The future of higher education

Cities, skills and the recession

Inclusion by degrees
Innovating workforce development: INVESTING IN HIGHER LEVEL SKILLS

The current economic climate sets a challenging context for higher level skills development. Building on the huge success of the 2008 conference, fdf’s 2009 event focuses on this challenge. It brings together policymakers, employers and the HE community to debate how current and future higher level skills needs will be met.

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- demonstrate cutting edge approaches to higher level skills development
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All organisations involved in workforce skills development including:

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- For significant dialogue between employers, training organisations, Sector Skills Councils and HE
- For an insight into the current policy and funding context for higher level skills development
- To learn about the latest key initiatives in workforce development
- To find out about higher level skills strategies and practices that work
- To take advantage of fdf initiatives and project outcomes

A ‘must attend’ event – keep up with new developments – take advantage of new opportunities.

Further information:

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Welcome to forward 17

The 2008-09 enrolment figures for Foundation degrees were released recently and show substantial growth in student numbers for the eighth year in a row. Derek Longhurst’s article examines the latest figures and discusses key trends in national and regional data.

Highlights of the 2008 fdf national conference Innovating Workforce Development: Productivity and Opportunity can also be found in this issue. The conference opened with a gala dinner at which Will Hutton, Chief Executive of the Work Foundation, spoke about the economic downturn and the likely impact on different areas of the UK. Conference delegates expressed great interest in Will’s speech and the subsequent seminar lead by his colleagues. For those who weren’t able to attend the conference, Alex Jones and Katy Morris have summarised the Work Foundation’s research for forward.

This issue outlines a number of projects undertaken by fdf in recent months. Bob Bell describes how fdf has worked in partnership with One North East to tackle a skills shortage in the process engineering sector. Charles Pickford provides updates on how fdf is working with the British Chambers of Commerce and reports on work with the construction management sector.

fdf commissioned a number of research projects in 2007-08 and the findings of some of these projects are described in this issue. Susan Hayday reports on research that examined the experience of disabled students on Foundation degrees. John Beynon et al describe the findings of work in the East Midlands that identified features of successful Foundation degree programmes.

Other features include the launch of the TDA’s Foundation degree framework, and reports concerning the work that fdf is undertaking to enhance the availability of information about part-time and work-based higher education opportunities.

I hope you find forward interesting and useful. Feedback from readers is very welcome, so please do contact me with any comments or suggestions for future editions.

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The future of higher education

Derek Longhurst
Chief Executive, dfd

In 2008 the Secretary of State announced his intention to commence a review of higher education (HE) in order to inform the creation of a framework for the sector’s future development. In a recent speech he acknowledges the successes of the higher education sector:

• growth (22%) in student numbers since 1997
• independent evidence of high levels of student satisfaction
• the UK is the most productive research nation in the G8 and is second only to the USA with 12% of research citations against 1% of the world’s population
• universities contribute £45 billion to the economy and earned £2.64 billion last year from their interactions with business and communities.

The purpose of the review, then, is to address the question: ‘How can an HE system remain world class 10-15 years from now?’

The report has been informed by a number of commissioned contributions concerning various key aspects of the HE sector including: research careers; intellectual property and research benefits; international issues in HE; academia and public policy making; understanding higher education institution (HEI) performance; teaching and the student experience; demographic challenge facing our universities; part-time studies; and on-line innovation.

A number of key themes appear to be emerging from the review. In particular, there seems to be a long overdue recognition that funding for part-time higher education as well as support for part-time students is in need of a radical new approach. In turn, this is linked to greater flexibility in the curriculum. As the Secretary of State argues,

‘…we will surely need to move decisively away from the assumption that a part-time degree is simply a full-time degree done in bits. I don’t have any doubt that the degree will remain the core outcome. But the trend to more flexible ways of learning will bring irresistible pressures for the development of credits which carry value in their own right, for the acceptance of credits by other institutions, and for the ability to create a degree through study at more than one institution.’

It is recognised that many students will wish to continue to study full-time for a degree on a campus although the Universities UK contribution (UUK 2008) to the debate focuses upon the demographic decline in younger students that will be experienced from 2010. There are strong indications that partnership and collaboration between institutions as well as between institutions and ‘other bodies’ will assume a higher priority in order to deliver more flexible curricula:

‘The development of credits and flexible courses demands developed relationships between institutions with different missions.’

Such a system would undoubtedly require funding models that encourage and support collaboration and partnership. It may also be significant that the Secretary of State, while supportive of more vocational routes into and within higher education, explicitly rejects the notion of a new polytechnic sector or ‘divide’.

Finally, it is recognised within the review that the education and training system cannot be shaped by individual employer or learner demand nor should it be subject to strong central planning. There has to be exploration of other ways in which higher education can be made more responsive to strategic needs as represented, for instance, in the recent UUK/CBI/HEFCE publication Stepping Higher (CBI 2008). This will include strategies for intensifying employer engagement ‘with the design, development and delivery of courses, and expanding work-related or work-based study’. The Foundation degree is cited as providing many excellent examples of employers working with the sector to support workforce development.

1 Available at: www.dius.gov.uk/speeches/denham_he_debate_240209.html
2 Commissioned contributions are available at: www.dius.gov.uk/policy/he-debate.html
Foundation degree growth 2007-2008

While *fdf*, supported by HEFCE and DIUS, has broadened its remit beyond Foundation degrees to generate employer partnerships for higher level skills development more generally, the qualification continues to provide a significant focus for our work. It is important, then, to note the growing success in Foundation degree development both quantitatively and, equally importantly, qualitatively.

Demand for Foundation degrees has been growing since their inception in 2001 (see Figure 1). It is sometimes suggested that this is related to the decline in student markets for Higher Nationals (HNs). There are two reasons why this analysis is partial: student recruitment onto HNs had been declining for some time prior to the publication of the Dearing Report (National Committee of the Enquiry in Higher Education 1997) and there is, therefore, no simple correlation between Foundation degree expansion and HND contraction. Secondly, the evolution of part-time provision in Foundation degrees with a very distinctive profile of students in terms of gender and age, in particular, again precludes an overly-simplistic approach to understanding the development of Foundation degrees.

*fdf* has been modelling annual growth in Foundation degrees and drawing upon HEFCE data to understand trends and directions that would inform our strategy. We had anticipated that there would be in the region of 83,000 students on Foundation degrees in England but last month we were able to confirm that this growth target has been substantially exceeded and the actual figure stands at 87,339. As the recent publication, Higher Education in England: Achievements, challenges and prospects (HEFCE 2009) indicates:

‘More than 40,000 students started foundation degrees in 2007-2008, an increase of 19 per cent on the previous year.’

If we look at how embedded the Foundation degree qualification is across the HE sector, one measure is the percentage of different types of institution involved in their provision (see Table 1). Although ‘involvement’ may be highly differential, the trends are very encouraging overall and do not suggest that there are significant problems related to validation.

Undoubtedly, the availability of additional student numbers (ASNs) has made a significant contribution to this expansion and it remains to be seen whether there will be any impact next year as a consequence of the current freeze on further ASN allocations. On the other hand, Foundation degree development should also benefit from the significant investment by HEFCE in supporting co-funding by employers and in institutional employer engagement strategies. As there is no longer funding for students with a HE qualification to study for a second equivalent or lower qualification (ELQ) but with exemption for Foundation degrees, this may lead to an increase in demand from students with HE qualifications and responsive strategies from HEIs.

It is, therefore, not beyond the bounds of possibility that Foundation degree recruitment will achieve the government’s target of 100,000 students a year early in 2009-2010.

*“Foundation degrees continue to grow in popularity as both students and employers appreciate the innovative nature of these qualifications. “They are enabling individuals to develop their careers whilst helping business to retain talent and remain strong in these challenging economic times. “I’m delighted with these latest enrolment figures, which confirm that we’re well on the way to meeting our ambition for 100,000 Foundation degree students by 2010.”* 
David Lammy MP, Minister of State for Higher Education

If we look at how embedded the Foundation degree qualification is across the HE sector, one measure is the percentage of different types of institution involved in their provision (see Table 1). Although ‘involvement’ may be highly differential, the trends are very encouraging overall and do not suggest that there are significant problems related to validation.

![Figure 1 National growth in Foundation degree student numbers](image-url)
Table 1 Higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs) in England involved with Foundation degree provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>% of Pre-92 HEIs</th>
<th>% of Post-92 HEIs</th>
<th>% of FECs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 2007-08, 58% of pre-1992 universities, 91% of post-1992 universities and 72% of FECs are involved in the provision of Foundation degrees. The pattern of HE provision through colleges is also interesting with relatively small numbers in a large number of colleges (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Number of higher education students (full-time equivalent) by college

Source: Higher education in further education colleges in England (QAA 2007)

There has been expansion in all regions although there are some marked differences (see Figure 3). Student numbers in the NW, for instance, have increased without significant numbers of new programmes being developed whereas there are more individual programmes with smaller numbers of students in the SW. This may reflect the rural context of the region as well as the delivery of full-time provision through colleges.

Figure 3 Regional growth in Foundation degree student numbers
In most regions growth is around the national norm of 19-20 per cent (see Table 2) but with very marked expansion in both the West Midlands and through the Open University.

Table 2 Regional growth in Foundation degree student numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total number of Foundation degree students in 2008-09</th>
<th>% increase on 2007-08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>9,003</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>3,791</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>11,670</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>12,168</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>6,152</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>10,257</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>11,843</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humber</td>
<td>9,821</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>6,947</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>5,687</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The regional variation in the profile of part-time provision is particularly interesting and will need further analysis as will trends in expansion in different sectors.

Table 3 Regional differences in mode of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>% Foundation degree students studying full-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humber</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is possible to suggest that the very high percentage of full-time provision in London represents not only the predominant delivery through further education colleges (FECs) but also some sector inflections. For instance, over 90% of recruitment to Foundation degrees in the creative and cultural industries sector, with a strong concentration in London, are young full-time students while education, health and social care are more attractive to mature students who may already be in the workforce or seeking enhanced career opportunities and need to study on a part-time basis.
Who teaches Foundation degree students?

The conclusions to be drawn from the HEFCE data are almost counter-intuitive in relation to part-time study, the majority of which is delivered by universities (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Who teaches Foundation degree students?

Full-time Foundation degree students

Part-time Foundation degree students

Source: Foundation degrees: key statistics 2001-02 to 2007-08 (HEFCE 2008), Table 4
Apart from anything else, these data would seem to question whether ex-polytechnics have given up on their missions in order to become ‘universities’ with a higher level of research orientation (see, for example, George Walden Polys were not universities (and shouldn’t be), The Times, February 24, 2009). Pockets of research cultures and, indeed, excellence existed within polytechnics long before they became universities in 1992; such research activity was and remains integral to their HE mission.

Talk of reconstituting a new polytechnic sector or other new structures, therefore, seems strange in this context and at odds with simplifying the education and training system for employers, employees and individuals. (See, for instance UKCES, 2008).

One aspect of the higher education review is the emphasis placed upon flexibility of curricula and delivery. The HEFCE analysis shows that 16% of part-time Foundation degree students study their programmes through distance learning provided by universities, especially the Open University (HEFCE 2008, Table 9, page 24). In general, however, it is clear that many Foundation degrees are not as ‘flexible’ as they could or should be and most courses are predicated upon existing full-time models and course lengths. This suggests that importance should be attached to Sir Ron Cooke’s recommendation to the Secretary of State’s review that JISC should ‘bring together key parties to discuss how best to embed digital literacy good practice across the HE, FE and skills sectors’ (DIUS, 2008).

**Diversity and Widening Participation**

The evidence supports the conclusion that Foundation degrees will attract people from low participation neighbourhoods (Table 4) and a broad range of backgrounds as well as providing alternative routes into higher education.

**Table 4 Entrants from low participation neighbourhoods (LPNs)**

(Home Foundation degree entrants in 2005-06 at HEIs and FECs in England)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution type</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>FULL-TIME</th>
<th>PART-TIME</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number entrants</td>
<td>% from LPN</td>
<td>Number entrants</td>
<td>% from LPN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEC</td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>2,065</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>1,765</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>1,605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>5,805</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>5,655</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6,455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Foundation degrees: key statistics 2001-02 to 2007-08 (HEFCE 2008), Table 16

This would seem to reinforce other evidence that the niche in Foundation degree provision for FECs lies in retaining younger full-time students although this market is likely to diminish and become more competitive as a consequence of demographic change after 2010. Part-time provision in Education is also frequently delivered in FECs (Classroom Assistants, Early Years and Childhood Studies) to meet the needs of mature students. While these are important strands of widening participation, however, they do not determine the full range and complexity of the ways in which the Foundation degree can be flexed to meet the needs of employers and employees and it is important to stress the very distinctive profile of part-time Foundation degree students in comparison to full-time modes.

**Table 5 Foundation degree entrant numbers by sex and age at commencement of study**

(Home Foundation degree entrants in 2005-06 at HEIs and FECs in England)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group and sex</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>% full-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young male</td>
<td>5,215</td>
<td>(19%) 89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young female</td>
<td>4,305</td>
<td>(16%) 90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature male</td>
<td>6,470</td>
<td>(24%) 55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature female</td>
<td>10,900</td>
<td>(41%) 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26,895</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Foundation degrees: key statistics 2001-02 to 2007-08 (HEFCE 2008), Table 13

Note: “Young” students are under 21 on the date of entry to the programme.
Conclusion

**fdf** has always sought to base its strategies and policies upon evidence and data rather than assumption and assertion. It is to be hoped that readers of *forward* will find the data presented here to be helpful and informative about what is, in fact, a complex picture. It is also an encouraging one.

We do not, therefore, need to reinvent the wheel or create new structures for Foundation degree innovation. Rather, we need to build upon the achievements of the last few years and we would argue that institutions should focus upon the issues laid out in *The Employability Challenge* (UKCES 2009), which explores good practice in integrating employability skills into curricula to ensure parity of esteem with academic knowledge and technical skills.

Surely we need to leave behind the out-dated dichotomies of liberal education on the one hand and vocational education on the other? Why should it be assumed that academic study involves being excited by learning and ideas, knowledge, critical thinking and analytical skills, capacity to reach sound judgements and make decisions while programmes that are developed responsively to meet employment needs are not? Our ongoing dialogue with employers repeatedly demonstrates that this is a ‘divide’ that they do not accept and regard as unhelpful. Nor do employers want an education and training system that ‘ghettoises’ vocational education as they would rather see programmes that integrate academic, technical and employability knowledge and skills.

This is one of the distinctive characteristics of the Foundation degree as a qualification and it also seems to typify the direction of the new 14-19 Diplomas. The publication in February of the *Consultation on the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England* (SASE) is also to be welcomed as this may lay the basis for a stronger provision of apprenticeships that are more likely to lead to progression into higher education, especially Foundation degrees. **fdf** has agreed that creating progression routes between apprenticeships and Foundation degrees will assume a new priority in our strategy. (See *Features of apprenticeship programmes that support progression to higher education* ([fdf](#) 2008)).

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3 See: [www.dius.gov.uk/consultations/con_230209_SASE.html](http://www.dius.gov.uk/consultations/con_230209_SASE.html)
Innovating workforce development: productivity and opportunity

**fdf annual conference 2008**

*fdf’s 2008 national conference was designed to raise awareness of the organisation’s recently expanded role in innovating workforce development and brokering employer partnerships with higher education (HE). The event was much more employer-focused than previous conferences, with many of the plenary and workshop sessions delivered by employers themselves. The event covered three key themes:

- **transformation** of HE opportunities and the transformative effect of HE on individuals, communities, wider society and the knowledge economy
- **achievement** of new and sustainable partnerships between employers and the HE sector, which will create benefits for employees and for workforce development
- **success** in implementing new strategies, demonstrated via employer-led plenaries and seminars, leading to a new dialogue about the purposes of HE and bringing real meanings to the term ‘employer engagement’. 
**Question time**

The first plenary session was a Question Time-style interview with Martin Williams, Director for Higher Education, Strategy and Implementation at the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). Martin answered questions about the DIUS response to the Leitch Review; the need for new forms of HE to tap into employer demand; and the potential impact of the economic situation on future engagement. In dialogue, Martin emphasised DIUS support for the Leitch agenda and for more employer-led HE provision. He also argued that even in an economic downturn, many employers would still be seeking to invest in workforce development to enhance competitive advantage.

**Employer panel**

The next session brought in views from a panel of employer representatives comprising:

- Linda Florance, Chief Executive of Skillfast-UK, the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for fashion and textiles
- Andy Smyth, Accredited Programmes Manager, TUI (an international tourism and shipping group)
- Mike Rushworth, Operations Director, Vitacress Salads
- Don Doman, Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce.

Panel members each gave an overview of what their particular sectors were looking for in workforce development with HE. Key issues covered included: the need to bridge the gap between what HE currently offered and what employers wanted; the importance of speedy and flexible responses from HE; the role of HE-level learning in improving quality of service, productivity and business competitiveness; and the importance, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), of value-for-money and seeing a return on investment.

Panel members were asked to comment on several issues, including whether employers undervalue training, the benefits for employees of work-based learning and higher level skills development, and the potential for more cross-sector collaboration via the Alliance of SSCs. In response, members highlighted the challenges still facing some businesses in justifying spending on training to their boards, the importance of providing employees with opportunities for career development, and the need for SSCs to work together, where possible, while also recognising that most would be prioritising ‘quick wins’ for their own sector.

**Seminars**

Delegates attended one of five parallel seminar sessions. Seminar presenters included a mix of employer representatives (both private and public sector) and staff from strategic organisations involved in facilitating education, training and workforce development.
had valued the support of EBTA in streamlining and facilitating developments. In discussion, participants explored issues relating to the number and level of credits awarded, and whether these were against a Foundation degree qualification or stand-alone. Flexibility of response to employer requirements was key to determining the particular approaches taken.

4 Transforming business delivery in the public sector

Seminar 4 explored the impact of higher level skills development on the delivery of public sector services, with speakers from the NHS North West and Royal Mail. Both organisations had been involved in major Foundation degree initiatives: the development of Assistant Practitioner roles in the NHS North West; and a Royal Mail Foundation degree in People and Organisational Services. Three key areas were covered in discussion: identifying the business imperatives for not-for-profit organisations in developing their workforce; how to get employer stakeholders more engaged; and how to capture the impact and benefits of learning. The business case for higher level skills development included issues such as quality of service, staff recruitment and retention, addressing skills shortages (including client-facing skills) and reducing absenteeism and sickness levels. The engagement of employer stakeholders would be facilitated by a range of factors, including pump-priming for new developments, greater flexibility and speed of response from HE, and setting developments against legislative requirements so that stakeholders can see a clear rationale for this type of activity. The benefits of learning and the impact on business/services could be captured via a range of measures, including: enhanced productivity; staff changing and developing their roles; greater professionalism and evidence of reflective practice; and more effective inter-agency working.

5 City labour markets and skills

Findings from the Work Foundation’s Ideopolis and Knowledge Economy programmes were presented in Seminar 5. These programmes are exploring ways in which the economy is changing and what this means for cities and for skills policies, employers and providers. Participants considered the increasing importance of the knowledge economy for the UK, while also noting that a high proportion of knowledge intensive jobs were clustered in major cities. Public and private sector differences were also apparent – knowledge-intensive jobs in the public sector are more evenly distributed across the UK, while private sector opportunities are focused around London, the South East of England and some other major cities. Areas with low skills and a lack of people with high-level qualifications have lower resilience to change and can get stuck in a cycle of decline. The importance of retaining graduates within regions was emphasised, along with the need to increase demand for higher level skills and improve management performance.

An article by Katy Morris and Alexandra Jones on page 15 provides further information about the Ideopolis and Knowledge Economy programmes.

Innovating workforce development: strategies and solutions

A second plenary session opened with presentations by Chris Humphries, Chief Executive of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), and Liz Smith, Director of unionlearn. Chris provided a strategic overview of the international productivity challenge facing the UK, with increasing divergence at the regional level and key sectoral challenges (interestingly, the UK’s productivity is good in manufacturing, but less so in some of the key service sectors, including education and health). High skill levels were necessary but not sufficient to raise productivity alone. Chris described how the UK should be seeking to improve productivity to the European average, increasing employment to 80% of the potential workforce, investing in a world-class high skills workforce and promoting greater equity and social cohesion. UKCES has access to high-level political decision making and is seeking to influence the debate via its current consultation on its draft strategic plan.

Liz Smith spoke from the perspective of the employee as learner. She highlighted the TUC’s longstanding commitment to vocational education and training – this was top of the agenda at the first-ever TUC meeting in 1868 and is still seen as ‘unfinished business’ today. Skills for life provide the essential foundation for future development and greater equity. TUC members are distributed across all skill levels, however, and there is recognition of the need to raise the game overall. Key blockages for individuals returning to learning include money, time, relevance and work/life balance. Liz also stressed the importance of social partnership between employers and employees, which is critical to raising productivity. unionlearn is currently exceeding its own targets and expects to have around 250 trained representatives by 2010.
In conversation with…

A more informal conversation session with Chris and Liz followed their plenary presentations. Discussion began with a consideration of the challenges of the Leitch agenda in raising higher level skills. Both speakers agreed that there needed to be a concerted effort to make a stronger case for higher level skills and for providers and employers to line up their resources and work together. It was also asserted that employers need to be prepared to pay more towards the development of programmes which met their specific needs.

Another area of discussion was whether work-based learning might provide a more effective solution to widening participation in HE than more traditional provision. Greater support for part-time adult learners and access to apprenticeships were highlighted as important issues. It was also noted that long-standing deprivation in some communities would take many years to overcome.

The role of the new UKCES in supporting employer investment in training in a time of economic recession was raised. Chris reiterated a message from the earlier session with Martin Williams that employers should recognise that a recession is a key time for investment in training to raise productivity. He also stressed the importance for the UK HE sector of being more inclusive and open to engagement with employers. UKCES will continue to plug the importance of employer investment in training, drawing on international best practice. Pro-active employers can also influence their supply chains by, for example, encouraging suppliers to sign up to the Skills Pledge.

Both speakers considered the need to support employee aspirations and encourage employers to invest in training. It was acknowledged that growing numbers of employers already recognise the benefits of staff training. In unionised situations, staff and employers can negotiate workforce agreements. The Government is also monitoring employer investment in training over the next few years and may consider regulation if the picture does not improve further. UKCES has launched a study looking at the value of various collective measures which particular sectors may decide to use. While levies may work in certain sectors, other measures such as licence to practise schemes may be more effective in others. The importance of supporting and engaging older learners was also emphasised.

Concluding address

Derek Longhurst, Chief Executive of fdf, outlined the organisation’s mission statement and strategic aims for 2008-11, and described how these dovetail with the topics covered by various speakers throughout the conference. He emphasised the importance of moving towards a wider, more generous notion of HE, with greater development of learning in the workplace and the need to draw on the latent potential within individuals. The separation of academic and vocational approaches to learning was no longer fit for purpose in the twenty-first century; greater value needed to be attached to provision which combined the two.

The presentation summarised fdf’s strategic roles as a collaborative partner, providing consultancy services (for example, EBTA), developing strategies to increase diversity within HE participation and through the compiling of data and evidence to support workforce development.

Feedback

Overall feedback on the conference was very positive. There was a real buzz to the event and the employer input was stimulating. Many people clearly appreciated the more discursive format and felt that the fast-moving programme had helped to keep them engaged. More opportunities for workshop discussion and networking were highlighted as areas for improvement next year. Three-quarters of those providing feedback said that they were more likely to want to work with fdf in the future, which is a highly positive outcome for the organisation.
Cities, skills and the recession

Katy Morris and Alexandra Jones
The Work Foundation

We live in extraordinary times. But at this time of great uncertainty, amidst the seemingly constant news of fresh business collapses and redundancies, the need for skills development remains constant. To understand why, we need to look beyond the dire economic present and reflect upon some of the fundamental economic shifts that have marked the past four decades and wrought profound change on the physical, social and economic landscapes of the UK’s cities.

Changing economy and skills

Over the past four decades the UK economy has changed dramatically. Whereas basic manufacturing dominated back in the 1970s, we have moved towards an economy based primarily around services – not just the now notorious financial services, but also retail, transport, professional services and so on. But other more subtle shifts in the nature of consumer demands and expectations have also driven change. Over time, the companies that have prospered have done so by using new information and communication technologies to become highly innovative and highly responsive to customer demands.

The notion of the UK as a ‘knowledge economy’ refers to the fact that ideas and innovation – the successful exploitation of new ideas – have become much more important sources of economic growth and wealth creation in the UK. This echoes a global trend among advanced economies, best illustrated by changing patterns of businesses’ investment. In 1970, UK firms invested just £4 on ‘intangible’ investments – research and development, software, marketing, design and workforce training – for every £10 on traditional investment in ‘tangible’ machines, tools, computers and buildings. But recognising the importance of innovation has led businesses in all industries to proactively seek to invest in ‘intangibles’ like branding and workforce training. Spending on intangible assets has tripled over the past 30 years, so that for every £10 invested in traditional machines, tools, computers and building, firms spent £13 on intangible investments.

In the UK it was knowledge-intensive manufacturing and knowledge-intensive services that acted as the primary source of economic growth in the boom period of the last decade, generating significantly more new jobs and productivity than other sectors. The effect is startling: based on the definition of knowledge-intensive industries used by The Work Foundation, 12 new jobs were created in knowledge-intensive industries for every one new job created in other industries between 1995 and 2005. By the end of 2007 nearly half of all employment in the UK was in knowledge-intensive industries.

Cities and skills

Clearly, a lot has changed since the 1970s. But the growth of this knowledge economy has not taken place evenly across the UK. Despite Thomas Freidman’s oft-cited notion of a ‘flat’ world in which technology allows businesses to locate anywhere and eliminates the importance of ‘place’, the story of the knowledge economy is, in fact, the story of the UK’s cities. With vibrant city centres marked by iconic buildings and thriving cultural scenes, Newcastle, Manchester, Bristol and others are all cities transformed; both the drivers and the beneficiaries of the growth of the knowledge economy.

These cities contribute more than their share of population to national productivity because ideas and innovation happen in places. Cities provide knowledge-intensive businesses with a number of important competitive advantages: they provide access to affluent consumers and to a pool of highly skilled workers that is both wide and deep; they offer strong transport links and vibrant cultural scenes; and – perhaps most significantly in an economy in which firms rely on innovation and knowledge for comparative advantage – they offer individuals and businesses the chance to exchange ideas and information. In turn, cities with high concentrations of knowledge-intensive businesses offer better job prospects and are more able to attract skilled individuals and hence more knowledge-intensive businesses. The Work Foundation’s research on the concept of the Ideopolis – a sustainable knowledge-intensive city that drives growth in the wider city region – highlights how different cities have become more or less successful in this knowledge-intensive economy.

But not all cities have been able to create these kinds of virtuous circles – contrast the ongoing success of London and the growth of Sheffield with slower progress in Stoke, Hull and Hastings. Here, growth in a limited number of knowledge-intensive sectors has been largely offset by significant decline in manufacturing and traditional industries – meaning lower wages and less affluence in these cities.

So why has Sheffield thrived while growth in Stoke has remained stagnant? The reasons behind the inequalities between cities are many and complex, encompassing local economic history, politics
and investment decisions. But part of the answer lies in the different skills profiles of the cities: research by The Work Foundation suggests that the less successful, less ‘knowledge intensive’ cities tend to have higher proportions of residents with no or low qualifications and lower proportions of people with intermediate and high level skills. Lower level skills affected both people and places during the boom years: our work conducted in July 2008 suggests that this will be just as – if not more – significant during the recession.

This means that investment in skills is important even during a recession. The extent of the current economic crisis and the lack of certainty about the nature of the economic landscape that eventually emerges could induce a retreat to a type of leadership that focuses only on the short-term consequences of job losses and rising unemployment. Such an approach would be understandable but also regrettable. The current economic crisis will inevitably herald some unpredictable changes in the nature and structure of city economies, and short-term measures are required to deal with these. Yet it is undoubtedly true that innovation will remain a key driver of economic growth and productivity. Innovation creates new markets, generates comparative advantage for companies and increases productivity through more efficient use of labour, land and capital. Innovation – and hence high level and intermediate skills – will be crucial to future success in both the short and longer term.

**Improving the supply of and demand for skills**

So what should cities with poor skills profiles be doing to ensure that they are better positioned for the recovery? In the long term, raising the supply of skills among local residents calls for renewed focus on increasing levels of educational attainment among school pupils and increasing access to higher education. There is an obvious role for universities and further education colleges in both increasing skills and raising aspirations, and lessons can be learned from existing efforts. Since the University of the West of England started supporting the new City Academy in the deprived Lawrence Hill area of Bristol in 2002, GCSE attainment has risen dramatically and the number of sixth formers going on to university increased from just 7 to 39 in 2007.

But given that more than a third of the current working age population do not have the equivalent of five good GCSEs, and that 70% of the working age population in 2020 have already left compulsory education, there is a need to do more. Here too, education institutions have a vital role to play. Following the lead of Aston University, universities and further education colleges can join up with local employers and skills institutions to create work placements or internships for current or recent students. This improves not only graduate employability and local businesses’ access to and demand for skilled young people with fresh ideas, but also long-term rates of innovation and graduate retention all at the same time.

Similarly, there is a role for further education institutions in providing continuing education, access to universities and continuing professional development for more established employees. There are always issues around employer demand for skills development, but the recession arguably creates opportunities for employers to think carefully about skills requirements and how the existing skills of employees can best be utilised in order to respond to the challenges of the recession. In the short term, it bodes well that business expenditure on human capital development remained steady in the previous recession, even while cutbacks were made on almost every other businesses’ area. Should a similar trend emerge now, it will in the long term help address some of the issues around management and poor skills utilisation that plague the UK and its cities.

Skills in places is a useful way to focus on how to improve the supply of skills at the same time as raising demand for higher level and intermediate skills. Skills profiles and skills requirements vary between different places, but all cities are facing a challenging economic climate. The new policy agenda, which emphasises joined-up working between local authorities, skills bodies and higher and further education institutions via Multi Area Agreements and Economy Prosperity Boards, offers a real opportunity to manage the impact of recession on individuals, firms and cities and position them for the better times ahead. For education institutions, predicted to be sources of growth during these challenging economic times, the recession provides greater impetus to the role they can play in improving the skills and prosperity of their local people and places.
The story

In the great days of post-war industrial development, ICI firmly established itself as one of the top UK businesses and Teesside was synonymous with that prominence. When ICI was split up and sold off to a number of other companies, the prevailing mood in Teesside was that chemical process engineering was a ‘sunset’ industry. Actually that proved to be far from the truth. The purchasers of ICI were mainly big multinationals keen to tap into the skills, knowledge and infrastructure available in the Teesside area. Other companies also made significant investments and ‘sunset’ became ‘sunrise’, with process engineering moving to the top of the ‘gross-value-added’ league in the North East region.

Teesside was not alone. Attracted by the availability of high quality water supplies (from Kielder), attractively valued real estate and a good supply of competent labour, many pharmaceutical companies moved into the region setting up in Northumberland in particular.

The problem

The North East region is home to a regional process engineering cluster – the North East Process Industry Cluster (NEPIC) – which acts for the industry. In 2005 NEPIC began to report to the Regional Development Agency (One North East) that this growth in inward investment was creating a serious skills/personnel shortage issue. Two independent surveys conducted in 2006 confirmed that engineering jobs were chasing recruits – and this was most acutely felt in the process field.

The solution

One North East was keen to make an intervention to alleviate the problem and ensure that inward investment to the Region continued. The factors behind the skills issues were identified as:

- an ageing workforce (the average age is well into the 50s)
- the impact of another sector (oil and gas) offering workers more attractive packages
- the effects of general demographic decline on the flow of entrants to the industry
- a poor sector image, leading to low interest among young people.

Bob Bell, fdf consultant

Process engineering – how partnership in the North East helped tackle a skills crisis

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- a poor sector image, leading to low interest among young people.

All of these are tough problems and One North East recognised that higher education and higher level skills had a major contribution to make. Working with fdf, it became aware that simply trying to look for better results from existing education provision would not contribute anything new to meeting the challenge. It was felt that supporting partnership with employers within the sector would build new provision that could attract new entrants with different age profiles, and could provide upskilling opportunities for those already in the workforce. One North East invested over £500,000 in a project to help provider/employer partnerships to develop innovative solutions and support the first group of learners. fdf managed this project on behalf of the Regional Development Agency and provided some match funding to cover project overheads.

The funded initiative, the North East Process Engineering Initiative (NEPEI), was started by fdf in March 2007 and ran for 15 months (including a short extension) until June 2008. It initiated four projects that operated on a large scale and two with much smaller profiles. A part-time project team – including a Project Director, an Administrator and a Consultant – were recruited and an agreement was formed with NEPIC to cultivate interest among its employer networks. Meanwhile, the first phase of the project was launched
by NEPEI, who moved quickly around the region speaking to all the potential providers (further education colleges, higher education institutions and private engineering providers) about the opportunity which was to be launched. A prospectus was then issued to explain requirements and proposals were received.

The Regional Development Agency was keen that the funding was used to support substantial projects and four strong bids were identified. Contracts were negotiated and the projects were able to get started in the autumn of 2006. A modest sum was left over from this initial allocation and it was decided to focus on two small projects that planned to create attractive process engineering learning materials aimed at exciting interest among young people.

**The initiative**

All four large projects involved one or more providers in partnership with one or more employers:

- **Stockton Riverside College** focussed on the polymer industry. It created a large and active group of employers who had clear ideas of their education and training needs. The college responded by creating a clear Ladder of Learning. The Ladder included short courses aimed at creating the all-round process engineer capable of dealing with quality and maintenance issues, as well as routine operation. The Ladder also included a Foundation degree in polymer manufacture, which was to be explored with the University of Teesside.

- **Hartlepool College of Further Education** established a productive relationship with Huntsman – one of the major Teesside chemical manufacturers. The University of Teesside actively participated with Hartlepool College in the development of a new Foundation degree concerned, with process engineering and the college and the company set about creating ladders into the Foundation degree by agreement on a variety of upskilling short courses.

- **Newcastle College** talked with a number of employers before ultimately focussing on Proctor & Gamble. New facilities and new provision is now in place at the College to take emerging science A-level learners into work-embedded Foundation degrees for the process industry. Proctor & Gamble was closely involved in consultation on the design and supply of the work element of the programmes.

- **LDR²**, a specialist learning provider in manufacturing management, worked with SembCorp (a company specialising in utility supply to chemical manufacturers on the Teesside Wilton site) and the University of Teesside to tailor leadership and management training for the company’s employees and to accredit the results into an appropriate Foundation degree. In addition, another three-way partnership was formed with LDR², the University of Sunderland and Merck Sharp & Dohme looking at short courses and a Foundation degree in Lean Manufacturing.

**The progress**

The timetable within which results had to be obtained was, in educational terms, short. No project had more than seven months to get partnerships up and running, devise the provision, recruit learners and deliver outputs at a module training level. All of the projects managed to produce good results – including the achievement of outputs which in aggregate exceeded the target by more than 100%.

In addition to the four main projects, the two smaller projects produced, respectively:

- a short course for emerging level 3 science and engineering learners to engage them with a hands-on taster course on pipeline inspection engineering – the course was accredited for some level 4 credits
- material for use in schools and colleges which explored the future of novel natural materials (for example, bamboo) and how these materials are processed.

**The lessons**

A full external evaluation of the initiative was conducted and the following is an extract from the report summary:

“The report concludes that the NEPEI Initiative was well conceived – the right thing, addressing the right needs, carried out in the right way, and was a well-managed project. Given the timescales, it has achieved tangible outcomes and some indicative signs of sustainability and movement. The modest output target of learner enrolments has been easily superseded, a range of new sector-specific provision has been created at a number of levels, and employer-provider partnerships have proved effective in gaining movement and bridging culture gaps.”

In addition to this assessment of the main objectives of the initiative, a few other lessons were learned:

- the degree of readiness of the HE and FE providers in the region to respond with innovative solutions to a clearly stated opportunity was quite variable. The conclusion is that in many cases, business development, current employer engagement and the production of tailored solutions all need attention in this new world of employment-oriented solutions
- very effective partnerships can be created by private and public providers working together. They can collaborate to give an employer a comprehensive and tailored staff development solution by blending the rapid response and flexibility of a private provider with the resources and quality assurance of a public provider
- Ladders of Learning are a good way to build an offer to employers that deals with their immediate needs (probably short courses, which might include some level 3 material) and introduces a longer-term staff development strategy that incorporates the idea of a very substantially work-embedded Foundation degree.
The C³ approach to strategic human resource development

LDR² brought together a consortium consisting of a private sector training provider, two universities and two private sector employers in the North East to pilot a holistic model of strategic human resource development in the process sector.

The aim of the project, funded by Regional Development Agency, One North East, and managed by fdf, was to provide an employer-focused programme that supports alternative routes for employees to enter higher education. The North East process sector has been identified as a key growth sector for the region. Much work has been done to encourage people into the sector. The focus of C³ was to provide career options for existing employees.

The C³ model, developed by LDR², is a holistic approach to human resource development. The cornerstones of which stand firmly in ‘improving competitiveness’, ‘ensuring compliance’ and ‘building capacity’ – improving an organisation’s competitiveness while ensuring it is compliant with all the regulatory bodies in a way that allows it to be sustainable within the organisation.

Other dimensions made the project very useful in terms of comparing employers in service and manufacturing based in the North and the South of the region, and with USA and Singapore parent companies.

Brian Smith OBE, Managing Director at LDR², was Project Manager: “We were able to assess how best to meet the specific needs of employed learners and come up with a flexible delivery that contributes directly to the business objectives of their employers.”

The focus at SembCorp Utilities UK on Teesside was to provide a coaching and mentoring programme that would help managers to support new and existing employees. The delivery, accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management, meant that those participating will be able to claim credits towards higher education qualifications. Working in partnership with the University of Teesside, LDR² has been able to develop an infrastructure that will support SembCorp’s ‘Unleashing Potential’ programme, which aims to develop leadership capability.

The relationship between these organisations is further enhanced by the development of a Foundation degree in Leadership and Management for the process industry, customised to meet the specific needs of the employers.

Merck Sharp & Dohme, LDR² and the University of Sunderland have supported a CAST (Competency based, Auditable, Sustainable Training) initiative. The CAST initiative involves a training programme that has certificated trainers within Merck, training to certificate operators, so that auditors have tangible vocationally-based certificates to refer to.

This approach allows a model of career development with links to higher education through ‘negotiated learning’. Through this model, Ladders of Learning from level 2, 3 and 4 vocationally-assessed qualifications can lead to higher education foundation degrees.
Newcastle College process industry initiative

Project background

Newcastle College School of Applied Science & Technology (AS&T) worked closely with partners in the North East process industry covering chemicals, pharmaceuticals and bio-technology. The College lead a North East Process Initiative, funded by fdf, which researched the process industry in great detail with major inputs from a wide range of industry partners.

Consortium participants

A project steering group was formed from the North East process industries across the region, with a range of employers including global organisations like Proctor & Gamble and new thriving companies like Quantum Specials involved; others included Sanofi Aventis, The Centre for Life Sciences (CELS) and The National Skills Academy for the Process Industries (NSAPI).

What was the starting position?

The starting point was to identify where the skills gaps lay within the sector and how best to provide clear learning pathways and employability sources to attract good people to the industry.

The research findings showed there was a huge shortage of fully trained Laboratory Technicians and Process Engineers within the North East, requiring new and relevant courses to help address the skills gaps and help develop and strengthen the regional process and manufacturing industries.

What were the objectives?

The project objectives were:

- to confront the labour and skills shortages in the process industry within the North East region
- to create new courses and enhance existing ones specifically to suit individual businesses within the North East.

What were the achievements?

The major achievement from the initiative was the development of new Foundation degrees linked directly to employer needs for the process industry. The initiative and resultant Foundation degree also provided a basis for development of strong partnerships between the college and other participants, one example being with a major pharmaceutical company which has recruited college students as Company Interns with the promise of more places to follow.

What is the legacy and what are the prospects?

A generic structure for all Foundation degrees has been developed providing flexibility and allowing the qualification to be adapted quickly and efficiently to individual employer requirements; the new structure also allows for clearer and easier use of an APL framework for students with prior experience and qualifications. The college is planning to set up a new micro process plant facility which shows the level of commitment it has in progressing the findings which came out of this project. This plant will also significantly enhance the further development and implementation of the new industry qualifications.

Comments on Foundation degrees as part of staff development strategies

The project focussed on those already in the industry, those who already had a start in another career, or those who have achieved some level of success in a level 3 education or training opportunity. Employers were keen to see an increase in supply of trained individuals offering qualification and capability in process, laboratory or engineering operations. It was felt that a desired route should incorporate a clear pathway to some level 4 and level 5 credits – this is where Foundation degrees proved a really useful component.

In effect the project has helped Newcastle College create a conversion programme which addresses a range of level 3 knowledge and skills deficiencies but also takes the learner forward to achieve at levels 4 and 5.
The successful NEPEI bid had two main strands: initially to develop a curriculum offering allowing part-time progression from level 2 qualifications (through an NVQ in Process Operations) to level 5 (through a specifically developed Foundation degree in Process Engineering), while also encouraging a number of employees in the process industries to upskill and achieve formal qualifications along the way.

With key partners such as the School of Science and Technology at the University of Teesside, Huntsman Tioxide, ConocoPhillips, British Energy, fdf and Cogent, the programme has undergone extensive consultancy with a range of process-industry employers in the Tees Valley.

As the pinnacle of a newly refreshed and specific process engineering curriculum, the College has successfully researched, written, tested and validated the Foundation degree in Process Engineering in less than an academic year. The result is a progressive, contemporary qualification that suits the current needs of a sector essential to the stability and growth of the North East. Research from Hartlepool College, supported by similar findings from Cogent, indicated that to succeed the programme must have the capacity to work flexibly around shift patterns and include accreditation of present competency through work-based learning.

The solution was to develop a programme with all the content and rigour expected of an undergraduate engineering programme, combined with a blended learning approach involving the use of distance learning (supported by a specific and efficient web-based learning platform) and enhanced by a series of mandatory and optional seminars distributed throughout the academic year to provide delivery of key technical content, specialist tuition and preparatory work for case studies and summative assessments.

The first group of students have enrolled and are currently embarking on the first stage of the Foundation degree in Process Engineering, and can expect the very best of engineering teaching and support.

However, arguably the most attractive part of the course is in the application: with specific case studies covering the sub-sectors of Chemical (Huntsman Tioxide), Nuclear (British Energy) and Petrochemical (Conoco-Phillips). These companies have developed the core assessment in partnership with Hartlepool College and will introduce the tasks to the students while also contributing to the assessment process. In summary, the programme was developed for industry, with a significant contribution from industry and will be delivered in partnership with industry to provide successful graduates with a unique insight into the different aspects of process engineering. On completing the Foundation degree in Engineering, graduates can progress directly to the final year of a Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in either Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Electrical Engineering or Instrumentation and Control at the University of Teesside.
Since ConstructionSkills launched a Foundation degree framework in 2004, numerous Foundation degrees for the construction sector have been developed. These cover a range of subject disciplines, from Civil Engineering to Quantity Surveying.

A workshop sponsored by fdf and the Centre for Education in the Built Environment was held at Salford University in June 2008. The workshop examined four case studies of Foundation degree development with the aim of:

- learning from recent Foundation degree developments focussed on construction management
- identifying common features of the Foundation degree programme
- assessing the potential for development of a national Foundation degree specification for the construction management sector
- informing future fdf policy and practice concerning construction management.

Aspects of the Foundation degree developments that were examined in detail included: the employer engagement processes; the employer groups involved; the target learner profile; employer demand in terms of higher level skills; attitudes to work-based learning and delivery; the generic content of the programmes;
options for tailoring; links to industry-recognised qualifications; professional body accreditation; and key marketing issues.

**Employer engagement**

The variety and range of approaches adopted by developers of the four Foundation degrees was noteworthy. However, the common factor in all cases was strong engagement with employers and employer representative bodies, both regionally and nationally. The 'employer voice' and sector demand was therefore strongly represented in these Foundation degree developments.

While employers represent a fundamentally important resource in identifying sector skills needs and demands, it was noted that input from other stakeholder groups is also crucial. For example, employer representative bodies, SSCs and others charged with examining future trends and scenarios in the sector can identify demands beyond those which may be expressed by current employers or via existing projects.

Employers clearly saw their involvement in design, development and ongoing monitoring of the four Foundation degrees as crucial. There was, however, less certainty about employer involvement in assessment, although employer provision of live briefs and case studies as a basis for assessment was strongly favoured.

**Learner profiles**

The four case studies outlined typical learner profiles. While the programmes were located in different UK regions and had been developed in partnership with a range of different employers, the degree of commonality in typical learner profiles was striking.

All of the programmes had been designed for up-skilling those who are currently employed in the construction sector and with a relevant level of existing experience in the industry. The focus is on those needing to improve their work-based vocational knowledge and skills, together with appropriate academic grounding to enable them to take on formal supervisory positions or job roles with wider leadership responsibilities. Typical students were generally seen to be non-traditional learners who would strongly benefit from the work-based/related approach that is one of the key defining characteristics of a Foundation degree.

**Delivery**

Part-time, flexible, face-to-face delivery was seen as the approach favoured by employers. The use of ICT was seen mainly as an adjunct to the core approach of classroom teaching, giving additional flexibility in delivery through the blended learning approach. Stand-alone, ICT-based distance learning was not favoured by the employers involved with these four case studies.

Work-based learning was seen as critical and employers were prepared to support this in various ways, including through mentorship.

**Summary of generic themes in programmes**

Examination of the module titles and content in the four programmes indicated a high degree of commonality in the generic themes present. A total of nine generic themes were identified. In some cases, these appear as module titles. In other cases the themes were integrated across the modules.

**Tailoring for local needs**

All four Foundation degrees recognised the importance of the option to tailor programmes to suit local need. In two cases, optional modules are available that give specific tailoring opportunities. In all cases, flexibility and tailoring was available to some extent via work-based learning project choices.

**Construction Skills Certification Skills (CSCS) card requirements**

The need for a Foundation degree in Construction Management to support the attainment of the Platinum level CSCS card is highlighted in the Construction Skills Foundation degree framework. This was also emphasised strongly in three of the Foundation degree case studies and in the associated employer engagement activities. Two projects used a mapping approach to demonstrate alignment of the Foundation degree content with NVQ requirements and provide an overview of where evidence can be generated for NVQ purposes.

**Professional body accreditation**

The employers involved with these Foundation degrees considered it very desirable that a Foundation degree in Construction Management should be accredited for appropriate professional body membership. Indeed, all four developments identified the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) as the most appropriate professional body.

CIOB accreditation at level 2 (Incorporated Member of the CIOB) is possible for Foundation degrees. In support of an accreditation submission, two projects had completed formal module mappings to demonstrate coverage of the CIOB Educational Framework. One project has obtained formal CIOB accreditation.
Summary of key marketing and promotional issues

The case studies provided an excellent overview of perceived marketing issues that should be carefully considered when developing a Foundation degree in Construction Management. Common themes include the need to:

- communicate in employer language and relate the Foundation degree to business benefits
- clearly describing the progression routes to and from a Foundation degree is more helpful for employers than discussing the National Qualifications Framework
- differentiate the Foundation degree from other higher education offerings (for example, HND/HNC)
- link the Foundation degree specifically to strategic workforce development plans and higher level skills issues facing employers
- understand the sector challenges in detail, work with recognised partners and hence demonstrate credibility
- emphasise how the Foundation degree supports industry-recognised qualifications (CIOB and CSCS)
- highlight where the programme can be tailored to meet local/company specific need
- highlight flexibility, for example, part-time delivery
- promote a change of mindset – emphasising the combination of academic study and vocational learning applied in the workplace and how work-based learning can impact on the bottom line – both short and long term
- address and challenge ‘head on’ the industry conservatism around strict lines of demarcation between vocational and professional career options.

Content and generic themes

Examination of the module titles and content of the four programmes indicates a great degree of commonality. A total of nine generic themes were identified:

- the construction process and management of a construction project
- teamwork, managing teams and effective communication
- contract procedures and working with clients
- health, safety, regulatory and legal matters
- surveying, estimating, pricing and bidding
- construction technologies
- sustainability, environment and quality
- work-based learning project (possibly linking to several generic themes)
- special options for local needs (for example, heritage, restoration, entrepreneurship, deconstruction).

It was noted that module titles reflecting all the generic themes are not present in all programmes. But where this was the case, the generic theme is integrated across all or within a subset of modules.

Based on intensive employer engagement in these projects, the list of generic themes can be considered as key to an employer-led Foundation degree in Construction Management.

A Foundation degree specification for Construction Management

In employment sectors and sub-sectors where the demand and skills agenda is relatively consistent across the English regions, FDF has been promoting and facilitating the development of national specifications for Foundation degrees. Two recent examples are the national Foundation degree Specifications for the ICT and Building Services Industries.

Based on the findings of this project, sufficient commonality appears to exist in terms of employer demand for Foundation degrees in Construction Management to make the development of a national specification potentially valuable and viable. The generic themes identified by this research would clearly be a starting point for a national specification.

The full report Demand-led Foundation degrees in construction management is available at: www.fdf.ac.uk/home/information_for_universities_and_colleges/research_commissioned_by_fdf
Successful Foundation degrees: a study of the role of employers and other key factors

John Benyon, Belinda Mckee, Elain Crewe and Katie Morris
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Introduction

In October 2007, The Institute of Lifelong Learning at the University of Leicester received funding from fdf to undertake a study looking at the factors influencing the success of Foundation degrees developed locally by the colleges – University of Leicester Network (CULN). This article examines the scope of the project and its findings.
The partners in the research

The CULN group is a dynamic partnership of 19 further education colleges and three higher education institutions located in the East and West Midlands who work together to promote co-operation between members and increase learner progression to higher education. It has a two-tier structure with a committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester and 16 operational groups. A Steering Group for the project was formed by combining two of these groups and has been effective in informing and steering the project.

The scope of the project

The project was carried out in three phases. The first involved a review of major documentary sources and a survey of all CULN members. The survey collected key information on both active and non-active Foundation degrees that had been developed over the past four years. A response rate of 73% (67 surveys) was received, providing much valuable information.

Phases 2 and 3 entailed detailed action-based research into five case studies of Foundation degrees, including focused interviews with employers, college staff and students. The interviews asked about the role of employers, from first initial concept through to shared delivery of programmes, and provided an opportunity to reflect on how employers’ involvement may have changed over time.

The following five case studies were selected:

- Foundation degree in Families, Parenting and Communities – Leicester College
- Foundation degree in Sport and Exercise Development – Lincoln College
- Foundation degree in Leadership and Management (Late-night entertainment) – Loughborough College (Aspire Centre for Leadership and Management)
- Foundation degree in IT and Technical Support – Newman University College, Birmingham
- Foundation degree in Managing Voluntary and Community Organisations (MVCO) – University of Leicester.

‘Successful’ Foundation degrees were taken to mean programmes with viable numbers of students enrolled, where the majority of students completed their programme of study, and where students had access to effective progression routes.

Research findings

1. Employer involvement

The role of employers emerged as a complex and varied theme. The survey showed that active Foundation degrees had significantly higher employer involvement than those that were not running, indicating a correlation between employer involvement and viable courses. Employers were mainly involved in the provision of work experience and were little involved in course delivery or assessing student work. Exceptions were the Foundation degree in Leadership and Management (Late-night entertainment) and the Foundation degree in Managing Voluntary and Community Organisations. The former was jointly delivered with the employer (Luminar plc) and the latter employed specialists from the voluntary sector to assist in delivering the course. There was only one example where the first approach had been from an employer and that was the Foundation degree in Leadership and Management (Late-night entertainment). 20% of survey respondents said that they had ongoing employer participation, but only 6% said that they had more involvement now than when the course first started.

Once involved, the employers in the case studies were very positive about Foundation degrees. They found the content of the curriculum relevant to the needs of their businesses and were consistent in their praise of how the course was of benefit to their employees. Very few employers were involved in marketing activities and it emerged from the case studies that marketing was often a neglected area.

Although employers enjoyed good relations with colleges and universities, there did appear to be a number of missed opportunities for contact with employers. Many of the employers interviewed wanted more contact, such as feedback on the progress of their employees who were students on a Foundation degree. Many employers received no regular information from the college or university. They were not asking for meetings, but informal phone or email contact and brief written reports.

Feedback from the Steering Group suggested that a very sensitive approach was needed when contacting potential employers, who were often overloaded with contact from different training agencies. The case studies showed that modular validation was often not available, and some colleges and employers found the process of making changes to courses, once they were developed, difficult and cumbersome.

Many students who were on part-time Foundation degrees benefited from employer financial support or assistance in other ways, such as time off for study and help with travel expenses. The proportion of students receiving support from employers ranged from 18% to 100% across the case studies.

2. Course/programme viability and sustainability

One of the measures of success of a Foundation degree is the number of students enrolled on the programme. The survey data provided the opportunity to examine this and showed that the number of courses with 11 to 50 students enrolled on them had increased year-on-year since 2004. However, there were still a number of courses with between 6 and 10 students enrolled (10 courses out of 67 in 2007-08), which raised questions about their viability.
The survey data showed that it was common for course numbers to fluctuate year-on-year. In some cases there had been a ‘honeymoon period’, where numbers were initially robust and then tailed off, possibly after many of those needing or wanting the qualification had enrolled on the course. In other cases legislative or occupational changes affected the relevance of the course, and there were also examples of competition affecting student numbers. One Foundation degree had introduced a distance-learning mode of study and had recruited students on an international basis. This was proving successful and helpful in combating reducing student numbers.

28% of the courses developed by CULN members were not active – either not running yet, or abandoned and not likely to run. The main reasons were poor enrolment, that the course was not validated, or that the course was still in development. Some subject areas posed a higher risk of not being active than others, with courses in media and business running the highest risk, and sport and education the lowest.

The data showed that student non-completion from Foundation degrees could be quite significant. Some of the case studies provided examples of what had been put in place to try to reduce this, such as inputting support systems at the first stages of a Foundation degree and dividing early modules into short, assessed blocks. Increasing the flexibility of a Foundation degree was shown to help with retention, but there was an inevitable trade off between flexibility and viability when it was not cost-effective to offer a range of delivery modes, venues or times of study.

The proportion of students on full-time Foundation degrees nationally (58% full-time) was considerably higher than those of CULN members (21% full-time) which could be indicative of greater flexibility provided by CULN members than is available nationally.

A common theme that emerged was that there were huge mixed ability and knowledge levels of students enrolling on Foundation degrees. Many fitted the profile of not having undertaken any academic study for several years and being unsure of how they would cope with academic study. Some course managers were developing strategies to cope with groups of such mixed ability and knowledge levels, though these strategies had generally not been in place when the programmes were first introduced.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study found that developing and delivering a Foundation degree required considerable ongoing management, usually more than had initially been envisaged. There was no room for complacency. If a course was to be responsive to the needs of employers then it was likely to require regular changes to the curriculum. Colleges and universities needed to keep ahead of new requirements and be alert to new markets if they were to maintain viable student numbers.

The benefits to employers and students were shown to be considerable. Many students commented that it had been a life-changing experience for them. They praised the quality of teaching and facilities and the increase in their technical expertise. Both employers and students particularly singled out how the course had improved their levels of confidence and employability. There were many examples of students taking on new roles or getting promoted as a result of undertaking the Foundation degree. One employer found that having students on the course had dramatically reduced staff turnover, which had previously been a major issue for them.

The study made a number of generic recommendations that aim to maximise the sustainability and viability of Foundation degrees:

- embed an employer/education communications strategy that facilitates regular, ongoing communication between employers and the college staff
- wherever possible, establish employer/education partnerships that have agreed numbers of students to be sent by an employer on a regular basis
- carry out regular updating of the curriculum content to ensure that it is meeting changing employer/environmental needs
- maintain flexible timetabling to allow for varying work and family commitments, using student and employer feedback
- develop new modes of study, such as distance learning, where appropriate. The Foundation degree in MVCO is a good example of this, the distance learning mode of study enabling the recruitment of students on an international scale
- with the validating partner, explore opportunities to offer a modular approach that facilitates student achievement step-by-step, using ‘small bites of learning’
- establish a comprehensive marketing and publicity strategy and ensure that it is continued on an ongoing basis each year
- provide a stimulating delivery of curriculum by professionals who have industry experience
- embed support systems for students, particularly to cover study support at the beginning of the course
- develop a clearly defined and available ladder of progression from level 3 courses through Foundation degree to honours degree level
- respond to student and employer feedback and show sensitivity in pitching fee levels to take account of market tolerance.
The partnership between fdf and the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) was established in 2005. During the period 2005-06, the partnership piloted work aimed at communicating directly to employers the opportunities and benefits of Foundation degrees. Pilots were supported in five regions: the North West, the North East, Yorkshire and Humber, the East Midlands; and the West Midlands. There were several valuable lessons learnt from this phase, not least of which, was the recognition that ‘fit for purpose provision’ aligned to the needs of chambers members needed to be in place prior to awareness raising amongst employers.

The 2006-08 phase of work with the BCC and with regional chambers reflected the learning from the 2005-06 pilot phase and consisted of three strands of activity:
• a continuing partnership with the BCC, delivering a high-level marketing and awareness campaign
• developing Foundation degree provision in the five pilot regions
• commencing new strands of activity with chambers of commerce in the other English regions.

This review reports on the activity streams and outputs pursued during 2006-08 in support of the second and third bullet points above. The review provides a summary of the key activities and outcomes relating to each of the fdf funded regional projects and collates the evidence from each of the projects to inform the overall conclusions from this second phase of the partnership between fdf and regional chambers.

Charles Pickford
Director of Employer Partnerships (Private Sector), fdf

Regional projects

WEST MIDLANDS: The development and implementation of a Foundation degree in Leadership and Management run by Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber Training (CWT)

Leadership and Management is a regional skill priority that cuts across all sectors and businesses of all sizes in the West Midlands. The aims of this project were:
• to use creative mechanisms to raise awareness of Foundation degrees among employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
• to identify and engage with key stakeholders to develop progression routes incorporating existing vocational/ work-based learning and qualifications
• to develop greater synergy between employers, higher education institutions and other providers to inform Foundation degree design, content and delivery in order to accurately meet the needs of business
• to develop the means of sustaining employer engagement in the design and delivery of a Foundation degree in Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management
• to develop a generic Leadership and Management Foundation degree that has a core modular framework with the flexibility to diversify into sector subject specialist areas in the future
• to ensure that the Foundation degree in Leadership and Management meets the higher level skills needs of Chamber members and other employers through sufficient accessibility, flexibility, meeting of local employer/employee needs and encompassing a diverse range of delivery methods

The Foundation degree was validated in July 2008 and the course commenced in September 2008 with 16 students from varying backgrounds, industries and job roles. Four students who completed their ILM level 5 Diploma with CWT in July have progressed on to the Foundation degree.

Students attend CWT Chamber Training one day per week for two years. The sessions are held during the afternoon and evening, minimising disruption to the students’ working day. Assessment is through completion of assignments, a journal and short oral presentations. Exemption from specific modules of the programme is possible through accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL).

CWT is pleased with the strong project outcomes. They now have an additional level of in-house progression available to chamber companies, a strong ongoing relationship with a higher education (HE) partner, potential opportunities to engage with more companies and further development opportunities within the current qualification framework.
NORTH-EAST: Working in partnership with the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC)

In the Autumn of 2007, a member of NECC staff was funded by fdf to be a part-time ‘Foundation Degree Specialist Advisor’ until July 2008. The Advisor was appointed to:

- raise awareness of Foundation degrees among employers in the North East
- create opportunities for fdf staff to speak to employer groups
- provide market intelligence to assist the development of Foundation degree provision
- develop a marketing strategy for Foundation degrees
- research the nature and scope of the demand for the Foundation degree in Leadership and Management
- promote a Leadership and Management Foundation degree course to North East businesses

The Foundation Degree Specialist Advisor generated significant levels of employer engagement and contact with many industry and educational bodies. One of the outcomes from this role was the development of a successful information, advice and guidance (IAG) Apprenticeship project, which was part-funded by the Lifelong Learning Network (LLN). This involved four work-based learning providers, one in each sub-region, who delivered enhanced information, advice and guidance (IAG) to Apprentices concerning the next steps available to them.

This work also resulted in the development of a Leadership and Management Foundation degree by NECC with the University of Teesside. NECC, with its large training base, it’s understanding of Foundation degrees gained through earlier project work with fdf and the recognition of the business needs for higher level management skills, had approached regional HEIs to develop the Foundation degree. The University of Teesside was keen to partner NECC and a Foundation degree was validated in December 2006 after a development period of only three months.

The flexible delivery method of this Foundation degree has become very popular, with three cohorts running in 2007/08 in Newcastle, Durham and Middlesbrough. The students study the 12 modules in 2-day blocks run every eight weeks. The 2 days of direct delivery at the university (called master classes) take place at the Chamber offices, and are followed by a work-based assignment which is supported by online feedback (via Blackboard). NECC promote the benefit of the two-day block study to minimise time away from the office and maximise the learning gained from the classes back in the workplace to support improved business performance. Each student has a workplace mentor with leadership and management experience, working in the same or a similar environment (peer support mentors are available for SMEs).

EAST OF ENGLAND: Promotion of Foundation degrees through the East of England Chambers of Commerce (EECC)

The East of England project ran from April 2007 to March 2008. It aimed to use the EECC membership network to:

- raise awareness of Foundation degrees among its membership in the eastern region
- identify and overcome any concerns which members have about value of the Foundation degree qualification
- encourage and promote the development of a new Foundation degree in Business and Management for SMEs in the eastern region
- develop stronger relationships between Foundation degree providers and networks of chamber members in order to strengthen existing provision and make it more responsive to employer need

The project was seen as a means of engaging with ‘hard to reach’ employers by providing face-to-face contact, raising the profile of Foundation degrees, promoting new provision and quality enhancing existing provision through greater alignment to employers’ needs.

The project was limited to two specific areas of focus, the first echoing the regional priority to develop higher level skills for the construction industry; the second to further investigate the support and interest, previously identified by various regional Sector Skills Councils, for a generic work-based Foundation degree in Business Studies/Leadership and Management for SMEs across most sectors.

The project ran 22 awareness raising events across the region, including nine events which were specifically aimed at the Construction sector. These events were attended by nearly 800 people. A substantial number of businesses (188) were contacted and made aware of Foundation degrees and higher level work-based learning opportunities through the networking events. Whilst 22 businesses requested further information after these events, it is difficult to measure the results of these networking events and to assess the impact of the Foundation degree message on each individual business within available resources.

Although individual business impact is difficult to measure, relationships between stakeholder organisations have strengthened during the project and awareness of fdf and Foundation degree opportunities has grown.
Early work in this region identified that employers specifically wanted higher level work-based learning to address skills shortages in the areas of Leadership and Management. Further analysis of the market, undertaken in 2006, identified that no higher-level Leadership and Management provision was available in South Yorkshire, despite the articulated need.

Key findings of research concerning employer’s needs were:

- staff skills and recruitment were highlighted as the greatest challenge facing organisations
- in terms of course modules, ‘managing people’ and ‘leadership and communication’ were identified as the most useful areas to include on a Foundation degree in Leadership and Management
- employers were generally willing to support their employees in a variety of ways while studying for a Foundation degree, including paying all or part of the course fees and allowing the employee to attend the course during working hours
- two- to three-day blocks of study every three to four months was the preferred choice of delivery method
- any delivery or assessment of the course involving e-learning was unpopular with employers
- employers would prefer learners to acquire new skills through practical application rather than studying theories
- a blend of different types of assessment was preferred by employers

This project aimed to address the needs identified above by developing a Leadership and Management Foundation degree and to further raise awareness of higher level skills amongst the traditionally ‘hard-to-reach’ SME community. The project co-ordinator was appointed from within the Chamber and could use the chamber network and reputation as a key to reach employers and signposting organisations in addition to making use of the chamber database. A Foundation degree was developed is being delivered through 11 intensive two-day workshops that are followed by an assessment task in the workplace and one major work-based research project. Individual accredited modules are also available.

The project produced successful outcomes; it has engaged with a number of local businesses, used the good reputation of the Sheffield Chamber to open doors and developed a good working relationship between three stakeholder organisations. It proved very valuable to draw on the university’s expertise and experience to consolidate research findings and develop the course and to draw on the large chamber membership for research and marketing.
This project began in Autumn 2007, following a small scoping project that aimed to utilise the Chamber networks to give SMEs a voice on the higher-level skills provision they need and require for business improvement. Dorset Business is the only BCC accredited chamber in the South West and the chambers in the region had not worked collaboratively before.

The project aimed to:

• establish collaboration for promotion of Foundation degrees
• increase awareness of Foundation degrees and demand-led skills training among Chamber members
• develop stronger relationships between higher education/further education providers and chamber members
• identify and develop the potential for a Chamber-led Foundation degree in Leadership and Management (the South West Regional Skills Partnership had identified Leadership and Management as a priority for action in 2007-10)

Dorset Business and an fdf project manager worked with three other chambers in the region: Somerset Chamber of Commerce; Plymouth Chamber of Commerce; and GWE Business West (Bristol) on this project. Each chamber agreed to publicise the project, promote Foundation degrees and host project events. Other chambers in the South West were kept informed through the involvement of the South-West Chambers Board and other dialogue with Chamber CEOs, in addition to briefing of the two regional LLNs and the Higher Level Skills Pathfinder project.

Eight focus groups were run in early 2008 involving 45 employers. The aim of the focus groups was for SMEs to meet together informally to discuss their own experiences and exchange ideas. The objectives were to ask the employers what their higher skills needs were, to tell them about some of the opportunities available and help them devise a ‘higher skills wish list.’ Two sectoral focus groups were held with more limited engagement. Skills issues were common to some extent but the issues also varied with the geography (rural issues of distance from higher education providers and lack of employer networking for example) and, of course, with both type and size of business.

In addition to the focus groups, an on-line questionnaire for employers was developed.

Some key findings from this research were:

• 60% of employers have heard of Foundation degrees and knew what they were
• 60% of employers encourage staff to gain higher level skills - barriers were relevance (54%) and perceived time constraints (27%) and cost 15%
• 58% of employers expressed interest in a modular Leadership and Management Foundation degree (generic core modules with specific options) and 45% offered to help with the development of an Leadership and Management Foundation degree
• Leadership and Management skills considered essential or very important were: communications and information management (93%); managing your own resources (93%); managing people and performance (88%); and leadership (84%)

Three sub-regional events were held across the South West with 60 attendees, 30 of whom were employers. The aim of these events was to report on the focus group and questionnaire findings to both employers and higher education providers and their related organisations, and to bring employers and providers together to network and form relationships in the light of these findings. Feedback forms indicate that these events were considered very valuable for all parties and new relationships were sustained as a result.

The need for a flexible higher-level business qualification was articulated at each stage of this project together with a support package for the learner that includes explanation of the opportunities available. The response to an offer of a flexible, Leadership and Management Foundation degree was very positive. The next steps are a pilot which will include exploration of Chamber support services for a web-based learning package.
SOUTH EAST: Developing an evidence base to inform a model for higher skills development with the South East England Chambers of Commerce network

This project began in 2007 in response to the need to strengthen Foundation degree provision for the SME community.

The project aimed to:
- develop strong relationships between Foundation degree providers within the region and the Chambers of Commerce in the network
- research and develop a model of provision that specifically meets the business improvement needs of SMEs
- strengthen existing provision through identifying employers’ needs and making appropriate adjustments to programmes
- develop one chamber-led Foundation degree with a focus on business improvement and leadership directly targeting micro-businesses and smaller SMEs.

The project was developed by fdf in partnership with a group of three South East Chambers. The work undertaken included raising awareness of the business benefits of Foundation degrees and provision of a strong evidence base of employer need to inform new or reshaping of existing higher level skills provision.

The Thames Gateway Chamber of Commerce project decided to concentrate on employers from Construction and the Built Environment because of the regeneration and new build agenda linked to the Thames Gateway. As the project progressed, it became clear that as a result of the plethora of initiatives launched in the area with little collaborative working between them, it was going to be difficult for this project to attract employers from just one this sector. The scope was therefore broadened to include a wider spectrum of employers. Awareness raising workshops were held and employers completed a survey of higher level skills needs. The survey results, from 26 employers, indicated that communication skills, time management, customer service and managing people were considered to be the most important subjects needed. Occasional off-site sessions and workplace learning were the preferred methods of delivery.

The Sussex Chamber (Sussex Enterprise) ran two focus groups (involving 10 employers) and employers completed a survey of higher-level skills needs. The results mirror some of the areas highlighted by the Thames Gateway project, with ‘managing people’ identified by all employers as mandatory. Day release, distance learning and workplace learning were all identified as preferred modes of delivery. Discussion of blended learning within the focus group suggested that e-learning was more acceptable than the survey had suggested.

Surrey Chambers worked with employer members to promote Foundation degrees and to discuss higher level skills needs. After researching existing provision, a series of meetings with employers took place at which the development of a qualification with core modules and options to suit the wide range of businesses represented in the chambers was discussed. Employers also discussed how the course should be delivered. Employers emphasised the importance of work-based projects and suggested a buddying system, job swaps and mentoring to assist the learning process. Following the focus groups, a questionnaire was designed, circulated to employers and evaluated in early 2008. The questionnaire was followed by a series of visits to employers and providers to further discuss the content and delivery of the proposed course.

Following the initial research, the Steering group decided to focus resources on the Surrey Chamber Foundation degree development and to use this as a model for a regional Chamber Foundation degree. The chamber developed a partnership with Guildford College and the University of Surrey with the aim of enhancing an existing Foundation degree in Business and Management to reflect the business need of the chamber network and the findings from the research. The Foundation degree is delivered in a flexible way, lectures and audio are posted onto the intranet as podcasts and students are able to complete the course using various methods of blended learning, online or at the college. Ongoing work is supporting enhancement of the curriculum to include chamber delivered provision including master classes in international operations.

Conclusion

The review of the activity and outcomes of the six regional projects has identified that the community of chambers members, predominantly SMEs, have consistent workforce development needs. Each project was purposely managed and developed in relative isolation to test whether the needs of the businesses represented were homogenous.

Each project was strongly informed by employers, resulting in a high level of confidence that the outcomes accurately reflect the views of this business community.

Working with the Chambers of Commerce to reach the SME and micro-business community has been successful. Developing the networking relationships between the employers, the chambers and the educational providers has produced strong results as each voice has been heard directly, not reported ‘second hand’. The chambers
have also benefitted from the HE providers’ other areas of expertise such as marketing and promotion, in addition to the academic aspects of course development.

The responses by providers to meeting employers’ needs have been very similar. Employers have also voiced very similar demands across the regions. This has resulted in the development of broadly similar higher level skills training to meet these needs. This provision can continue to be fine-tuned in response to the changing needs of business in the future.

In terms of the provision required by employers, Leadership and management is the dominant theme. The core units required for a Leadership and Management qualification were common to every project, although they may have been worded slightly differently. Communication skills, customer service, managing people and leadership were the top topic requirements at focus groups, in surveys and at networking events across the regions. The demand was for generic content relevant to all business with an opportunity for contextualisation for sector specific study through work-based learning and projects. There is some evidence to indicate that programmes should have the capacity to encompass specialist content where required.

The blend of delivery methods requested by the employers may have varied a little depending on sector and geography, but all required minimal time away from the workplace. This led to the development of block delivery by three Foundation degrees, the exploration of online study and support and the opportunity for work-based students to network with each other in the leadership and management subject areas. A delivery model that is proven to be successful is the ‘master-class’ with further supported and applied learning being undertaken in the workplace, with a technology assisted support infrastructure of academic tutors, peer groups and work-based mentors.

Cost was not usually the key consideration for the employers; more emphasis was placed on the responsiveness of the HE providers, flexibility of the delivery and immediate relevance to the challenges faced by the business.

The need for this practical relevance to the workplace was echoed in the employers’ priorities for work-related assessment. All project outcomes stressed the need for work-based projects and presentations which related to the students’ own work experiences and would directly benefit the business.

The employers across each project highlighted the need to support the learners before, during and after the learning. The value of mentors within the workplace and support from the education provider was identified by all of the projects, and the subsequent programme developments reflect this.

Future work

As the 2006-08 phase of the partnership work neared completion, fdv and the regional Chambers held a joint workshop to share practice and experiences. The following is a summary of the discussions that took place:

1. Networking – each regional project was developing in relative isolation and it was recognised that the opportunity for a cohesive pan regional/national approach is easily lost. Establishing a network of practitioners was viewed as important. This needed to involve more than occasional meetings, but rather a supported network that actively sought to share practice and resources and find resolutions to problems.

2. Regional / Pan regional roll out of provision – this should be a joint initiative, led on a regional basis by partnerships of fdv and chambers staff and where appropriate developing additional points of delivery.

3. Marketing – a combination of fdv, BCC, regional chambers and universities has the potential to provide a strong brand identity. Utilising this brand to signal fit for purpose provision to employers will be an important aspect of roll out. The principles of endorsement might have a role to play in developing a network of providers.

4. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) – the provision developed to date has been within the context of a full award. Although the provision is modular in design it has not been marketed or offered as CPD. Developing a CPD framework at levels 4 and 5 should be a strand of future work.

5. IAG – developing IAG tailored to the needs of the potential audience for this provision is desirable.

6. Other Stakeholders – raising awareness of the projects and provision with other stakeholders such as Regional Development Agencies, Sector Skills Councils and other employer representative bodies to gain support and ensure sustainability should be pursued.

These discussions will clearly influence any further partnership work.
Building on the Foundation degree framework for the children’s workforce in schools

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Monica Farthing
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The June 2008 issue of Forward featured an article from the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) about its plans to develop a Foundation degree framework for school support staff. In this issue, Sue Graves of Edge Hill University, who acted as consultant to the TDA, and Monica Farthing of the TDA discuss some of the issues raised in the development of the framework and outline the next steps for the TDA.

In 2007 the TDA was commissioned by the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills to develop proposals on ‘how best to ensure that the future development of new Foundation degrees meets the needs of the school workforce and articulates with the Integrated Qualifications Framework’ (IQF). The first stage of this commission has now been completed with the publication of the TDA’s Foundation degree framework in December 2008; the second is underway with a public consultation on how to include higher education (HE) qualifications for school support staff on the IQF.

The draft Foundation degree framework, which went out for consultation between April and July 2008, was based on fdf’s template and included an analysis of workforce needs, guidance on

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1 The Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) for the children’s workforce is being developed by the Children’s Workforce Network of sector and regulatory bodies, www.iqf.org.uk. Qualifications and learning programmes at all levels will be included on the IQF (subject to meeting the four IQF principles for inclusion), fostering career progression opportunities across the Children’s Workforce sector and reducing duplication in learning requirements.

2 The TDA Foundation degree framework is at www.tda.gov.uk/fdf.

3 The consultation is at www.tda.gov.uk/support/support_consultations/iqfconsultation.aspx.
Foundation degrees from fdf and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and subject-specific guidance commissioned by the TDA from Edge Hill University. Consultation included both an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews with interested higher education institutions (HEIs) and other stakeholders across England. Responses were extremely positive overall, with strong agreement in the online consultation that the framework would be useful, that the picture it gave of the school workforce and its needs was accurate, that the role of sector bodies in endorsing Foundation degrees would be positive and that greater integration of children’s services would offer more opportunities for Foundation degree development.

Where online consultation questions focused on whether the framework needed additional material, views were more evenly balanced. Some saw no need for additions, but a small majority thought it would be helpful to say more about employer engagement, selection of learners, and credit for prior learning and experience. Generally, suggestions for improvement were followed up, even where the majority were content with the draft, on the grounds that this was likely to be helpful to potential users.

The small team from Edge Hill who worked on the draft framework also undertook to consult nationally with colleagues from HE and employer representatives through face-to-face, telephone and email interviews over a four-month period. The team had extensive experience in developing Foundation degrees for the wider school workforce and, as regional providers of assessment for Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status, strong partnerships with local authorities.

In these interviews, respondents raised issues about accreditation of prior learning, particularly the proliferation of entry qualifications that Foundation degree students are likely to present with. They felt it was important to ensure a consistent approach, enabling applicants to claim credit for prior learning while also ensuring that programmes maintained a coherent and logical structure. Using the framework document to inform development was seen as a helpful way forward as it provided clear guidance that could be adapted to suit local imperatives.

This also led to discussions about progression opportunities for Foundation degree students both into and out of Foundation degree programmes. Colleagues were keen to ensure that these opportunities were made explicit for students, and felt that the framework document provided a template for conveying this information and articulating the links between qualifications.

Although colleagues on the whole welcomed the idea of a national framework to enable consistency and equity of provision, there was much discussion about keeping enough flexibility in programme design to be responsive to local need. The framework document enables these concerns to be addressed as the content is not prescribed and the guidance can be adapted to local contexts. The exemplification of part of the children’s workforce ‘common core’ knowledge and skills4 within the framework document was much discussed during consultation. A high proportion of respondents regarded this as a very helpful addition to the framework document and some were keen for it to be extended to the whole of the common core. It was eventually decided not to expand this section as this would provide a level of prescription that was at odds with the tone of the rest of the document. The validation guidance5 offered by the framework was on the whole welcomed by colleagues as a useful addition for those either developing or reviewing a Foundation degree programme.

Respondents were also keen to ensure that the framework document addressed the issue of support for students on Foundation degree programmes. It was considered important that the role of employers, particularly in workplace mentoring, should be made explicit and the significance of this role highlighted. Moreover, the framework’s elucidation of the importance of employer engagement in the development, delivery and review of programmes was considered vital to ensure compliance with Foundation degree philosophy and principles.

The TDA Board gave its approval to the framework in October 2008 and it was published on the TDA website at the beginning of December. The next step for the TDA was to decide how to use the framework to support the inclusion of HE qualifications for school staff on the IQF.

The aim of the IQF is to support the development of a children’s workforce that is competent in its own specialist areas, able to work effectively with others across the sector, and able to transfer more easily from one sector to another. It will embrace both vocational and HE qualifications at all levels.

The Children’s Workforce Network’s (CWN) basic requirements for inclusion on the IQF are that qualifications should be fit for purpose for their sector and reflect the common core for the children’s workforce. It is for the relevant sector bodies to decide what procedures they will use to establish fitness for purpose, but all are committed to working together to develop qualifications and components that can be jointly supported and shared across the

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4 The common core of knowledge and skills for the children’s workforce, available at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore

5 This was based on fdf’s endorsement pilot guidance, particularly the ‘ten key questions’.

workforce. The target date for completing the development of the IQF is 2010.

At vocational level, the process of placing qualifications on the IQF will be closely linked to the development of the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), which gives a key role to sector bodies in confirming whether qualifications meet sector needs.

The IQF process for HE is just beginning its trial phase and recognises that relationships with sector bodies are more varied for HEIs, as they are autonomous institutions that also need to meet the requirements of their own – and other bodies’ – quality assurance systems. Not all sector bodies for the children’s workforce currently offer guidance or endorsement to HEIs providing programmes relevant to their sector; those that do vary widely in the extent to which they are directly involved in course development and approval.

Before publishing its Foundation degree framework, the TDA played no part in developing HE for school support staff. The positive reception for the framework suggested that HEIs would be willing to follow TDA guidance, and that if they did so it would better help their programmes meet schools’ changing needs. But creating a new, formal process for making decisions about which HE qualifications should be included on the IQF as ‘sector-endorsed’ for school staff would be a step change from offering guidance. The TDA therefore decided to hold a further consultation on its proposed approach to IQF decisions before finalising its plans.

In considering what approach to take, the TDA has sought a balance between:
- ensuring that any HE qualifications included on the IQF would be fit for purpose, in relation to changing workforce needs, reflect the common core and have credibility with employers
- ensuring that TDA approval procedures remain consistent with CWNs overall approach to the IQF
- respecting the autonomy and expertise of HEIs, and recognising that they have to meet other quality assurance requirements
- learning from fdf’s Endorsement Scheme pilot and from TDA’s own experience of accrediting providers of initial teacher training
- keeping bureaucracy to a minimum.

The resulting consultation document therefore proposes, in summary:
- a system of approving institutions rather than individual courses
- basing institutional approval on evidence (from course validation, monitoring and evaluation) that HEIs follow TDA guidance and involve employers at every stage
- the establishment of a network of experienced HEI staff to share good practice and act as external members of validation panels.

The TDA will be consulting on these proposals until the end of March 2009, with a view to implementing the new arrangements by autumn 2009. Full details are on the TDA website at: www.tda.gov.uk/support/support_consultations/iqfconsultation.aspx

Anyone with an interest in HE for the children’s workforce is welcome to contribute to the consultation.
Adults and young people need informed advice about qualifications and progression routes to help their planning and decision making about study and employment. It has long been acknowledged that advice and information about opportunities in full-time higher education are both more available and more straightforward than for part-time or work-based higher education, with UCAS as a single point of information about, and application for, all full-time higher education. Sources of information about and methods of application for part-time and work-based higher education are more diverse and variable. Foundation degrees are an increasingly significant element of this latter form of higher education but, despite having been established in 2000, are not universally known about and understood, either by adults and young people or those that advise them.

fdf has a clear responsibility, as part of its communications strategy, to enhance informed awareness of the distinctive identity of the Foundation degree, including to advisers. Up to now our work has been focused on providing training materials and a training programme for advisers,1 but we know that those materials impact on a small proportion of advisers and that we need to do more. In order to clarify the extent of advisers’ awareness about Foundation degrees and inform any further development of resources, fdf commissioned some research from the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) at the University of Derby. We asked them to assess advisers’ understanding of Foundation degrees, with a particular emphasis on those advisers involved in the provision of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) on Foundation degrees to adults in the workforce.

Research aims

The overall aims of the research were as follows:

- undertake a review of adviser awareness and understanding of Foundation degree programmes
- consider how advisers’ address the IAG needs of learners regarding Foundation degrees, including identifying emerging good practice
- consult managers and practitioners in the field to identify key issues in regard to providing effective IAG about Foundation degrees to both young people and adults
- collate, analyse and report on findings, including providing recommendations to fdf to help inform future developments.

As fdf’s particular interest in the identification of those advisers involved in the delivery of advice about Foundation degrees in workplace settings had the potential to simultaneously both expand and limit the findings of the research, it was agreed that this specific focus would be limited to two sectors: Healthcare and Food and drink.

Methodology

Research was carried out in three stages: stage one involved a literature review to ensure that all findings built upon other published work on Foundation degrees and a review of current online sources of information on Foundation degrees. The aim of this latter activity was to develop an initial baseline of internet sources on Foundation degrees, as well as assist with the identification of advisers involved in the provision of IAG in workplace settings.

Stage two focused on expanding the network of advisers and then contacting them to respond to a questionnaire about current understanding and future information needs with regard to Foundation degrees. A structured questionnaire was developed that aimed to assess adviser awareness and understanding of Foundation degrees, and identify what information sources they were currently using and what further support or resources they might require. Respondents were also invited to contribute any examples of good practice that they could identify.

In addition to the quantitative response from advisers, the research team sought further qualitative insight from advisers through the conduct of a series of 10 telephone interviews.

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1 www.fdf.ac.uk/home/information_for_universities_and_colleges/iag_training_materials

2 The term adviser, in this context, includes careers practitioners, lecturers and tutors at further and higher education institutions, as well as those staff and managers who may be involved in providing advice on learning and development to their own workforce.
The third stage was reporting and entailed the collation, analysis and reporting of all findings into a final draft report for agreement with fdf at the end of August 2008.

**Findings**

An aspect of the research of particular interest to fdf, in terms of being a target for resources developed, was the identification of workplace advisers. Both the review of key reports and the website review reaffirmed that there is not a discrete, discernable body of ‘workplace IAG advisers’. Rather there is a whole range of different individuals, agencies and initiatives providing advice to employed people at different levels and in different settings.

In some cases, the advice is provided as part of a training, personnel or human resource function in the workplace; in some cases it is provided by external initiatives operating in the workplace; in some cases the advice is provided through agencies operating outside of the working environment; and, generally, by a number of agencies who meet the needs of specific groups (for example, RNIB, RNID). While this plethora of advisers offers potential for bespoke and personalised services, it makes engaging ‘workplace advisers’ a particularly challenging activity. The research suggested it is also important to identify where there are key ‘influencers’ and gave examples of Foundation degree course leaders; further education tutors; learndirect and Connexions advisers; trade union learning reps; higher education institution admissions tutors; and Level O and Access to HE course tutors.

In respect of the awareness and understanding of advisers, the research concluded that levels of understanding and awareness of, and confidence in, Foundation degrees are very mixed. Advisers reported a general level of uncertainty and lack of confidence and that the term ‘foundation’ continues to be a problem – across the board.

An important aspect of the research was identifying advisers’ information resources and needs. The research found that advisers used a range of sources to get information about Foundation degrees with varying opinions on the quality and accessibility of the information available. The inconsistency of information on websites is disappointing. While there are some key agency sites that provide high quality information, others do not. Sector skills websites in particular were identified as needing to improve both their commitment and approach to the provision of information on Foundation degrees, and make some attempt at some consistency of style and approach.

The research indicated that the benefits of Foundation degrees need to be promoted more widely to increase understanding; advisers needed more evidence and resources to be able to undertake discussions and provide guidance on the opportunities for progression and employment that they present. They also needed to know where they could refer people on to for specialist advice linked to Foundation degrees generally, and more specifically around the progression and job opportunities provided through Foundation degrees.

The research also indicated that employer awareness of Foundation degrees continues to be a problem.

**Using the research**

The research concluded that while many advisers understand the principles of Foundation degrees, many do not understand the detail, or are unclear about the specific arrangements that might apply to different Foundation degrees offered in different institutions and linked to different industries or sectors. It identified that the main issues to be addressed are:

- continued awareness raising to increase understanding and improve confidence when advising about Foundation degrees
- one main location for detailed information
- access to some specialist advice about Foundation degrees
- access to sector-specific specialist advice (linked to Foundation degrees)
- increased resources for advisers and individuals.

**fdf** has responded to these research findings by building on our existing training materials and resources for advisers, and by creating an area of our website specifically for advisers that will include:

- general information about where Foundation degrees fit in the whole picture of higher education provision
- information about funding and the implications of withdrawing funding for ELQs (equal and level qualifications)
- updated training materials for advisers
- resources for Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) and other work-based advisers
- case studies about the needs of individuals in making the choice to do a Foundation degree as part of a career plan
- some sectoral progression maps developed with SSCs
- links to a wide range of national and regional resources and other websites that both advisers and learners will find helpful.

There will also be a section of FAQs with answers, featuring questions received by **fdf** via their website from advisers and posed by advisers that are being consulted in the preparation of these resources.

We expect the website to go live shortly.

**Watch this space!**
Introduction and rationale

There has been surprisingly little academic research into careers services and provisions for non-traditional students, and no research that has specifically examined the needs of work-based and Foundation degree students. A review commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment (2001) highlighted the importance of the contribution of careers services due to the increasingly diverse nature of the higher education population and the emerging role that higher education plays in lifelong learning. The review also noted that non-traditional students did not tend to use career services, mainly because these services were geared towards younger, more traditional students. The need for research into what mature, part-time or distance learners require from a careers service became apparent. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) also reiterated the need for targeted careers services to meet the needs of non-traditional students (HEFCE, 2001). Considering this, research into career needs and provisions for non-traditional students seems both necessary and worthwhile.

Foundation Direct is a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University of Portsmouth that supports Foundation degree students and conducts research into Foundation degrees. Foundation Direct recognises the need to provide tailored careers support to Foundation degree students, and as a result a researcher employed by the centre is undertaking a project to develop a careers support website. This decision was based on research findings since 2001 into careers education for non-traditional students, findings from a national survey of Foundation degree students carried out by fdf (fdf, 2008) and also an electronic survey of Foundation degree students at the University of Portsmouth and its partner colleges.

The University of Portsmouth survey posed questions such as what level of careers support students currently received, their attitudes to career development, what support they would like to receive, and whether they would use a dedicated careers website if available. The data from this survey suggests that students feel that they would benefit from a dedicated careers support website, and that they rate the importance of career development very highly. Despite this high regard for career development and desire for support and advice,
the data from the survey indicates a lack of careers provision for current Foundation degree students at Portsmouth. Only 17% of students enrolled on their Foundation degree in order to change careers, however they still feel that they need advice about how to progress in their careers, and a staggering 49% of respondents were not aware of their options on completion of their studies. Three-quarters of these students were intending to top up to an honours degree, but 64% were not aware of the procedures to do this, or even where to go to find out. Despite the University of Portsmouth having a large careers service, only 14.5% of respondents accessed this support, most of them stating that they felt it was geared towards the more traditional, younger students, and did not cater for the mature work-based learner.

Based on the results of this study, the author is in the process of designing a careers support website dedicated specifically to Foundation degree students. It is anticipated that this website will be available nationally for Foundation degree students across the country.

**The website**

This section of the article intends to give an overview of the website (which is currently being designed), in terms of the kind of information it will provide and what services it will offer to Foundation degree students.

**Design/structure**

The website will offer advice, information and interactive activities for students. The author believes that it is important to put the individual learner in control, and the website aims to do this by following the e-learning principle of reusable learning objects. These will be stand-alone pages that enable the user to navigate the site easily and efficiently. The site will contain topics of interest/relevance and each section will contain stand-alone pages that are linked to other topics.

The site will be constructed in a manner that will encourage students to jump between topics and information sections, and also to print off and download templates. The site is based on the principle of the DOTS iterative cycle (Law & Watts, 1977), which states that students need to develop skills and knowledge in four key areas: self-awareness, opportunity-awareness, decision learning and transition skills. This model is underpinned by social science theories that attempt to explain career choice and career identity
in relation to new and emerging perspectives over time. A new
and more recent theory of the DOTS process recognises that this
DOTS cycle is not a one-off process, but one which occurs with
each job change (Law, 1999). This site acknowledges this cycle of
self-awareness/opportunity-awareness/decision making/transition
learning and aims to address these aspects of career choice through
the provision of a comprehensive arena for advice, information
and guidance.

One important issue that needed to be addressed early on was
the target audience of the site. The audience needs to be defined
before design begins. There are typically three types of Foundation
degree student: the young full-time student; the mature part-
time student returning to education to further their prospects in
their current career; and the mature part-time or full-time student
undertaking the Foundation degree to change their career. In
addition to needing general careers advice, these three different
types of student will all have different specific needs in terms
of what advice they require and what services they would most
benefit from. It is therefore proposed that the site be separated into
three ‘streams’, each one being designed according to one of the
student profiles, as defined above. That way, when first visiting the
site, students will be able to select the profile that best matches
their description, and they will be directed to the advice and
guidance most appropriate to them.

The website will be interactive and contain video clips of students’
experiences of Foundation degrees, diagrams and animation, and
interactive activities to engage the user. The site will also contain
some key links to other useful careers sites and services currently
available on the internet.

Content

One aspect of careers advice that Foundation degree students
would benefit from is advice about how to sell their Foundation
degree to employers. Many Foundation degree students are faced
with challenges when trying to assure employers of the benefit and
advantages of their degree, as employers may not be convinced
of their value or may not be aware of what they involve. In order
to address this need, there will be a section advising students how
to market their Foundation degree to employers. There will be a
summary sheet that students can print off and use to prepare for
an interview, and a template letter explaining to an employer what
a Foundation degree is and what it offers. Students will be able to
print this off and amend it with their personal details to send to a
potential employer.

Many Foundation degree students find it difficult to get back
into studying after a long break, and many are unsure about
how to deal with the challenges and pressures of work-based
learning programmes. In order to assist with this transition back
into an academic environment, the website will contain a section
specifically dealing with aspects of adapting to study, such as
time management skills and study skills. Many Foundation degree
students have worked in their profession for many years and are
very experienced, but they may not have written an essay since
they left school and therefore feel very unsure about this. This
section will also help students with the transition from Foundation
degree to honours degree for those wishing to top up to an
honours degree. The electronic survey revealed that almost half of
the respondents were not aware of this process, so the site will also
provide information about how to apply for a place to top-up their
degree.

Many mature Foundation degree students also lack confidence,
and therefore the site will contain information about confidence
building and decision making. In addition there will be sections
containing advice about writing a curriculum vitae, cover letters
and completing application forms, and advice about interview
skills and assessment centres. These sections will all be tailored to
Foundation degree students.

There is an expectation that because Foundation degree students
are, on average, more mature and already employed, they have
already received careers advice. This is not necessarily the case, and
due to horizons being broadened during studying, Foundation
degree students may benefit from careers advice to help them to
rethink their options and re-evaluate their position in the light of
their newly acquired skills and experience.

Once the site is near to completion, a demo version of the site will
be tested on Foundation degree students, and feedback obtained
regarding the content level, content usefulness, accessibility, and
so on. This feedback will be incorporated into the final website.
As well as one-to-one testing, there will be focus groups and user
surveys. Based on evidence from recent surveys and the fact that
there is currently very little careers provision for Foundation degree
students and work-based learners, it is anticipated that this website
will be both a popular and valuable addition to the education
resources available to this student group.

References

2001 Working papers. Stage 2 report to the Student Sub-Group Employment Studies


participation in higher education – a guide to good practice. Bristol: HEFCE.


Cambridge: CRAC.
Inclusion by degrees

Susan Hayday,
Director of Workplace Learning Strategy, fdf

Alongside the key role Foundation degrees play in developing the higher level skills employers need, they have a social inclusion role.

“If we are to create a more inclusive society and unlock the potential of our workforce, we must also increase the number of routes into and through higher education… we need to create a continuum of learning where people can expect to move in and out of education throughout their lives. At the centre of this new approach will be the new Foundation degree….”

David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, 2000

While Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) statistics (HEFCE, 2008) indicate that Foundation degrees attract people from a ‘broader range of backgrounds’ than mainstream higher education (HE) and provide alternative routes into HE for those who are not the ‘traditional A-level school leaver’, they do not suggest that Foundation degrees are any more successful than traditional HE programmes in attracting disabled students.

Given that “disabled people represent one-fifth of the working age population, but are far more likely to be out of work and to lack skills than the population as a whole” (Office for National Statistics 2007), and Foundation degrees are a potential route into employment for disabled people, fdf was concerned to investigate what might be done to increase their recruitment on to Foundation degrees.

Our assumption was that while institutions are likely to be accessible and welcoming for disabled students, the particular issue in relation to Foundation degrees might be the work-related elements and the preparedness of employers to facilitate work-based learning for disabled students.

fdf therefore commissioned research in May 2007 into how inclusive and accessible existing Foundation degrees were for disabled people and to provide evidence based on the experiences of disabled students, education providers and employers. Our aim was to use the research to provide guidance and examples of how Foundation degrees could provide a route into employment for disabled adults. The approach taken focused on the ‘lived’ experiences of disabled students, and rather than a formal survey used individual interviews, which were conducted face-to-face, by telephone and/or by email to capture the experiences and views of the three stakeholder groups: disabled students, their education providers and employers involved in their courses.

Approximately 300 people were contacted between May 2007 and April 2008, from which 50 students, providers and employers were identified and subsequently interviewed.

The resulting research provides some interesting, and not always heartening, messages for institutions and for Foundation degree providers. The findings were organised under three headings:

• issues specific to Foundation degrees
• issues for disabled students generally
• barriers
• innovative and promising practice

Issues specific to Foundation degrees

Of concern is some of the questionable practice picked up in the interviews about work-based elements of Foundation degrees. Students in some institutions were provided with a list of local employers and left to organise a placement themselves, and all the students interviewed were expected to organise at least the details of their own placements.

Encouragingly however, employers providing work placements were very positive and those who had not worked with disabled students before said they would be pleased to take disabled students again.

Generally the interviews indicated that most employers needed more information about what help was available to enable them to employ disabled people. They were surprised to learn how much help the Access to Work Scheme1 could provide. The researchers found that some students were reluctant to declare an impairment or condition in the workplace because of the fear of discrimination, while most were happy to disclose their disability to the college or university.
While not problem free, on the whole the disabled students in this study were very positive about their experiences of their Foundation degrees. What made the difference was the nature in which problems were approached by the college/university staff as much as the outcomes. In particular experiences were positive when:

- the students were considered to be expert in their own needs and therefore their ideas were respected and acted upon
- their tutors and employers exhibited a ‘can-do’ approach to finding solutions and in many cases were equally as pleased with the experience and outcomes as the students.

**Issues for disabled students generally**

What was perhaps surprising were the general issues identified by students that were making any study more difficult for them. While most students interviewed gave a very positive account of their experiences in further and higher education, a number reported inconsistency in the ways in which staff responded to students’ impairments,

“...I have been singled out in the classroom. ‘Who is the person with the visual impairment in the class?’ they say. It has made me want to run out of the room or sink down in my seat.”

**Student**

Others reported delays in the provision of the Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) and in the delivery of assistive technology equipment, both of which compromised their being able to fully access their courses.

Most of those interviewed felt that training in disability awareness and equality for both education providers and employers was essential, but it was actually working with disabled students which most felt was invaluable. Not only were they able to develop knowledge and skills about disability and how successfully people do things in different ways, but it also made them consider and enhance their practice generally, which was seen to benefit other students and employees.

**Barriers**

Most of the barriers experienced by students interviewed were caused by their lack of information and knowledge about what was available and, in relation to providers and employers, their “inherent lack of knowledge/understanding of how disabled people live their lives with different impairments; how, with the right equipment and support, they can progress through education and into work commensurate with their competences and knowledge and that it is not just impairments that disable, but negative attitudes (and environmental barriers), which can be just as, if not more disabling”.

**Innovative and promising practice**

A range of effective practice was identified during the research such as disability toolkits, disabled student forums, disability champions and personal development programmes. These are reported in detail in the full research report.

**Research outcomes**

The research concludes that only by attracting greater numbers of disabled students will the expertise in meeting the needs of a diverse student and employee group grow until diversity is confidently and expertly anticipated, welcomed and accommodated as part of the mainstream.

A key outcome of the research has been two guidance documents, for disabled students and for providers, which encapsulate the positive practice elicited through the interviewing process. The guidance derives from the experiences of the students and lecturers and is therefore a personal and experiential addition to existing sources of information such as those provided by SKILL, MIND or the Equality Challenge Unit. An example is student advice on taking responsibility: “Don’t only rely on others – take responsibility for finding out about what you need. Have the confidence to ask for help but make sure you are in the driving seat.”

The guidance will be available on the fdf website or in print form from Simon Tudor, s.j.tudor@fdf.ac.uk. The guidance will be supported by some case studies that we hope will raise awareness of what disabled students can achieve. We are working with the advice and guidance community to disseminate the guidance for students and have produced the case studies to encourage disabled adults to consider Foundation degrees. We would be interested in hearing from any colleges or universities that are successfully recruiting disabled students on to Foundation degrees or who are working with employers that are involving disabled staff in higher level skills development. Please contact Susan Hayday at susan.hayday@fdf.ac.uk.

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**Case study 1  Alexander**

Alexander was born deaf and attended residential school for deaf people where he gained A-levels in Photography and Graphics and a BTEC in Business Studies. He is currently studying for a Foundation degree in Photography and really enjoying it.

“I was born deaf. I have one hearing aid and a cochlear implant. I had it done four years ago and it changed my life. Before I had never heard birds singing, cats meowing or telephones ringing!”

Alexander receives the DSA and has a learning support worker who takes notes for him, as his tutor thought it best because she is Swedish and she was worried he wouldn’t be able to cope with her accent. He is not sure yet what he wants to do when he completes the course. He chose the course because if felt like a natural progression, having achieved his Photography and Graphics A-levels but he chose the college because he wanted to make friends in his local community. Having been away at a specialist residential school for most of his schooling, Alexander had never had any long periods with “hearing people”.

Alexander found the first few months difficult as he had to ask people to speak more slowly and more clearly, but after a while things settled. Following a field trip to Amsterdam, where everyone was interacting in a more relaxed environment, Alexander was able to make friends with the one student who he was having difficulty communicating with.

Alexander’s tutor says she is much more aware of having to face him when she is talking, and she is also aware of where the other students are in relation to Alexander. She also gives out notes: “Not just for him – it benefits all the students but I try to reinforce everything I teach in two or three different ways to make sure it is understood.”

**Case study 2   Tracy**

Tracy was a busy working mother who has had a visual impairment from birth. She left a Visual Impairment Unit in a mainstream secondary school with one CSE in English and a certificate in typewriting in 1969. She studied O and A-levels at night school as a mature student.

Before starting her Foundation degree in Health and Social Care, Tracy was working as a Health Care Support Worker (band 2) in a general hospital. She is now an Assistant Practitioner (band 4) working on a rehabilitation ward and enjoying the additional responsibility. She is certain she will undertake the BA conversion course for her own satisfaction; she recognises this is unlikely to make a difference to her present role. At present she has no intention to train as a qualified nurse.

Tracy had some initial difficulty with her course work but took the initiative herself and talked to the tutors about what she would find helpful. They had been using a white board which Tracy couldn’t see and producing huge documents in A3 which Tracy found difficult to handle and couldn’t file – she simply asked for standard A4 documents in 14 or 16 point print. She also asked that documents being handed out to all students be read out to the class beforehand. The whole class found this helpful.

Tracy had no idea about how or where to get any support to assist with her training.

She describes her experience of doing the Foundation degree as positive, although she did face a number of barriers.

Tracy’s Ward Sister had wanted her to do the Foundation degree training the previous year but she had lacked the confidence to try at that time. The following year an advertisement was posted on the staff noticeboard but Tracy was unable to read this. Fortunately, one of her friends brought it to her attention. The confidence her friends and colleagues had in her gave her the push she needed to apply.

Having started the course, the process of identifying some of the tasks that Tracy would need to undertake, for example taking an ECG, was challenging. At times this made her confront some of her deep-rooted feelings about her own impairment. While most of her colleagues were supportive, she did experience negativity in one of her mentors, and this added to her difficulties. Once Tracy talked this through with her line manager and another mentor was found she sailed through the rest of the course. It is worth noting that her ‘negative’ mentor is now a trusted and supportive colleague.

When Tracy qualified, her line manager contacted the Access to Work Scheme and following an assessment, Tracy was provided with some Assistive Technology. She felt awkward about this due to her independent spirit but now recognises it makes her job easier. It does take her longer than her colleagues to write her notes – she stays on for an extra half an hour but she is happy to do this. She feels that learning to use new technology is particularly challenging for those who are no longer young!
Evidence from the Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council (LSC)/Aimhigher AdvAnce project suggest that Advanced Apprentices (AAs), along with other level 3 work-based learners, aspire to higher learning in far greater numbers than previously thought.
The context

Government strategies have skirted around the progression of AAs into higher education (HE). The Economic Affairs Fifth Report (Economic Affairs Committee 2007) states: “It is welcome that successive governments have persevered with promoting and supporting apprenticeship. However, too much emphasis has been placed on quantity of apprenticeships, and not enough on quality and subsequent destinations, including progression to Foundation degrees.”

With the publication of the DIUS HE policy outlining the need for “higher education institutions to work to widen participation beyond young people leaving college or school with good A-levels and to put learners and employers at the heart of their provision” (DIUS, 2008); the growing demand for associate professionals and senior technicians (Wilson et al, 2006); and the pressure on businesses to be ever more efficient and adaptable, is it now the time to put Advanced Apprentices well and truly on the HE map?

Data sources from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) suggest that the progression on to HE for AAs is stubbornly blocked at around 1%. Official Devon and Cornwall LSC figures are even lower with 2005-6 data showing only 0.55% of AAs progressing onto full-time Foundation or honours degrees. The reasons are multi-layered and complex, grounded in both history and management information systems.

The effect of such low progression rates impacts upon policy and practice far beyond the work-based learning arena – ranging from the advice and guidance given out in schools to the feasibility of funding relevant and flexible higher learning provision. However, are these progression figures accurate? Anecdotal evidence, from both Foundation degree providers and training providers in Devon and Cornwall, suggests otherwise. Both staff on the ground and emerging case studies reveal that many more work-based learners do progress on to HE and suggest that the official figures do not accurately reflect this group’s participation into and through HE.

The AdvAnce project

In early January 2007, the Devon and Cornwall LSC agreed to fund the AdvAnce project. Managed by the Vocational Strand of the Aimhigher Peninsula Programme, in partnership with the Cornwall Training Provider Network (DCTPN), the project aimed to:

- identify and collate data on the progression intentions of graduating AAs in Devon and Cornwall from 2007-2009
- investigate the experience of AAs and other work-based learners who have progressed on to Foundation degree courses
- identify the barriers preventing progression
- disseminate findings and make recommendations to inform future practice and policy.

The project had two main components – the first involving pre-entry data gathering about future HE aspirations; the second about the experience of work-based learners in HE, involving an online student survey that was followed up by focus groups.

This article focuses on the project’s progression findings, more fully reported in the SERIO report (Southern et al, in press). The experience of work-based learners in HE is reported in Watton et al (in press) and Hicks et al (in press).

The pre-entry data collation involved asking graduating AAs and work-based learners questions about their work and training intentions in both the next six months and the next three years. The process was kept simple, building on the current role of the reviewing officers but without breaching confidentiality or producing a conflict of interests. Each provider could choose how to ask the questions, that is adapt the current exit paperwork or have additional online or paper-based questionnaires but the questions and the timing, that is at the pre-exit or exit interview, were not negotiable.

The results

By the start of January 2009 there have been returns from 463 learners.

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<td>171</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not responded</td>
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Figure 1

Sector Participation

- Health & Social Care - 26%
- Engineering - 18%
- Business - 24%
- Construction - 12%
- Other - 7%
- Education - 2%
- Retail - 5%
- Leisure/Hair - 3%
- Hospitality - 1%
- IT - 1%
- Customer Service - 1%

Participants’ learning aspirations 6 months after graduating

- 54%
- 31%
- 15%

Participants’ learning aspirations within 3 years of graduating

- 52%
- 37%
- 11%
Key findings:

- nearly 40% of work-based learners questioned want to train at a higher level (Figures 2 and 3)
- AA and work-based graduates are loyal to their current employers and the majority wish to stay at their place of work, albeit with an eye on future promotion (Southern et al, in press)
- the majority want to work full-time (Southern et al, in press)
- there is evidence that some college-based work-based learning departments are organised separately from the rest of the college. There are notable exceptions in which the HE departments set targets for work-based learner progression
- certain sectors dominate the findings (see Figure 1) – engineering, business, construction and health and social care which are linked to clear progression routes, employer support together with an expectation of future study
- there is a shift upwards in both the awareness raising and aspiration of work-based learners. This has been influenced by:
  - the current quality and level of information, advice and guidance being provided in Devon and Cornwall, by both the private providers and colleges
  - improved Aimhigher resources (see www.learnandwork.org)
  - the work of the South West Life Long Learning Network
  - the establishment of Foundation degrees
  - Ofsted's continued focus on work-based learner progression
- one key reason why so few work-based learners seem to progress onto HE is because providers do not recognise or record the AA experience at entry. For example, the University of Plymouth collects data on highest qualification at entry and will not include the AA framework, although the component NVQ3 can be recorded.

Could it be the case that what is occurring in Devon and Cornwall is mirrored elsewhere in the country? Clearly 40% of AA graduates, both past and present, would provide a significant pool of potential HE students. How can Government policy, training providers and HE providers take these findings forward?

A review of how data is collated both at the AA exit interview and at the application to HE stage:

- adapt college management information systems to ensure easier tracking of students as they progress from level 3 qualifications to level 4
- LSC to request progression intentions of all graduating AAs
- part-time admissions systems to recognise (elements of) AA framework
- raise awareness of vocational and work-based learners among HE admissions staff.

Extend information advice and guidance:

- introduce sector-specific progression pathways that include possible job roles at each level of learning. For example, in accountancy, where there is a clear progression path from technician level to professional qualifications.

Enhance the relationship between HE providers and work-based learning providers:

- extend and expand the current Apprenticeship Framework to include relevant higher learning element/experience
- carry out curriculum mapping across level 3-4 – to see where framework (that is, technical certificate) maps across to HE provision

Extend the development and delivery of part-time, flexible, relevant HE, including ‘top up’ provision from Foundation degrees, which meets the needs of work-based learners.

A greater push to engage employer support for, and buy into, higher learning for their work-based graduates, that is, ‘grow your own’ managers.

There is a constant stream of Advanced Apprentices and work-based learners wishing to progress on to higher learning. It is now imperative that there is a renewed push, through policy, practice and partnership to enable this group of learners to go forward and achieve their potential.

References


Watton, P, Wild, S and Hicks, H (in press) The progression experience of Advanced Apprentices and other work-based learners undertaking higher education courses at University of Plymouth Colleges. Advance Project.

Paul Groves,
PR and Marketing Manager, fdf

Read all about us

We are now starting to update the news sections of both www.fdf.ac.uk and www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk on a more regular basis.

Some improvements have also been made to the news sections – such as the inclusion of RSS feeds – to provide a more proactive service.

Also, as more of us find different ways to access news and information, so the number of opportunities to create awareness of our work increases.

Although traditional broadcast and print media outlets are still a strong force, a growing number of people are going online to gather information and get their regular news updates.

That is why we have set up two accounts on Twitter – the micro-blogging service.

Both the account dedicated to promoting Foundation degrees and higher level training (follow@found_degree) and the second, focusing on fdf news (follow@fdf_news), will enable us to provide regular news updates and practical information and network more effectively with those in higher education, employers, public sector organisations and the media.

For more information, or if you have any news about fdf and our work, please contact: Paul Groves, PR & Marketing Manager at fdf, on 01543 308659 or at p.groves@fdf.ac.uk.

On course to reach 100,000 Foundation degree student target

The number of students enrolling for Foundation degrees has risen for the eighth year in a row and the Government’s aim of 100,000 students by 2010 is now within touching distance.

Latest figures show that 87,339 students are enrolled on Foundation degree courses for 2008/09, up from 71,999 in the previous academic year.

Minister of State for Higher Education and Intellectual Property, David Lammy MP, said: “Foundation degrees continue to grow in popularity as both students and employers appreciate the innovative nature of these qualifications.

“They are enabling individuals to develop their careers whilst helping business to retain talent and remain strong in these challenging economic times.

“I’m delighted with these latest enrolment figures, which confirm that we’re well on the way to meeting our ambition for 100,000 Foundation degree students by 2010.”

A central element of fdf’s work is to support diversity in higher education in terms of opportunities for people.

Of the 87,339 Foundation degree students, 48,503 are on full-time courses and 38,836 are part-time. The current percentage of full-time students is 56% and over the last eight years that figure has fluctuated between 51 and 59%.

The figures also show a regional breakdown of current Foundation degree numbers across England. The North West continues to have the largest take-up – currently standing at 10,121 and up from 8,876 in the last 12 months. But each region has consistently seen growth in Foundation degree student numbers since 2003 as both providers and employers look to develop new qualifications.

Minister supports new partnership to improve workforce skills and employer competitiveness

A new and strategically important agreement has been signed with the Open University at a special ceremony at the House of Commons attended by David Lammy MP, Minister of State for Higher Education and Intellectual Property.
"The development of higher level skills is crucial to future competitiveness."

Professor Derek Longhurst, fdf

The Memorandum of Understanding with the Open University has been created to complement both organisations’ common focus on promoting educational opportunity by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions.

"Never has access to higher education and high level skills been more significant," explained Derek Longhurst, Chief Executive of fdf. "This is a strategically important agreement that will address the issues currently facing employers in all sectors during the recession.

"In the current economic downturn an appropriately skilled workforce can give an employer competitive advantage and help to ensure that they are strongly positioned to take advantage of economic recovery when it comes. This collaboration is vital to ensure flexible, high quality and relevant programmes are available to meet the needs of both employees and employers."

Professor Alan Tait, Pro-Vice Chancellor for Curriculum and Awards for the Open University, said the OU is fully committed to providing the relevant skills to help people achieve their goals in life.

"The partnership between the Open University and fdf demonstrates our shared commitment to lifelong learning, skills pathways and workforce development with a commitment to skill development to benefit the UK," Professor Tait added.

"Both the Open University and fdf are already working in partnership with other organisations, such as unionlearn, to develop work-based higher education initiatives to create greater opportunities for people to gain higher level skills. This new agreement further strengthens both of the organisations’ commitment to the aspirations of the Leitch Review of Skills."

David Lammy MP, who spoke briefly at the event on January 27, said: "Foundation degrees continue to grow in popularity as both students and employers appreciate the innovative nature of these qualifications, which enable individuals to develop their careers whilst helping business to retain talent and remain strong in these challenging economic times.

"Partnerships like this are also crucial to equipping employers and individuals with the flexible, high quality qualifications they will need to take advantage of the upturn when it comes."

Employer groups and representatives of higher education institutions and the public sector also attended the signing ceremony.

British Chambers of Commerce and fdf unite to support SMEs

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) and fdf have joined forces to offer more support to smaller businesses facing skills gap issues.

In particular, they are promoting the kind of support available through Foundation degree programmes provided by universities and colleges across the UK.

John Dunsmure, Managing Director, BCC Enterprises commented: "We have been working closely with fdf for the last three years to ensure that many of the courses developed were well designed and relevant for smaller businesses. Many of our members have been involved in course design. "These training options for businesses couldn’t have come at a better time. When SMEs face such challenging economic conditions, having a skilled and motivated workforce is critical – and may just make the difference between success and failure."

The BCC and fdf will not only encourage employers to use Foundation degrees as part of their training programmes, but will continue to provide a two-way dialogue that will help shape Foundation degrees in the future.

Professor Derek Longhurst, Chief Executive of fdf added, “There may be a temptation not to invest in training.

"It is an easy thing to ignore when times are tough but it is sure to boost staff capability and maintain high levels of service, when customers are more demanding. In addition, businesses that do invest will have a trained and motivated team in place ready to meet demand when the economic upturn comes.

"The development of higher level skills is crucial to future competitiveness."
**fdf Updates**

**Free Marketing Support for Universities and Colleges**

Although not a primary role for *fdf*, we are keen to support providers with their student marketing where possible. To this end, last year we piloted the offer of a free marketing toolkit and a free marketing consultancy service.

This offer consisted of: a toolkit – containing a banner stand and 1,000 promotional leaflets aimed at students – both were personalised to carry the institution logo and contact details; and a free marketing consultancy service enabling institution marketing staff and senior managers to gain support in developing marketing strategies and plans from a specialist in marketing Foundation degrees and higher education.

The take-up of the initial offer was huge and as resource was limited we were unable to extend it outside the pilot areas last year, however we now have the resource available to open it up to additional institutions on a first-come first-served basis.

Below are examples of the stand and leaflet which form the free toolkit offer. The toolkit design is specifically linked to a national advertising campaign which *fdf* runs on behalf of the Department of Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS). By having a toolkit which incorporates your own branding you are able to directly benefit from linking your institution to this campaign.

To see our marketing campaign in action go to [www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk](http://www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk).

If you would be interested in taking up any aspect of this offer then please contact Lorraine Westwood, Director of Marketing and Communications via l.westwood@fdf.ac.uk or 01543 301153.

**External Examiners Service**

In response to demand from providers, *fdf* developed an External Examiners Service for Foundation degrees. The service has now been in operation since 2006 and has helped higher education providers to identify potential external examiners for over 200 programmes.

Higher education practitioners who are interested in becoming external examiners for Foundation degrees are invited to add their details to a database. *fdf* makes these details available to institutions who are seeking examiners. *fdf* does not make any judgement as to the suitability or experience of those who register since this judgement can only be made by the institution making the external examiner appointment.

If you would like to add your details to the database please see [www.fdf.ac.uk/home/information_for_universities_and_colleges/external_examiners](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/home/information_for_universities_and_colleges/external_examiners) for further details and to download a registration form.

Providers who are seeking to appoint an external examiner for a Foundation degree are invited to contact *fdf* for details of potential candidates. Please email Kate Fletcher k.fletcher@fdf.ac.uk or telephone 01543 308674.
New Publications

**fdf** produces a range of publications. A PDF of our publications can be downloaded from the **fdf** website at: [www.fdf.ac.uk/home/information_for_universities_and_colleges/fdf_publications](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/home/information_for_universities_and_colleges/fdf_publications). If you require printed copies please contact Kat Price [k.price@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:k.price@fdf.ac.uk).

**fdf Publications for Employers**

*Where is your workforce heading?*

A revised version of a publication that outlines the business benefits of Foundation degrees for employers.

**fdf Guides**

**fdf** is in the process of producing a series of guides concerning various aspects of course development and delivery. The first publications in this series are focused on work-based access to higher education.

**fdf Research Reports**

*Inclusion by Degrees*

In 2007, **fdf** commissioned a research project that examined the experience of disabled students on Foundation degrees. This publication summarises the findings of the research.
Features of apprenticeship programmes that support progression to higher education

This publication summarises the findings of a research project carried out in 2008 by the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) for fdf. The research aimed to identify features of apprenticeship programmes that facilitate progression to higher education.

fdf Case Studies

Kathy Raffles Counselling Service

This case study provides an overview of how the Kathy Raffles Counselling Service utilised fdf’s EBTA service for accreditation of their in-house training.

BT

This case study outlines how BT has utilised Foundation degrees for development of their workforce.
### Board Members

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