A new framework for higher education

What is work-based learning?

The fdf Endorsement Service
Welcome to forward

The summer of 2009 has been an eventful period for the higher education sector. In June Government announced the demise of the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Creation of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). July saw the launch of a HEFCE consultation on the withdrawal of targeted allocations and also the publication of the Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions by the Cabinet Office. The autumn of 2009 is likely to be equally notable, with publication of the Government’s Higher Education Framework expected in November. In his article ‘A new framework for higher education’ (opposite) Derek Longhurst considers the future development of higher education in the light of these publications.

In this issue Derek also examines the question most frequently addressed to fdf – What is work-based learning? His article explores what differentiates work-based learning appropriate to higher education levels and explains why fdf will shortly be publishing a Framework for Work Based Learning.

The fdf Endorsement Service has recently become operational. This service will offer a quality mark that will convey a powerful message regarding the ‘fitness for purpose’ of programmes. An article on page 20 presents an outline of this service and includes details of how institutions can register their interest in having a programme, or family of programmes, endorsed.

The publication of this issue of forward coincides with the 2009 fdf National Conference. This will be an unmissable event for all those involved in workforce skills development. On page 11 Javier Bayer, (founding CEO of The Talent Foundation and advisor to a variety of public and private organisations in the UK and abroad), who will be chairing the 2009 conference, provides a fascinating insight into his view of workforce development and training.

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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Contents: Issue 19

A new framework for higher education 3
Derek Longhurst

Is our impact ‘future proof’? 11
Javier Bayer

What is work-based learning? 13
Derek Longhurst

The fdf Endorsement Service 20
Sue Tatum, Alix Pearson and Deborah Trayhurn

The TDA endorsement process 26
Rick Crowshaw

Innovating workforce training through accrediting work-based/in-house company training 31
Bop Dhillon, Charles Pickford and Ken Phillips

Workforce development for the retail sector: From partnership to a community of practice via a Foundation degree 35
Helen Dewhurst

Foundation degree literature review 40
Lee Harvey

New Foundation degrees in palliative and end of life care services 42
Chris Mullen, Jo Blackburn and Margaret Seiffert

Expressions of interest: helping employers to find the right higher education partner 45
Angela Maguire, Frances Cambrook and Alix Pearson

Dispatches 50
Paul Groves

New Publications 52

Forthcoming Events 53
A new framework for higher education

While the Government’s new framework for the higher education sector’s development over the next 10-15 years had not actually been published at the time of going to press, it seems appropriate to make some reference in this conference issue of our journal to its likely policy priorities.

The framework was being developed during 2008-2009 while John Denham was Secretary of State at the (then) Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). The central objective seemed to be the establishment of a policy framework and strategic direction for the development of the higher education sector over the next 10-15 years. Owing to the broad nature of this framework it was decided in April to abandon the publication of a Higher Level Skills Strategy in response to the Leitch Review of Skills in favour of a single publication originally to be published in the summer. Following the demise of DIUS and its integration into the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the publication of the framework has been further delayed until the autumn while Lord Mandelson reviews its recommendations. It is expected to be published in November.

In a speech at Birkbeck in July the new Secretary of State outlined some of the major priorities for this higher education sector framework. Acknowledging that “bringing university policy into a department with ‘Business’ in its title has not thrilled everyone in the university world”, the speech seeks to clarify the direction of Government policy, addressing some of the more extreme characterisations of it emanating from some parts of the sector:

“I need to be clear that I do not believe that the function of a university is limited to - or even primarily about - economic outcomes. They are not factories for producing workers. Defining the skills that underwrite many skilled jobs in the UK is not the same as defining useful and necessary knowledge. The case for a higher education that invests in everything from classics to quantum physics is a compelling one.”

The speech goes on to argue for the development of a “collective sense of where the marginal pound in British higher education should be properly focused” and this provides a rationale for the decision to link additional student numbers to developments in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programmes. Higher education, therefore, has a critical role at the heart of the knowledge economy, in research and innovation as well as in:

“...equipping people as rounded intellectual beings but also giving them the skills they will need in a global economy. Turning more of the knowledge that is generated in UK universities into jobs and growth, especially by bringing businesses and universities together to collaborate even more than they do now.”
This is an agenda that is central to Unleashing Aspiration strategy and activities. We have consistently supported a model of the foundation degree - and other higher education programmes - that integrates intellectual challenge with employability skills. Central to this enterprise is the development of collaborative partnerships that will exploit the full potential of work-based learning where the workplace is created as a learning environment for the development of knowledge and understanding, as well as skills. In November Unleashing Aspiration will publish the outcomes of research into the experience of part-time Foundation degree students that will provide a useful evidence base for us as well as for institutions and policy-makers. (Mantz Yorke and Bernard Longden, Learning, Juggling and Achieving)

In case there should be any doubt, however, about central planning of the higher education sector, the Birkbeck speech is quite explicit that “The man in Whitehall - and increasingly the woman - does not know best how to run a university”:

“There is no tension between a more strategic view of Britain’s universities as critical to our knowledge economy and our future economic growth and their essential autonomy or their cultural and civilisational role.”

Once again, then, a Secretary of State argues that the autonomy of institutions and diversity of mission statements should be respected in the context of a need for a collective strategic vision for the sector and its role in our national economic life. The new framework, it is promised, will seek to achieve an appropriate balance.

**The social mission of higher education**

The rationale for delaying the publication until the autumn is to allow further detailed consideration of whether the framework’s recommendations are sufficiently informed by the enquiry into social mobility led by Alan Milburn. The report, Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (Cabinet Office, 2009), contains a wide range of recommendations fired by the knowledge that social mobility has been static in recent years and that the UK remains “a persistently unequal society”. Lord Mandelson argues that the new Framework for the higher education sector must engage with the core challenge of social mobility and that this will also inform the review of variable student fees to be initiated in the autumn:

“…there must always be a link between what an institution charges and its performance in widening access and supporting those without the ability to pay.”

While there are no significant indications about future funding models - a somewhat central issue for the sector - there is a very welcome commitment to explore an issue that has been central for Unleashing Aspiration.

“…we need to ask whether the higher education system adequately supports mature students and part-timers.”

There is also acknowledgment that there needs to be encouragement for alternatives to the “conventional, campus-based, full-time, away-from-home model of study” and, again, this has been central to our remit in stimulating high quality and credible options that will meet the needs both of employers and, just as importantly, students and adult employees. Both the Birkbeck speech and the Milburn report suggest that future provision of this kind may not be defined totally by the current focus upon full qualifications but could be based upon the accreditation of achievements such as is provided through the Unleashing Aspiration EBTA (Employer Based Training Accreditation) service.

In addressing the roots of social inequality and the challenges of stimulating greater social mobility, the Milburn report casts its net wider than higher education. It does suggest, however, that while there are alternative routes into the professions higher education has a critical role to play in creating new opportunities. Chapter 6 of the summary report focuses upon higher education and argues for:

- The university as a preserve of the 18-21-year-old full-time undergraduate is now a thing of the past: such students now represent only one-third of the total student population
- The proportion of students studying flexibly and part-time continues to rise substantially. At some universities, part-time students are already in the majority
- The number of mature students has grown; there are now 1.2 million mature students, almost half the total 2.5 million student population
- The ‘local’ university is becoming increasingly important as student numbers grow, resources diminish and many more students with family responsibilities aspire to a university degree

Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions

There are four areas of activity that are central to the implementation of Unleashing Aspiration’s current Strategic Plan and are at the heart of what we do as an organisation. We also support the development of the professional internships proposed by the Milburn report (chapter 7).

- accelerating flexible higher education
- removing the silos that divide vocational and higher education
- universities and colleges, working with the Government, should support the development of ‘higher education within further education’ (HE within FE)
- integration of flexible professional experience into higher education programmes.
Other significant proposals for the sector are outlined:

- Review of the current widening participation funding as not providing value for money and a proposal that funding should be redirected towards supporting local partnerships between schools, colleges and universities
- Mentoring opportunities for young people from the professions and universities
- Enhancement of annual monitoring of widening participation statistics to evaluate individual university performance
- Fairer financial support for those undertaking postgraduate and part-time courses; provision of more targeted packages of financial support for students from average and less well-off families; new support for students living and learning at their local university, including ‘fee-free’ higher education
- Enhancement of the existing data on student destinations with possible linked financial incentives from government redirected from existing widening participation funding

Unleashing Aspiration: The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, summary and recommendations of the full report, pages 37-44.

It remains to be seen how or whether these issues are addressed in the new framework. In his speech at the annual UUK Conference of Vice-Chancellors in September, the Minster for Higher Education, David Lammy, suggested that there would be a greater degree of ‘contestability’ in future funding in order to boost, in particular, STEM sector subjects. He also indicated that the sector would need to place greater focus upon alternative sources of funding for higher education to match investment by the taxpayer. Subsequently, Lord Mandelson has announced a review of Regulatory Bodies and Funding Councils, including HEFCE, in order to address duplication and public sector costs.

The Select Committee report on Students and Universities

The Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee (IUSCC) report on Students and Universities (House of Commons, 2009) attracted a good deal of attention when it was published in July mainly because it is highly critical of the current system for safeguarding standards as out-of-date and inconsistent. The Committee was apparently not impressed by what it called the culture of “defensive complacency” in the leadership of the sector and a refusal to engage, as the Committee saw it, with key issues concerning standards. Much of the debate focused upon the Honours classification system, the increase in First Class Honours awards and the comparability of classifications between universities. In September, at the annual Universities UK (UUK) conference of Vice-Chancellors, a review evaluating degree standards and the external examiner system was announced by the new President of UUK (Professor Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor of University of Exeter) in order to address the questions raised by the Committee.
This issue attracted most media attention but the Committee report also contains some significant recommendations for the future of the sector. It argues, for instance, in remarkably strong terms, that support for and treatment of part-time students must be improved as the current system amounts to a form of discrimination.

“In our view the case for improving the treatment of part-time and mature students is compelling. In equity all students must be treated in the same manner. Any system that does not achieve this will discriminate against groups - in this case part-time and mature students - and this is unacceptable. Nor does it make sense, given the scale of the improvement in education and skills that the Government wants to see by 2020, to deny support to part-time and mature students, who have a crucial part to play in achieving this objective.”

Students and Universities, IUSSC report (paragraph 54)

The Committee goes on to recommend that the forthcoming review of student fees should examine all aspects of support for part-time and mature students. It is to be hoped that this recommendation is translated into action at the earliest opportunity.

Unfortunately, however, some aspects of the Committee's analysis are shaped by the nature of the evidence it received and from whom. For no discernible reason other than the shared use of the word ‘foundation’, the committee report lumps Foundation years and Foundation degrees together in the same section. There is no necessary connection between Foundation years and Foundation degrees: the former serve to prepare students for any higher education experience; the latter is the benchmark qualification at level 5 in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Framework for higher education qualifications (QAA, 2008). This is not just a semantic issue as the committee offers a recommendation to government that is confusing:

“We as a Committee favour the widening of access routes into higher education but we also recognise that opening the gates wider will assist no one if those admitted have the cognitive ability but not the learning skills to take full advantage of the benefits of higher education.”

Students and Universities, IUSSC report (paragraph 84)

In itself, this support for Foundation years in preparing individuals is welcome but the subsequent recommendation for the Government in developing its proposals within the new framework for higher education becomes confusingly tangled up with Foundation degrees:

“When the Government comes to set out its vision for higher education over the next 10-15 years it is essential that it explains how students with the required cognitive abilities but without matching learning skills will be supported and assisted. The Government needs to set out how it wishes to see the current foundation degree arrangements evolve - particularly how many entrants to higher education it expects to commence with a foundation year and what financial support they can expect.”

Students and Universities, IUSSC report (paragraph 84, emphases added)

Enquiries made by fdf have suggested that this is not a typographical error but that the committee simply wants to recommend that both Foundation years and Foundation degrees should be central to the Government’s thinking around the new framework. If this is the message that the Committee wished to convey, then it is clearly a positive one but the lack of discrimination around the potentially negative term ‘foundation’ is not helpful in terms of clarity and understanding of the distinctive characteristics of what are degree-level programmes. It is also arguable that the committee should have sought broader evidence concerning existing Foundation degree provision and should have consulted available data resources.

Notwithstanding this unfortunate section on Foundation degrees, there is much to be welcomed in the Select Committee report, especially in relation to the development of credit-based systems and funding models. As in the Milburn report, the committee also strongly recommends Government to look at supporting the development of higher education in a further education context more strategically and systematically. We have been here before, of course, with various reports recommending greater clarity and support for higher education in further education contexts and it remains to be seen whether this part of the sector will figure significantly in the new framework.

**The HEFCE review of teaching funding**

It was in this context that in July HEFCE launched a consultation concerning its proposals for delivering ‘efficiency gains’ in the light of John Denham’s post-Budget letter to the Funding Council. There are three areas in which HEFCE proposes to withdraw or phase-out targeted allocations from recurrent teaching funding from 2010-2011:

- old and historic buildings
- accelerated and intensive provision of postgraduate taught subjects in price band D
- Foundation degrees.

HEFCE has announced that its consultation will take account of compelling counter-arguments to these proposals. In order to formulate its response fdf has undertaken an analysis into the likely impact on individual institutions of all three of these HEFCE proposals. This includes an assessment of the percentage of total Teaching Funding for each institution that would result from the implementation of each of these proposals individually and

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1 Details of the HEFCE consultation are available at: www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2009/09_25
together. In the case of the Foundation degree proposal we have also sought to map existing HEFCE data drawn from its Foundation degrees: key statistics 2001-2002 to 2007-2008 (HEFCE, 2008) against the specific proposal to remove the targeted allocation supporting the qualification.

Our response to the HEFCE consultation details why we find the proposal concerning the subsidy for old and historic buildings to be different in kind from the other two proposals. In this case we find the HEFCE rationale to be persuasive while acknowledging that some smaller institutions especially may need some protection from de-stabilisation through a process of transitional implementation while alternative sources in funding are developed for these assets. This is the proposal, according to HEFCE data, currently attracting the highest level of targeted allocation (£40 million) and the high level of HEFCE capital investment in estates since 1998 seems to constitute a strong argument for the proposal in this consultation.

In saying this, we have sought to avoid a ‘nimby’ interest-driven analysis and to recognise that HEFCE is seeking to protect the unit of resource from further decline. Its proposals are seeking to ‘spread the pain’ across different parts of the sector. For this reason we have also argued that those institutions significantly affected (e.g. above 2% of total teaching funding?) by the proposal to remove the targeted allocation supporting postgraduate provision in price band D are protected from de-stabilisation through transitional arrangements that will allow opportunity to develop alternative postgraduate recruitment strategies. We support HEFCE’s commitment to mitigation (paragraph 15) for institutions that are affected above a certain norm. Currently, this allocation constitutes £24 million of HEFCE funding.

**FDI** has consulted widely with those institutions most affected by the proposal to remove the Foundation degree allocation and we have sought to provide a considered approach to the issues raised by the HEFCE proposal. It is important that our response to HEFCE is a considered one and is informed by values and quality issues. In the early phase of development it is arguable that many Foundation degrees were not substantively based upon employer partnerships with integral work-based learning opportunities or even flexibility as significant characteristics. This led to some uncertainty about the identity of the qualification and it is extremely important that its hard-won credibility with employers is not damaged.

The final point is, perhaps, the strongest argument in favour of reviewing the Foundation degree allocation and, indeed, it is arguable the remaining arguments actually weaken rather than strengthening the rationale. The anomaly indicated above is, arguably, a false comparison and a relatively isolated one. The achievement of the target is irrelevant to the qualitative delivery of Foundation degrees and there is no evidence that the unpopular ELQ policy has significantly impacted upon Foundation degree development in those institutions generally affected by it. Finally, institutions argue that the widening participation allocation is a consideration one and is informed by values and quality issues. In the early phase of development it is arguable that many Foundation degrees were not substantively based upon employer partnerships with integral work-based learning opportunities or even flexibility as significant characteristics. This led to some uncertainty about the identity of the qualification and it is extremely important that its hard-won credibility with employers is not damaged.

The allocation to support Foundation degree development was introduced, according to the HEFCE consultation, in recognition of the “additional costs associated with partnership arrangements with employers” and the new qualifications “were an area of high Government priority”. The use of the past tense is somewhat strange here as there is evidence that Foundation degrees remain a priority area for Government (see, for example, The UK Low Carbon Industrial Strategy, 4.54, Cabinet Office 2009). Our response to HEFCE questions those aspects of its rationale for removing the targeted allocation that seem to suggest that Foundation degrees are ‘yesterday’s priority’ and that, therefore, the case for continuing to support them through the allocation is now ‘less compelling’.

The rationale provided by HEFCE for the removal of the Foundation degree allocation is outlined in paragraphs 22-24 of the Review of teaching funding: Consultation on targeted allocations (HEFCE, 2009) and can be summarised as follows:

- the targeted allocation for Foundation degrees has introduced some anomalies where Foundation degrees attract higher funding than some other qualifications. The example used is a comparison between Foundation degrees for classroom assistants and qualifications for those wishing to qualify as teachers
- the government’s target of 100,000 Foundation degree students is close to achievement
- the equal and lower qualification (ELQ) policy is referenced as an incentive to further Foundation degree development
- to the extent that Foundation degrees widen participation they secure additional funding for widening access and improving retention
- partnerships with employers are not restricted to Foundation degrees and, therefore, there is no reason why the qualification should continue to attract a premium as against other forms of employer-supported provision.

The final point is, perhaps, the strongest argument in favour of reviewing the Foundation degree allocation and, indeed, it is arguable the remaining arguments actually weaken rather than strengthening the rationale. The anomaly indicated above is, arguably, a false comparison and a relatively isolated one. The achievement of the target is irrelevant to the qualitative delivery of Foundation degrees and there is no evidence that the unpopular ELQ policy has significantly impacted upon Foundation degree development in those institutions generally affected by it. Finally, institutions argue that the widening participation allocation is designed to address different challenges in supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and retaining them in higher education. It is not directed towards meeting the costs of developing, designing, supporting and assessing work-based learning, a required and necessary characteristic of the Foundation degree. Currently, the total cost of the targeted allocation for Foundation degree support constitutes £24 million.
is concerned, then, that the loss of the targeted allocation for Foundation degrees could damage the quality of frontline delivery, innovation and risk-management in an area that is deemed to be a priority within the policy interventions that surround the future framework for the higher education sector. This constitutes a feature of the Foundation degree proposal that makes it different-in-kind to the other two proposals.

Owing to the constraints upon Additional Student Numbers (ASNs), institutions already have to be imaginative in their support for new Foundation degree development. The loss of the targeted allocation constitutes a ‘double-whammy’ at this time and may impact on both the level of continued expansion and on part-time Foundation degrees, in particular, where employer engagement is normally at its highest. Such developments will, therefore, have to seek co-funding and full-cost partnerships if they are to be sustained. Here we would like to note that the research we will publish in November indicates a growing level of employer support, especially ‘in kind’, for part-time Foundation degree students.

Drawing upon HEFCE statistics (see Figure 1), the institutions that will be most affected will be those that have developed Foundation degrees to meet employer and employee need.

The proposed removal of the targeted allocation for Foundation degrees will also impact upon those institutions that have consistently and strategically committed to partnerships with further education colleges. Again, this remains a high priority in policy terms (Please see Milburn Report and Select Committee Report recommendations outlined above). This comes at a time when policy directions have advocated more systematic support for this part of the sector. Our response to HEFCE argues, therefore, that there are some flaws in the rationale to support the Foundation degree proposal and that these need to be reviewed before any final decision to implement the removal of the targeted allocation is made. We also argue that any strategy must seek to protect quality of frontline delivery and, in particular, should protect part-time and flexible provision designed to meet the needs of employees and employers. Finally, there should be consideration of how the proposal could negatively impact upon Higher Education in Further Education contexts. HEFCE has indicated in the consultation that it wishes the funding allocations to enable it ‘to reflect changing policy and ensure that funding is focused on aspects of provision and features of HE that are of the highest priority.’ (Paragraph 10) Whilefdf initiates and supports different and distinctive developments in higher education that engage with employers other than Foundation degrees, there does seem to be an argument that Foundation degrees, especially within collaborative contexts, do remain a significant priority across a broad spectrum of provision.

In our view there is still too little evidence available concerning the success of co-funding strategies and that any decision concerning the future funding of Foundation degrees might usefully be related to an evaluation of this broad spectrum of employer engagement provision. It is a requirement that Foundation degrees integrate work-based learning – with all of its costs – into flexibly-delivered
programmes (please see What is Work-Based Learning? in this issue of the Journal for further detail on what this might constitute). Other forms of CPD directed towards employer demand may have different options.

On the optimistic side, there are strong signs that the Foundation degree has gained in respect and credibility with employers and with institutions so that there will continue to be further development of the qualification.

**Learning Through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning**

In September Learning through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (NIACE, 2009) by Tom Schuller and David Watson was published. The Inquiry offers the following broad definition:

“Lifelong Learning includes people of all ages learning in a variety of contexts – in educational institutions, at work, at home and through leisure activities. It focuses mainly on adults returning to organised learning rather than on the initial period of education or on incidental learning.”

*Learning through Life, page 10*

The analysis and recommendations for future development derived out of a two-year Commission of Inquiry chaired by Sir David Watson. Many strong features of the UK system were identified but so, too, were a number of systemic blocks:

- Initial education does not serve as a secure foundation for lifelong learning (The analysis notes the overwhelming investment in the 19-25 age range in comparison to support for subsequent age groups)
- The demographic challenge: the balance of opportunity and support for learning through different stages of life is wrong
- The system does not recognise the increasingly diverse transitions into and from employment
- Educational inequalities accumulate over the life course to an unacceptable extent
- For all the rhetoric, a high-skilled economy is not yet in prospect
- Finding a way through the system is complex, opaque and demotivating for too many
- The governance of the system is over-centralised, insufficiently stable and does not trust its professionals enough
- Inadequate infrastructure: buildings, technologies and services are not well integrated
- The ‘system’ is not sufficiently intelligent, i.e. it does not create and use information as well as it might in order to innovate and improve

*Learning Through Life, pp. 49-57*

The report notes many examples of good practice and positive features but makes the following 10 Recommendations for action, amongst which **ffl** is particularly focused upon contributing to development of activity related to Recommendations 4 and 5 below.
Schuller and Watson’s ten recommendations:

1. Base lifelong learning policy on a new model of the educational life course, with four key stages (up to 25, 25-50, 50-75, 75+)
   "Our approach to lifelong learning should deal far more positively with two major trends: an aging society and changing patterns of paid and unpaid activity."

2. Rebalance resources fairly and sensibly across the different life stages
   "Public and private resources invested in lifelong learning amount to over £50 billion; their distribution should reflect a coherent view of our changing economic and social context."

3. Build a set of learning entitlements
   "A clear framework of entitlements to learning will be a key factor in strengthening choice and motivation to learn."

4. Engineer flexibility: a system of credit and encouraging part-timers
   "Much faster progress is needed to implement a credit-based system, making learning more flexible and accessible with funding matched to it."

5. Improve the quality of work
   "The debate on skills has been too dominated by an emphasis on increasing the volume of skills. There should be a stronger focus on how skills are actually used."

6. Construct a curriculum framework for citizen’s capabilities
   "A common framework should be created of learning opportunities which should be available in any given area, giving people control over their own lives."

7. Broaden and strengthen the lifelong learning workforce
   "Stronger support should be available for all those involved in delivering education and training, in various capacities."

8. Revive local responsibility…
   "The current system in England has become over-centralised, and insufficiently linked to local and regional needs. We should restore life and power to local levels."

9. …within national frameworks
   "There should be effective machinery for creating a coherent lifelong learning strategy across the UK, and within the UK’s four nations."

10. Make the system intelligent
    "The system will only flourish with information and evaluation which are consistent, broad and rigorous, and open debate about the implications."


**Conclusion**

This editorial has sought to provide an overview of some of the significant policy debates that are currently surrounding the higher education sector. Hopefully, it will assist in supporting constructive and positive discussions around the future development of the sector.

**References**


I’ve been honoured with the role of chairing fdf’s upcoming National Conference, which is something I am looking forward to. I believe that this conference will be a great opportunity to challenge and further develop our capacity to innovate, unleashing more powerful ways to truly prepare people for today’s and tomorrow’s work. The business case has been made an infinity of times, and it would be pointless - and even patronising - for me to discuss here how much of the UK’s future is depending on our ability to make things happen. And in making them happen quickly.

I ‘live’ in the business sector. I spend most of my time working with boards of directors of public and private organisations, trying to help them grow (and most recently, sustain) their businesses. Bosses already know that they depend on the skills of their workforces for everything they do, from manufacturing to customer services. Most organisations believe that they are already investing in developing people to work well, whether through formal training interventions or through ‘sitting by Nelly’ strategies. Of course, they could increase the time and money spent doing this, but I believe that they don’t because they can’t see how these approaches will fully give them what they need.

The good old realm of skills for work is starting to change shape, and we have to morph our strategy accordingly if we are to succeed in developing the workforce the UK needs. When I look at what would make a difference I see two main areas: The first one, at the elementary level, already receives most of our attention. This is the ‘how to’ area, where people’s technical abilities allow them to get most of their jobs done. I include here anything from the absolutely basic skills like literacy and numeracy, to very high-level skills such as planning and forecasting. At large, either we are already doing a good enough job here or, at least we know what needs doing and have already started a journey towards it. By all means, I am not suggesting that we take our attention away from this, but that we expand our frame of reference to increase our impact.

The second area is equally important, but gets little or no attention. We used to call this ‘attitude’ (remember 1980s conversations around KSA - knowledge, skills and abilities) and over the years we either left it for bosses to ‘develop’ it through bonuses and communication campaigns, or simply accepted attitude as something given by nature and thus rather difficult and expensive to grow.

In business it is often the case that attitude is what closes a sale. It is attitude that creates teamwork and increases collaboration and innovation. Attitude retains a customer or an employee who is about to leave. Attitude calms people down when they haven’t received the right product or service. It is attitude, in a world of increasing homogeneity, that makes a competitive difference. We often choose attitude over skills when we have to pick our teams. We feel that we can develop skills in those with the right attitude, but not the other way around. Although today most organisations talk about engagement, talent and motivation, these are treated as passive outcomes, often relating to pay/rewards, right management, clear direction and good communication. What if attitude was a skill that we can develop? What if we could learn attitude, as we develop computer, time management or problem solving skills?
We have often shied away from the attitude challenge, treating it as something uncontrollable or overly complex, to say the least. At best, we’ve attempted to help people develop the right behaviours by describing behavioural taxonomies, their consequences and then hoping for change. Of course, impact has been minimal, as we can see in today’s workplace.

We have done our best, considering how much the world knew about the levers of attitude. However, through recent advances in the field of cognitive neurosciences, we are starting to understand not only what drives attitude but also how to help people develop it. I believe that we need to start to pay attention to unfolding research in this area. For example, the current work of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on ‘Theory of Mind’ - the mechanisms people use to infer and reason about other person’s states of mind - is very likely to bring useful insights, which we could use to help people develop customer service attitudes in the future. Another example is the work of the RSA, through its Social Brain project, looking at recent brain sciences research and its impact on how we interact with others as part of social groups.

As we advance in the learning field, increasingly bridging the attitude gap through the application of new learning strategies, we have to keep in mind the additional challenge of preparing generation Y as it enters the workplace. This ‘dot net’ generation of young people has a somewhat different value system and different priorities when it comes to work.

There’s never been a more interesting time to work in the skills development area: there are more complex needs for the application of skills at work and more impatient and demanding learners, who will question our ability to sufficiently prepare them for their futures. As a professional in this area, whether you work on the supply or demand sides of this new equation, you can be sure that the coming years will keep you not only busy, but also satisfied, having helped the country become better prepared for the future.

1 Details of the RSA’s Social Brain project are available at: www.thersa.org/projects/pro-social-behaviour/social-brain
Introduction

This is one of the most frequently asked questions addressed to *fdf* - and there are no straightforward answers to it. This article will explore why this is so and will constitute the first in a series of articles to be published in *forward* exploring the theory and practice of work-based learning. There is a wealth of academic literature around work-based learning but it is questionable as to the extent to which this ‘translates’ into practice, is accessible or informs the development of work-based learning within Foundation degrees or other higher education provision.

For this reason *fdf* plans to publish a Framework for Work-Based Learning in the autumn to guide practice through the establishment of a number of key principles that might usefully support the understanding, design and delivery of work-based learning. It will seek to complement Section 9 of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Code of practice, which is focused upon the quality assurance of Work-based and placement learning (QAA, 2007).

Definitions

So, why is ‘What is work-based learning?’ a question that needs to be framed in ways that do not lead in simplistic directions? Quite simply, there is no definition of work-based learning that is appropriate for all contexts in which it is to be developed. When consulted about the draft of the principles informing the QAA Code of practice section 9: Work-based and placement learning, many institutions requested that this section of the Code of practice should provide a set of QAA ‘definitions’, but the Advisory Group established by the agency took the view that this could lead to an inherent danger of tick-box compliance rather than creative and innovative practice. Any ‘definition’ of work-based learning is, therefore, heavily determined by both the context in which the learning is to take place and perspective (for example employer, employee, student, programme design team and so on).

There is a significant area of difficulty also in that there are practices of work-based learning that have been developed in the context of other vocational qualifications, usually at levels that precede higher education programmes, and which are limited in their objectives and ‘stretch’. There is evidence such embedded practice has been influential within Foundation degrees, for example, and not necessarily in ways that are educationally expansive. An identification of the primary purpose of work-based learning as the ‘transmission’ of job-specific skills is overly simplistic and inhibiting, therefore, at higher education level.

We might usefully ask the question, then, what differentiates work-based learning appropriate to higher education levels? Other kinds of learning experience shaped by a broad employability agenda, such as work-related learning or work-focused learning, might be developed, not unreasonably, without any direct engagement with a working environment. Institutions certainly find this kind of provision less challenging. Workplace training is also a broad and varied field of activity defying simple definition, but clearly it involves engagement with development located in the workplace as a learning environment.

Similarly, work-based learning must involve some engagement with a workplace or workplaces or, where simulation may be involved for a variety of reasons (health and safety, mobile working in new industries and so on), there needs to be a systematic way of recreating the culture of the working environment through which ‘live’ projects are delivered involving employer support and engagement.

The development of work-based learning, therefore, requires engagement with a range of questions about the organisation within which the programme is to be located. How does the organisation operate within its sector, region, nationally or globally? Who are its competitors? How is work and employment managed within the organisation? What are the systems of power, decision-making and authority within the organisation? How open to innovation and enterprise is the organisation and so on. These factors provide key reasons why no one ‘model’ or definition of work-based learning is adequate.

It is also important that work-based learning involves the construction of the workplace as a learning environment. ‘Being at work’ or ‘work experience’ is simply not enough and is inadequate...
to meet the needs of higher education levels of achievement. In other words, institutions need to work with employers to design appropriate objectives, outcomes and deliverables that are negotiated between student/employee, employer and providing institution. At higher education levels the design of work-based learning must involve the development of critical and analytical skills, as well as job-specific or occupational skills, with the workplace being created as a learning environment in which knowledge and understanding is stimulated. It is also arguable that employability skills, such as team-working, communication and problem-solving, are best developed and assessed in systemic ways within workplace cultures.

The issue of assessment is crucial here. Consequently, *fdf* has commissioned the Standards and Classification Working Group (SACWG) to undertake a survey of institutional practice in the assessment of work-based learning and to develop a guide to good practice. The outcomes of this research will be discussed at a SACWG conference at Aston University in November (see details on page 53), and this will be followed by publication of the good practice guide.

Work-based learning also needs to be distinguished from ‘work experience’, which is often an ‘add-on’ supplementary feature with very broad and general aims in relation to the programme of study. Work-based learning, on the other hand, must be integral to the totality of the learning experience, especially of a Foundation degree, and relate to the learning outcomes of the qualification as a whole and its constituent parts.

“Authentic and innovative work-based learning is an integral part of Foundation degrees and their design. It enables learners to take on appropriate role(s) within the workplace, giving them the opportunity to learn and apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired as an integrated element of the programme. It involves the development of higher-level learning within both the institution and the workplace. It should be a two-way process, where the learning in one environment is applied in the other.”

*Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark (QAA, 2004), paragraph 23*

While this remains a useful benchmark, it could be argued that the implicitly informing ‘model’ is the full-time ‘learner’ rather than the adult employee for whom the programme is designed around the conditions of work and employment in the company, organisation or sector. It is arguable that work-based learning also provides a valuable vehicle for enhancing diversity in higher education as it creates new opportunities located in the workplace for those people who cannot - or do not wish to - follow the conventional on-campus experience.

To conclude this section, then, some practitioners will find the work of David Boud to be useful in guiding their thinking about work-based learning. At one of *fdf*’s annual conferences Boud produced a typology of characteristics to distinguish work-based learning programmes from more conventional qualifications involving placements (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Typology of characteristics of courses with placements and work-based learning courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conventional courses with placement</th>
<th>Work-based learning courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content base</strong></td>
<td>Academic/professional</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Disciplinary/occupational /professional</td>
<td>Transdisciplinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Pre-determined</td>
<td>Emergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student control</strong></td>
<td>Minimal negotiation</td>
<td>Fully-negotiated (three-way)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student managed</strong></td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of student</strong></td>
<td>Mostly pre-employment</td>
<td>In existing/continuing employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student aspiration</strong></td>
<td>Enter full-time employment or conformation of employment</td>
<td>Continuing development in existing/ promoted position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staffing</strong></td>
<td>Academic teachers, placement supervisors</td>
<td>Academic advisors, existing workplace supervisors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: David Boud – presentation at the 2005 *fdf* National Conference
Amongst the most useful literature available to practitioners is that which derives from the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Importantly, this work is informed by interdisciplinary research involving analysis of employer and employee experiences in a wide range of organisational contexts. The case studies provided in the research programme publications will be invaluable for practitioners in developing their own strategies.

In *Improving Workplace Learning* (Evans et al., 2006, page 4) workplace learning is seen as:

> “...an activity which is embedded in the production process and the social interactions of the workplace, as well as more formal learning interventions related to the work environment.”

While there is a great deal of policy focus (and provision) that is directed towards the formal qualifications of young people leaving education for the world of work, there is a welcome emphasis here upon the “need for the workplace to be developed as a site for accessing different forms of learning” in ways that may be more appropriate to meet the needs of adults and existing employees. Such an approach is clearly central to any strategy that may deliver on the aspirations outlined in the Leitch Review of Skills.

This is not, of course, an easy matter and will involve interventions that are based upon understanding of the social relations of the organisation and its workplace(s) and cultures. It cannot be assumed, for instance, that there is a simple identity of interests between employers and employees or that the injection of formal qualification acquisition will lead to enhanced productivity or the culture of a ‘learning organisation’. An important objective of work-based learning, therefore, is to create a consensus of interests around participative learning within a community of practice, not just for individuals.

> “Learning in the workplace can refer to a variety of different forms of learning, which may or may not be formally structured, some of which take place spontaneously through the social interactions of the workplace.”

Evans et al. (2006), page 7

Here the value of tacit knowledge is significant, as are informal learning modes. This also constitutes common practice in professional practice (TLRP, 2007) where mentoring and learning through practice are accepted models for development in medical and healthcare as well as legal and teaching professions. An important characteristic of work-based learning, then, is how learning opportunities are integrated into the primary purposes of the organisation (making profit, product development, service delivery and so on) and its production processes.

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Work-based Learning: A New Higher Education? (Boud and Solomon, 2001), pages 4-7
“Learning through the workplace refers to learning opportunities that are accessed as part of the employment relationship.”

Evans et al. (2006), page 7

Again, such opportunities are relatively commonplace within professional occupations often as an integral feature of the employment contract (continuing professional development) but less available to other workers.

“Learning for the workplace refers to learning opportunities that may be narrowly or broadly defined.”

Evans et al. (2006), page 8

This discrimination between narrow ‘restrictive’ and ‘expansive’ learning environments is fundamental to the TLRP analysis of workplace learning and education. There is a particularly critical analysis of NVQ qualifications as typifying ‘restrictive’ educational provision with narrow educational objectives (see Evans et al., 2006, pp 116-159).

The theoretical framework deriving from the research develops three layers that need to be understood in order to achieve a ‘holistic integrated’ analysis of workplace learning:

• wider institutional settings
• the establishment of learning cultures in work contexts
• ‘accessibility’, in the broadest sense, to a wide range of individuals.

“It is commonly held that forms of learning that go beyond mere technical qualification considerably help to increase the motivation of adults and young people for education and training. Participation in a work process encourages taking on responsibility and develops commitment. Practical work in a team can help to make learning success visible and to enable the individual to experience individual contributions to the collective activity as personal success. To have learning in an actual workplace context recognized can highlight the importance of the work”

Evans et al. (2006), page 14

This conclusion coincides with the evidence derived by fdf from employees’ experience of undertaking a Foundation degree programme. It also underpins the approach developed through our Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA) service.

The TLRP research concludes that target-driven approaches to qualification acquisition are demonstrably less effective than those that are driven by the creation of embedded cultures of learning that take account of employer and employee perspectives with the learning objectives as both ‘expansive’ and integral to workplace practice.

“At the highest level, wider social structures and social institutions can be fundamental in enabling or preventing effective learning from taking place….The evidence from our research suggests that, due to the absence of wider institutional structures supporting workplace learning, there is weak support at this level for the development of expansive learning environments in the workplace in the UK….In the UK, there are no social institutions embedding cooperative approaches to learning at work.”

Evans et al. (2006), page 163

In developing its strategies in partnership with institutions, employers, SSCs and Trade Unions through unionlearn, fdf has been seeking to address this significant UK-specific problem.

The Working as Learning Framework (WALF)

The TLRP has also led to the publication of Improving Working as Learning (Felstead et al, 2009) which further develops the focus upon the workplace as learning environment. This theme is significant in that it constitutes work environments as central to learning rather than as marginal to the acquisition of formal qualifications through block or day release. The Working as Learning Framework (WALF) is conceptually developed around three constituent and inter-related layers of analysis that inform workplace learning practice:

• Productive systems
• Work organisation
• Workplace learning environments

1 Productive systems

The establishment of effective workplace learning requires analysis and understanding of the systems of power and socio-economic relationships that configure the context within which the learning process is to take place. In the design and development of work-based learning it is necessary to take account of the relationships...
and pressures both within the organisation and beyond it that will potentially determine the outcomes of the learning processes. Too often providing institutions assume that this ‘is not our job’ but without such engagement with the perspectives that are of priority importance for employers and employees the conditions for sustainable partnership are unlikely to be met. See *Stepping Higher* (CBI, 2008) for further evidence of the cultural bridges that need to be established. At worst, institutions all too often assume that their systems of regulation, bureaucracy, quality and funding should be seen as determinant by the employer.

### 2 Work organisation

The second layer of the WALF conceptual Framework is concerned with levels of discretion and trust within the organisation of work.

- Discretion in the conception of work involves the extent to which employees have control over the aims and objectives of their work process
- Discretion in work execution involves control over the way in which given objectives are attained and tasks executed
- Discretion in the evaluation of work outcomes involves taking responsibility for monitoring work outcomes

_Felsted et al. (2009), page 24_

The exercise of discretion and autonomy can create uncertainty and risk in work processes. Equally, it can enhance participation, community, motivation and productivity. To bridge these polarities, the WALF model suggests that three forms of trust are important:

- Habitual trust, in which the granting and exercise of discretion is legitimised and validated by a (real or imaginary) long-term history of tradition, reliability and solidity
- Symbolic trust, in which the indeterminacy surrounding discretion is validated by symbols of moral and ethical values
- Communal trust, in which the parties identify with one another and share in some sense of communal bond that is highly emotionally charged

_Felsted et al. (2009), page 25_

There is, however, a significant factor which renders problematic the development of workplace learning within the UK. It has been argued that a core characteristic of a ‘high skills society’ is a robust consensus around the purposes of education and training that is shared by key institutions (government, employers, trade unions, and education and training providers) Brown et al. The history of vocationally-orientated education in the UK repeatedly demonstrates ‘fracture’ rather than ‘consensus’:

The potential for distrust and suspicion in employment relationships remains significant in the UK and not infrequently erodes the potential for creative risk-taking and innovation. It is also not uncommon for managements to adopt very different levels of discretion and trust for different kinds of employees.

### 3 Workplace learning environments

The third layer in the model is concerned with ‘learning environments’ and ‘learning territories’ within which workplace learning can be enhanced. Here again the concepts of ‘expansive’ and ‘restrictive’ environments becomes central. Three aspects of potential participative learning are highlighted:

- engagement in multiple and overlapping communities of practice at and beyond the workplace
- access to multidimensional approaches to the acquisition of expertise through the organisation of work and job design
- opportunities to pursue knowledge-based courses and qualifications related to work.

It is important to see restrictive and expansive learning environments as a continuum within which individuals and groups can develop their own ‘learning territories’ that are most appropriate to meet their needs, interests and learning styles.

‘…Amongst the adults who participated in the research there was an appetite for high quality, work-based and employer-supported provision, and for recognised qualifications that offer adults tangible returns…if more employers were to make this sort of provision available, the latent employee demand could be released.’

*Non-participation in Higher Education: Decision-making as an embedded social practice* (TLRP, 2008)

### The practice of work-based learning

A significant feature of the WALF model for other practitioners is that it has been developed out of research into the practice of work-based learning and workplace training. It is not a conceptual model that has been created and then ‘imposed’ upon the evidence in the case studies that underpin the research. Developing a conceptual approach to work-based learning is important as there is evidence still of somewhat ad hoc approaches and uncertainty about the purposes of its design. Moreover, there are still institutions that find it difficult within their mindsets, systems and procedures to view work as a context in which real learning can take place, or even that it is possible to perceive work-based learning as attaining any level of ‘equivalence’ to academic credit.
There is, therefore, an important place for a robust conceptual framework that can shape, order and drive work-based learning practice in enabling and innovative ways.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this brief article is to stir up debate about the nature and purposes of work-based learning so that it is seen as an innovative mode of higher education development rather than ‘a bit of work experience’ or associated with a narrow skills agenda. Indeed, it is clear that employers do not expect such limited ambitions from the higher education sector. What they need – and deserve – from higher education is the wit and will to create exciting learning opportunities, appropriate to the needs of some (not all) individuals that will make them employable, professional and able to progress through their creativity, flexibility, intelligence and enthusiasm. That is, after all, what higher education has always promised to deliver?

**References**


The fdf Endorsement Service

Introduction

The fdf Endorsement Service assists higher education providers in evidencing and demonstrating that their work-based learning programmes (particularly Foundation degrees) meet employer and sector needs. It provides information and guidance to education providers, employers and sector bodies to facilitate the development and delivery of quality provision. It clearly signals to employers and employer organisations, potential students and other stakeholders that a programme has appropriately and effectively addressed specified requirements and can be considered as ‘fit for purpose’.

In the article fdf’s Endorsement Service (Tatum, 2009a), fdf’s intention to take forward the Endorsement Service was outlined. This decision was based upon the highly positive evaluation of the pilot scheme undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The revised fdf Endorsement Service is now operational and is managed by the fdf Endorsement Team consisting of Sue Tatum, Alix Pearson, Deborah Trayhurn, Kate Fletcher-Bulman and Lee Garnett.

A major contract with the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) has been secured to develop and implement the TDA endorsement process, supporting the inclusion of programmes on the Integrated Qualifications Framework for the children’s workforce (IQF). Information on this is presented in the article by Rick Crowshaw from the TDA on pages 26.

This article presents an outline of the fdf Endorsement Service.

Rationale

The evaluation of the fdf Endorsement Service pilot (QAA, 2009) found that there was extensive support for the service. The service was judged to operate ‘effectively and efficiently’ with the process enabling opportunities for education providers to reflect on their own programmes and for good practice to be shared. Importantly, the service was clearly achieving its demonstrated aims that:

- employers can have full confidence in the professional underpinning of a programme
- students can be assured that their programmes incorporate the relevant employer skills development requirements
- education providers can market their programmes as fit for purpose and can demonstrate that this is the case.

Foundation Degree Forward Endorsement Service - Information Bulletin (QAA, 2009)
The fdf Endorsement Service aims

Employers can have full confidence in the professional underpinning of a programme

This is a very important message. As most education providers and sector bodies are aware, employers have variable knowledge of higher education level programmes. A frequent request from employers is for better information about the educational activity on offer. In the present economic climate selecting the right educational investment is critical. Having robust, evidence-based information to inform decision making is vital and the fdf Endorsement Service provides that information.

The Service, therefore, assists employers, potential students and commissioners of programmes in making critical choices for workforce development.

Many sectors have specific requirements set out by the Sector Skills Councils, standard setting bodies, professional and regulatory bodies or even Government. The fdf Endorsement Service works with such bodies to incorporate their requirements into the Service.

It provides confidence to the sector bodies that their requirements have been appropriately incorporated into the education provision. It enables Sector Skills Councils and standard setting bodies to be able to signal to their sector that endorsed, education provider programmes have met their specifications.

Students can be assured that their programmes incorporate the relevant employer skills development requirements

The fdf Endorsement Service provides reassurance to students that they will have the right knowledge and skills to be more effective in the job. It provides evidence that programmes are delivered in accordance with good higher education practice, clearly identifying career and progression opportunities.

As the article Foundation degrees from 2001-2009: difference and diversity - clarity and credibility (Tatum, 2009b) highlights, students often have confused expectations about what their learning programme will enable them to do. Effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) is critical. The outcomes from the fdf Endorsement Service provide valuable, additional information for the potential student body to aid their decision making.

Education providers can market their programmes as fit for purpose and can demonstrate that this is the case

Education providers’ marketing materials often incorporate statements on the quality of the provision, such as ‘good’ or ‘best’ practice. However, exactly what this means is unclear. Such descriptors are often overused and become devalued as marketing ‘hype’. What is ‘good’ or ‘best’ practice and what is the evidence to support these assertions?

This previous lack of any authenticated process that was recognised and valued by a variety of external stakeholder audiences was a key point raised in the QAA evaluation. The fdf Endorsement Service was seen to fill a very important gap. The opportunity for higher education providers to gain recognition for, and to celebrate, quality learning activity which employers and students hold in high regard was considered a prized outcome of the service. The fdf Endorsement Service ‘quality mark’ is positively seen as providing that important statement: one that is recognised and valued by all stakeholders.

The fdf Endorsement Service enables higher education providers to present information and evidence on high quality education practice that meets sector needs. The endorsement ‘quality mark’ can be incorporated within specific institution and course marketing materials and general communications, providing a valuable indicator for employers, for the wider public, for sector bodies and for existing and potential students.

The QAA evaluation found that the three aims of the fdf Endorsement Service were clearly met. It supported the emphasis upon ‘fitness for purpose’. This has informed the revisions to the Service that have taken place.

Fitness for purpose

The Department for Children, Schools and Families, through the Children’s Workforce Development Council, commissioned a recent survey - undertaken by the Open University - in order to ascertain a comprehensive picture of Foundation degree provision for the young people’s workforce. They found it was simply not possible to construct an accurate and comprehensive picture. Further, from the information available it was also not possible to determine the extent to which these programmes were likely to meet the quality standard being set for the children’s sector through the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) Principles.

This meant that there was no mechanism whereby programmes, such as Foundation degrees, developed for the young people’s workforce could be adjudged ‘fit for purpose’. This was seen as a significant gap: one which a number of sector bodies are seeking to address for their respective sectors.
Although the phrases ‘fit for purpose’ and ‘fitness for purpose’ are often used to designate conformance with external requirements, exactly what these mean is open to interpretation and masks a raft of assumptions.

Fit for purpose for education providers will, primarily, be interpreted within the subject, pedagogy and quality assurance (for example, benchmark requirements) contexts. The emphasis given to each will reflect the type of qualification (for example, work-based or traditional campus learning), its area and focus (for example, traditional subject knowledge or practice related), and the qualification itself.

For work-based programmes, such as Foundation degrees, any definition of fitness for purpose needs to take account of the perspectives and interpretations of the audiences - employers, employee students, external commissioners. The particular mission and operational approaches of education providers set an important steer as to how fitness for purpose is interpreted within any institution. This diversity is to be celebrated as it stimulates innovation. However, it poses challenges for external stakeholders seeking to make judgement or comparisons.

For Sector Skills Councils and standard setting bodies their own requirements and priorities determine how they define ‘fitness for purpose’ for higher education-level provision. The evidence, in these cases, is based upon sector specifications. This raises challenges for programmes that may span sectors, or those that do not sit within a particular sector. A number of Foundation degree programmes are highly innovative - ahead of their time and future focused. Such innovations are recognised by employers as meeting their needs but may not meet existing external sector benchmarks.

A number of Sector Skills Councils fully acknowledge that their Foundation degree Frameworks now require revision. Continually updating documentation is a demanding task. Ensuring that external stakeholders are fully aware of changes is likewise challenging. The Endorsement Service has taken this into account, acting as a facility that alerts the sector to new requirements which are then incorporated into the endorsement guidance and process.

The paragraphs above highlight that there are a range of important factors that inform how fitness for purpose is defined. Formulaic approaches can be insufficiently flexible to consider all relevant evidence: they become too cumbersome. They may not be able to take account of particular contexts and inter-sector working issues: they are unlikely to be able to consider new or evolving requirements with the incorporation of new knowledge and skills and the use of technology in supporting learning. They may not, therefore, be able to acknowledge quality provision and innovative developments that do not follow a traditional approach.

Clearly, then, ‘fitness for purpose’ is not an absolute but is relative. Endorsement Service has drawn upon this construct in setting up its revised Endorsement Service. The service is set around enhancement, recognising that there is no ‘absolute’ measure of quality or fitness for purpose. It fosters good practice approaches to work-based learning higher education. It takes account of relevant variables that may impact, such as sector specifications, particular employer and learner requirements and the nature of the learning context.

Within this frame, endorsement becomes an opportunity to communicate the innovative ways that education providers use models and practices to develop their provision to meet the requirements of workforce development. These requirements may be defined by employers and employer organisations in relevant occupational standards and, with education providers, frameworks for provision. An overt recognition of these approaches is increasingly sought by both education providers and employers as a way to highlight practices and provision.

The fdf three Impact Factors

The Endorsement Service encourages confidence in work-based programmes by demonstrating, at a point in time, that they are fit for purpose and have been developed in line with the needs of the relevant employment sector or sectors. Through the exploration of how fitness for purpose is manifested in the programme development and delivery, examples of educational innovation are identified and areas for enrichment clarified.

It does this using the fdf three Impact Factors, which provide the pillars against which fitness for purpose is explored and examined:

- Employer involvement
- Capability and capacity
- Development and delivery

The Impact Factors have been designed to recognise the different needs and priorities of sectors and also of employers. They are not mutually exclusive enabling an iterative and layered reflection from the strategic to operational.

Underlying each of these Impact Factors are areas for question and exploration. These areas and the underlying questions have been designed to elicit detailed information on how programmes address the Impact Factors, capturing good practice and aspects that could be enriched. The Impact Factors provide important external reference points for those developing or validating work-based programmes.
Employer involvement acknowledges the key imperative of developing higher education level work-based learning with employers. It explores issues such as sustainability, employer engagement in the design, development and delivery, workforce benefits and potential impact in the workplace.

This Impact Factor explores the programme’s approach to addressing sector requirements and other external specifications, involving external stakeholders, where appropriate. It explores the systems and processes that have been put in place to enable a programme to be effectively delivered. This is particularly important where programmes address new knowledge and skill sets where there is no precedent for teaching and learning and the associated resource requirements.
Development and delivery focuses upon work-based and employer-led learning. It considers how the programme design and its delivery take account of the particular needs of the audience and those who will access the programmes. Importantly, it explores how the various requirements and specifications have been creatively incorporated into the learning experience, capturing examples of innovation and good practice.

The Impact Factors and the underpinning questioning approach facilitate exploration that recognises sector imperatives but which also takes account of the programme context. It enables the Factor with a particular salience for one sector to receive greater consideration or a particular nuance or emphases to be incorporated. The article on page 26 sets out how this has been utilised to meet the particular requirements of the TDA.

Importantly, the approach accommodates the unanticipated, recognising alternative and progressive approaches. The three Impact Factors are, therefore, a quality enhancement tool that higher education can use to inform programme design, development and delivery. They provide readily usable guidance to shape programme development and act as criteria to inform validation and review.

The Factors assimilate the various perspectives of higher education, employers and sector bodies, acknowledging different organisational approaches and working contexts. The approach gives a consistency across sectors, providing a clarity and consistency of approach and reducing duplication.

The **fdf Endorsement Service process**

The process fosters consistent and good practice approaches to the development and delivery of higher education work-based learning and Foundation degrees. The **fdf** Endorsement Service identifies examples of educational innovation as well as clarifying areas for enrichment. It offers support where programmes experience challenges in meeting the criteria.

The **fdf** Endorsement Service looks at whether Foundation degree/work-based higher education programmes (or family of programmes) can be said to be ‘fit for purpose’. This is based upon consideration of information available in relation to the realisation of the three Impact Factors:

- the application made by the higher education provider to the **fdf** Endorsement Service. This indicates whether the organisation has understood the requirements and is ready to fully engage with the process
- existing evidence and documentation
- discussions with staff, employers and students (where appropriate) undertaken by two experienced endorsement consultants visiting the institution. The visit will be linked into institutional quality assurance processes, where feasible.

The Service has been designed to acknowledge the distinctiveness of theory/practice integration in relation to the specific requirements of the employer, the sector and the education context. The endorsement criteria have been developed to explore the extent to which programmes meet specific workforce development requirements and differing sector specifications and imperatives.

**fdf** provides the Endorsement Service through the engagement of trained, specialist endorsement consultants. Information is obtained and reviewed by the endorsement consultants through questioning and investigative techniques, including reviews of written evidence. Provision is considered within a process of positive enquiry.

Observations are recorded during the visit. Examples of good practice and areas for improvement are recorded. This information will be openly shared with the institution.

Programmes will be described as ‘endorsed’ or ‘not yet endorsed’. The education institution(s) will receive a formal letter stating the outcome and the endorsement visit record. Programmes that meet the requirements for endorsement will be eligible to use the **fdf** endorsement quality mark. If a sector body is involved then the **fdf** Endorsement Service partnership will signal the involvement of the sector body in the quality mark. Endorsed programmes will be listed on the **fdf** website and those of sector partners.

**Endorsement consultants**

The endorsement consultant team for an endorsement consists of two consultants, each bringing a complementary level and range of knowledge and skills. They are appointed following application to **fdf**, with selection made against the person specification. The higher education Specialist Endorsement Consultant has extensive knowledge of the higher education sector. The Sector Specialist Endorsement Consultant has contemporary, in-depth, working knowledge of a specialist sector.

The consultant must successfully undertake the mandatory training provided by **fdf** in order to become an approved **fdf** endorsement consultant. Between them, the members of the team will demonstrate a full range of relevant knowledge and understanding to enable them to make secure endorsement decisions.

**Sector body involvement**

The **fdf** Endorsement Service is offered to higher education providers for a fee. The Service will provide an informed endorsement based upon all relevant specifications, drawing upon the expertise of sector specialist endorsement consultants.

The Service has been informed and devised through ongoing consultations with sector bodies over several years, through the former Skills for Business Network. It recognises the differing stages
and interests of sector bodies in Foundation degree and work-based learning higher education through a partnership model with individual sector bodies. One of the recommendations from the QAA evaluation was the request from higher education providers for such a quality mark branding recognition. This will now be possible. Where a sector body is conjointly involved the outcome will signify both fdf and sector body endorsement.

This approach enables the service to be shaped to meet particular requirements. At the time of writing, (prior to the fdf Endorsement Service's official launch), various sector bodies have already approached fdf to discuss their interest - the English Standards Board for Community Development, e-skills, Financial Services Skills Council, Government Skills, SkillsActive, Skillsmart Retail, Skillset, SummitSkills and the TDA. Most organisations are interested in being involved in the operation of the fdf Endorsement Service through the involvement of their selected sector specialist endorsement consultants and they wish to co-badge the outcomes.

SummitSkills has recognised the potential that the fdf Endorsement Service offers to demonstrate to employers in their sector how Foundation degree programmes effectively meet the specifications set out in their Foundation degree Framework. SummitSkills and fdf are seeking the views of stakeholders at an event on 30 October.

Some sector bodies are interested in utilising the fdf Endorsement Service and fdf expertise to support the development of their own endorsement process. This secures an approach that meets the particular specialist need but also ensures an approach that is in common, removing additional hurdles and bureaucracy from higher education.

One such example is the fdf contract with the TDA. In July 2009, the TDA commissioned fdf to assist it in its consideration of the eligibility of higher education providers and their programmes for inclusion on the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF) for the children and young people’s workforce. Further information about this work can be found on page 26.

Next steps

The fdf Endorsement Service quality mark conveys a powerful message regarding ‘fitness for purpose’ to the external world, potential markets and to quality assurance and funding organisations more widely.

If you wish to register an interest in having a programme or family of programmes endorsed please go to www.fdf.ac.uk/endorsement. The web page provides all the information you require, including information on the three Impact Factors and the application form. Regular updates on specific arrangements with sector bodies will be posted. If you have any particular queries, please contact endorsement@fdf.ac.uk.

References


The TDA endorsement process

Rick Crowshaw
Team leader, HE Qualifications Wider Workforce, Training and Development Agency for Schools

The context

In forward issue 17, Sue Graves of Edge Hill University and Monica Farthing of the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) wrote about the development of a Foundation degree framework for the children’s workforce in schools (Graves and Farthing, 2009). Rick Crowshaw has now taken over the responsibility for this work following the retirement of Monica Farthing. In this article he explains how the TDA is building on the framework with an endorsement process that will enable higher education institutions (HEIs) to submit programmes for school support staff to the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF).

The TDA is working with Sector Skills Councils and bodies who are part of the Children’s Workforce Network (CWN)1 to develop an IQF2 for the children’s workforce by 2010. The vision for the IQF is to establish a comprehensive framework of qualifications that have acceptance and credibility across the children’s workforce, and are agreed to be appropriate for people who work with children, young people and their families. The framework will include both vocational and higher education (HE) qualifications.

Any qualification included in the IQF will be fit for its purpose, meet relevant regulatory requirements, and reflect the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children’s Workforce (‘common core’). The IQF aims to promote collaboration and shared learning between sector bodies and, in the case of HEIs, to promote cross-sector expertise and inter-faculty cooperation in the development of children’s workforce programmes, where appropriate.

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1 CWN, www.childrensworkforce.org.uk
2 IQF, www.iqf.org.uk
**The TDA proposals**

Between January and March this year, the TDA consulted stakeholders on proposals for including HE qualifications for school support staff on the IQF. The consultation sought to build on the valuable learning gathered from HEIs in the development of the TDA’s Foundation degree framework for the children’s workforce in schools, published in 2008.

We took as a starting point the principle that our endorsement process should recognise the autonomy and expertise of HEIs in developing programmes, while at the same time providing a robust assurance that HE programmes submitted to the IQF met the IQF inclusion principles and the TDA’s sector-specific endorsement criteria.

We felt it was important that our endorsement process should keep bureaucracy to a minimum and, where possible, draw on existing quality assurance (QA) procedures. A substantial majority of those consulted agreed with the TDA’s proposals, and the feedback received has helped to shape the further development of the endorsement process.

**The consultation outcomes**

The consultation involved five focus groups that drew participants from HEIs, local authorities (LAs), further education institutions (FEIs), schools and other bodies (including the Children’s Workforce Development Council). The TDA held an online consultation that yielded a further 45 responses from people with similar backgrounds to those in the focus groups.

The focus groups and online consultation asked four questions. These are set out below, along with some of the key points raised in the feedback.

**Question 1**

**Do you agree that the TDA’s approval system for HE qualifications for school support staff should fit within the IQF, ensure qualifications meet the needs of schools, complement existing QA systems and be robust but not bureaucratic?**

In principle, the proposal that the TDA’s approval system for HE qualifications for school support staff should fit within the IQF was agreed. It was felt that such a process would complement existing QA procedures for HEIs and be robust in nature.

Other key points raised:
- existing HE QA systems should be trusted to operate effectively
- clear criteria would have to be outlined for IQF approval
- HEIs would need to ensure a high degree of employer engagement in the development of provision.

**Question 2**

**Do you agree that, in principle, the TDA should approve institutions rather than individual programmes for the purposes of including HE qualifications for school support staff on the IQF?**

It was agreed in principle that institutional-level approval rather than course-level approval was preferable.

Other key points raised:
- in principle the notion of other sector professionals from the CWN attending programme validation panels was accepted as a positive idea
- where provision was franchised to partner FEIs, it would be necessary to ensure that QA procedures were robust and aligned in both settings.

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Question 3

Do you agree that criteria for HEI approval and review should be based on evidence following the TDA’s guidance on validation, particularly the emphasis on employer engagement, relevance of programmes to school needs, the common core for the children’s workforce, the Children’s Workforce Network values and impact evaluation?

It was generally agreed that the criteria for HEI approval and review should be based on evidence following the TDA’s guidance on validation. The TDA’s guidance was seen as important to ensure a common agenda in the sector. Employer engagement was viewed as particularly important to ensure ‘fitness for purpose’ of provision.

Other key points raised:
- HEIs needed to develop stronger links with other CWN partners
- there was agreement that the common core should be included in provision
- there was agreement that both long-term and short-term strategies would have to be used to assess impact
- HEIs expressed that they would welcome further guidance from the TDA on assessing impact.

Question 4

Do you agree that approval, monitoring and review by the TDA should be based on a triennial review of records showing how the HEI has followed TDA guidance in validating and reviewing its programmes for school support staff?

It was generally agreed that a triennial review would represent a logical approach to review and validation, and that care should be taken to ensure that review and validation procedures did not duplicate the procedures of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). It was felt that, as far as possible, QA procedures should be aligned with the processes of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and QAA.

Other key points raised:
- HEIs would welcome an exchange of ideas at national level to share good practice and reduce duplication of ideas
- the TDA could support the development of a network of HEIs for this purpose, for example, through an online portal, or conferences.

The TDA endorsement process

Phased implementation:

We are now developing our endorsement process, building on the helpful recommendations that HEIs and other stakeholders made during the consultation. We have appointed fdf to help us with this work because of its experience of endorsement and its expertise in this field.

We have developed draft endorsement criteria for the introductory phase that draw on the characteristics of good higher education provision described in the TDA’s Foundation degree framework. We will seek to use existing evidence held by HEIs in order to minimise burdens.

We are planning a phased approach to implementation, beginning with an Introductory Phase in October 2009. The Introductory Phase will give us the opportunity to work with a small group of HEIs who represent a range of factors, including spread and type of provision, geographical location, and management of further education partnerships.

The call for expressions of interest from HEIs to take part in the Introductory Phase endorsement process has now closed. The TDA website gives further details and guidance for HEIs, including the proposals for Phase 1 and Phase 2 endorsement. Those HEIs not involved in the Introductory Phase will be able to participate in the next phases of the endorsement process in late 2009 or early 2010. Institutions endorsed during the Introductory Phase or subsequently will be eligible to submit programmes for inclusion on the IQF.

The following HE providers have been selected to engage in the introductory phase:
- Institute of Education
- University of Chichester
- Staffordshire University
- Open University
- University of Hull

We will look to endorsed HEIs to support the further development of the process by helping to form a network of endorsed providers. This will facilitate a peer review system and will help to support the development of the IQF and ensure high-quality provision for school support staff in the longer term.
**The criteria:**

The TDA is working with its partners on the CWN to develop an integrated framework of qualifications agreed to be appropriate and fit for purpose, which meet regulatory requirements, and reflect the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children’s Workforce.

The endorsement process uses criteria based on the key questions for the validation/review of Foundation degrees included in the TDA’s foundation degree framework. They have been adapted to follow more recent guidance from the fdf process and focus upon employer involvement; capability and capacity; and design and delivery. Further detail and guidance for HEIs is given on the TDA website.

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### 1. Employer involvement

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<tr>
<th>Question areas</th>
<th>Points to consider</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Demand:</td>
<td>How have you identified a sustainable level of demand from the sector in your locality for your programmes and what evidence have you considered?</td>
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<td>What discussions have you had with employers and at what level?</td>
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<td>What potential benefits of the programmes for employers and for the career development of learners have been identified?</td>
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<td>1.2 Development:</td>
<td>How are stakeholders, especially employers, involved in informing programme development (inception, design, development and delivery)?</td>
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<td>What discussions have you had with employers or colleagues with expertise in other parts of the children’s workforce and how have these discussions informed the development of your programmes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Impact:</td>
<td>How have you helped employers and other relevant stakeholders to define outcomes and impact measures for the programmes?</td>
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<td>How will your programmes contribute to improving outcomes for children?</td>
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### 2. Capability and capacity

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<th>Question areas</th>
<th>Points to consider</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Sector specifications:</td>
<td>How do your organisation’s quality assurance processes recognise and take account of the IQF principles and TDA specifications?</td>
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<td>What reference points have you used to establish QAA, children’s workforce and schools sector requirements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Expertise and resources:</td>
<td>How do you ensure resources are provided by all those involved in the delivery of your programmes to enable the programmes to meet the needs of the children’s workforce?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What relevant sector experience do staff have to deliver and support programmes?</td>
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<td>How do staff ensure their knowledge and skills reflect current practice?</td>
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<td>2.3 Collaboration:</td>
<td>What mechanisms are in place to promote the involvement of stakeholders, especially employers, in the delivery of your programmes?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What mechanisms are in place to ensure that programmes are actually delivered in accordance with IQF principles, where they are delivered in partner education organisations?</td>
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## 3. Design and delivery

### Question areas

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<th>Question areas</th>
<th>Points to consider</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.1 Partnership delivery:</strong></td>
<td>How are stakeholders, especially employers, involved in supporting the programme and its delivery?</td>
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<td>How can it be demonstrated that programmes are designed and delivered in partnership with stakeholders to meet employer, student and sector requirements?</td>
<td>How has your pedagogic approach been based upon the needs of employers and students? Is the delivery of your programmes flexible enough to meet the needs or employers and students?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.2 Work-based learning:</strong></td>
<td>How is any employer’s in-house training accredited, incorporated, or adapted into your programmes?</td>
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<td>How is work-based learning made an integral part of the learning experience?</td>
<td>How do programmes provide opportunities for students to develop and apply skills and knowledge? How does assessment facilitate, capture and accredit both skills and knowledge?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.3 Innovation and good practice:</strong></td>
<td>How do your programmes provide opportunities to experience and learn from, and reflect on, practice in the children’s workforce?</td>
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<td>How do programmes provide quality and diverse learning experiences appropriate for the school workforce, recognise previous learning, the accumulation of learning, and support student progression?</td>
<td>How do programmes reflect the IQF principles and the common core? Are there progression opportunities from programmes to provide a relevant career development path for students?</td>
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The TDA IQF endorsement process will confirm that the providers’ practice and specific programme examples meet IQF principles. A full response is not necessarily expected against all the points, but all education providers who wish to include their programmes on the IQF will need to demonstrate how all the question areas have been addressed.

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**Endorsement consultants:**

The TDA IQF endorsement process will confirm that the providers’ practice and specific programme examples meet IQF principles. A full response is not necessarily expected against all the points, but all education providers who wish to include their programmes on the IQF will need to demonstrate how all the question areas have been addressed.

**Further information**

The TDA website gives all the information about the TDA endorsement process. The fdf website also hosts this information in addition to wider guidance in relation to the fdf Endorsement Service, which is also described in the article on pages 20. A further update on the TDA process will be included in issue 20 of *forward*.

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**References**

Innovating workforce development through accrediting work-based/in-company training

Introduction

The pdf Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA) Service has now been in existence for some three years. It offers an independent and impartial approach to brokering relationships between employers and universities to offer accreditation. The aim of this article is to provide an update on how EBTA has continued to develop since our previous article in forward (Sharpe, 2008).

The national context for EBTA

The EBTA Service represents a significant response to Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) priorities for strengthening the higher education (HE) sector’s relationship with industry, to meet the current and future skills needs of UK plc. This article offers a reminder of the wider context within which the accreditation of in-company training has continued to gain emphasis, informing the development of the EBTA Service.

The Leitch Review (HM Treasury, 2006) set a target of 40 per cent of the UK working population to be qualified at level 4 or above by 2020. Edmunds, formerly team leader of the DfES Skills Group suggested that traditional routes into HE may not be sufficient to achieve the Leitch target. Current demographic trends indicate that 70 per cent of the 2020 working population have already left compulsory education (Young and Garnett, 2007) and so it is people who are already in the workplace who need to be the focus for developing our higher level skills base. This is emphasised by DIUS in its report Higher Education at Work (DIUS, 2008):

‘Higher education providers must develop new ways of working if they are to meet the potential market from employers and employees.’

UK plc has invested substantially in the upskilling of its workforce. The 2007 National Employer Skills Survey (NESS) calculated that UK plc invested £38.6 billion on workforce development. However, according to the HE Business and Community Survey 2006-07, HE accessed only £400 million of a potential £5 billion-worth of provision that HE could have delivered (Howat, 2008). Strengthening relationships with industry to support workforce development is a substantially untapped market for much of the HE sector, and this is the rationale for it to be a strategic priority for HEFCE.

Bop Dhillon
Associate Director, pdf

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

Ken Phillips
EBTA Manager, pdf
A 2007 HEFCE circular made explicit the need for flexible provision, work-based learning and accreditation of experiential learning as key development priorities for stimulating demand for HE products and services from industry. Both DIUS (2008) and the CBI (2008) identified HE accreditation of employer-based training, the current unique selling point of HE, as key in capturing greater share of this employer market.

Higher Education for the Workforce: Barriers and Facilitators to Employer Engagement (DIUS, 2008) and Beyond Known Unknowns: A further exploration of the demand for higher level skills from businesses (Kewin et al, 2009) detailed how HE must adapt its products, processes and services to enhance its appeal to industrial training markets in the context of Leitch targets for higher level skills. The latter made specific mention of the desire by employers to have their in-company training accredited.

Kewin et al (2009) emphasised that what the HE sector may perceive to be ‘innovative’ delivery methods come as standard in the private training sector, who are also able to operate from a lower cost base.

It would be a high risk strategy for any HEI to attempt to compete with private training providers in the market for non-credit/non-qualification bearing short course training. HEIs must play to their strengths and exploit their unique selling point.

Kewin et al. (2009)

So what is the EBTA Service and how does it work?

In stimulating demand for higher level skills from employers, the EBTA Service acknowledges that businesses are increasingly concerned with the difficulties associated with reassuring themselves of the return on investment in training the workforce, particularly in a constrained economic climate.

Our starting point is to understand the business, where the business is going, and the employer’s aspirations for developing its people. Thereafter it is about supporting the organisation to enhance and build upon the training already provided to ensure that the workforce has the knowledge and skills to achieve the organisation’s goals going forward.

Following an initial scoping visit, organisations have the opportunity to be supported by a trained EBTA consultant for up to four days. The consultant seeks to gain an overview of the organisation’s training, culminating in a report detailing the potential of the training for accreditation, in such a way as it fits with the employer’s wider aspirations and strategy for workforce development. The consultant also attempts to formulate a notional view on the volume or ‘credit value’ of the training, and the level of training as against the level indicators within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). In using the service, there is no obligation on the part of the employer to pursue any recommendations which may be made.

Should the employer wish to proceed with accreditation, the EBTA Service provides support in identifying a preferred university partner. Currently over 30 universities are signed up to offer accreditation through the EBTA Service. There have been occasions where an employer has expressed a preference to continue a pre-existing relationship with a university, which may or may not be part of the EBTA community. In such cases, the role of the EBTA Service has been to facilitate the employer-university relationship through to a positive outcome. It is ultimately the employer who makes the decision regarding which university partner it wishes to work with.

The EBTA process

Initial Enquiry

Initial Scoping Visit

Scoping of in-company training

Identification of university partner

Minimum 4 days consultancy through EBTA
To what extent is the EBTA Service making an impact and stimulating demand for higher level skills in the workplace?

The benefits of accreditation through the EBTA Service have been very different for the many organisations we have already worked with.

Many employers have valued the opportunity for the quality of their in-company training to be externally verified, by drawing upon external national benchmarks as reference points not only for their staff development practices, but also wider industry practices. Many of the retail organisations we have worked with have specifically requested that their training be mapped against the national Foundation degree framework for retail developed collaboratively by Skillsmart and *fdf*. As such, accreditation has stimulated employer demand for further higher level learning as a means of strengthening internal capacity to achieve direct and sustainable improvements in performance:

“EBTA has added value to Booth’s existing programme as well as providing a route onto the Foundation degree, blending different learning philosophies and building on existing processes and structures in a highly cost effective manner. The programme is redefining the training landscape and is becoming the benchmark standard for the development of retail store managers.”

Therese Edmonds, Booths

Many employers have developed their own training to respond to current and anticipated skills gaps in their industries. They have identified accreditation through the EBTA Service as a valuable vehicle for taking a lead in plugging anticipated skills gaps for the sector as a whole:

“The Booths/fdf/MMU Foundation degree offers an outstanding example of being able to develop a senior retail team to aid growth of market share, improve customer satisfaction and ultimately profits.”

Therese Edmonds, Booths

The opportunity to access accredited in-company training has for some employers resulted in a higher calibre of applicants taking up new positions. For other employers the EBTA Service has supported a strategy of more accurately identifying and developing internal talent.

Through recognising and rewarding the continued commitment and contribution of existing staff, many employers have seen retention levels increase and reduced recruitment costs associated with staff turnover.

“Through EBTA, Murco is now able to form a productive and progressive partnership with the University of Glamorgan and Pembrokeshire College that will not only provide long-term business benefits but aid employee career progression and retention levels.”

Dave Smith, Competency Systems Controller, Murco

This aligns with a recent report Engaging for Success (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009), which also presents a strong call to action for employers to more actively develop the latent potential of employees in enhancing UK competitiveness. ‘Employee engagement’ is about how employers motivate and empower individuals to develop the behaviours and skills to take active ownership of their role in driving business performance. As MacLeod and Clarke state, “in a world where most factors of production are increasingly standardised, where a production line or the goods on a supermarket shelf are much the same the world over, employee engagement is the difference that makes the difference”.

Benefits for HE providers engaging with EBTA

The EBTA Service has built up a network of 33 universities which have all signed a Memorandum of Understanding to be represented within an EBTA ‘Community of Practice’.

Employer engagement, including accreditation, reflects the need for institutions to develop very different processes and practices to those which support traditional HE delivery geared around full-time, campus-based provision of full qualifications. Acknowledging these challenges, the EBTA community of practice provides a forum for universities to share experience and expertise for their mutual benefit. As such, it is already making an impact in terms of facilitating enhancement of employer responsiveness as a sector:

“The emerging EBTA Community of Practice is a key development to develop this capacity and capability across the HE sector - to enable HEIs to become more enterprising in these challenging times.”

York St John University
Specifically, universities have told us that their engagement in the EBTA Community of Practice continues to support the development of institutional systems and processes; the development of internal staff involved in employer engagement initiatives; and extends institutional reach to a wider network of employers:

“The University of Huddersfield was fortunate to benefit from this in developing our partnership with Royal Mail Group for the provision of a Foundation degree in Human Resources Management. Through the EBTA network we were made aware of this opportunity and the bidding process organised by EBTA provided the mechanism through which the partners could come together. EBTA staff provided helpful advice and guidance and facilitated the process by acting as an impartial broker.”

University of Huddersfield

The EBTA Community of Practice is not an exclusive arrangement but reflects a shared commitment to collaborative working to enhance workforce development, and to work towards a consistent approach to employers in the accreditation of training programmes at higher levels.

Two EBTA Community of Practice events have now taken place, each focusing upon the issues, challenges and opportunities associated with accreditation of in-company training in respect of HE quality and standards and costing, funding and pricing accreditation respectively.

Where is EBTA now?

The EBTA Service has essentially been a bottom-up development, initially starting out as a series of smaller pilot projects. It has developed organically, developing very differently based upon its ‘fit’ and potential to enhance existing industry-HE infrastructures within different regions.

Since its inception in 2006 it has supported over 120 organisations of varying sizes in both the private and public sectors such as Tesco, Jewson, Marshall Aerospace, Flybe and the East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce. Many of these engagements have become part of a growing suite of case studies available to view on the fdf website. The case studies outline how employers have benefited from seeking accreditation of their in-company training through the EBTA Service.

The EBTA Service provides access to a team of specially trained EBTA consultants who have a strong understanding of higher education, specialist knowledge of particular industrial sectors and a body of experience developed over the past three years. These consultants will be formative in taking the service forward into its next phase of development.

Future directions

The EBTA Service has now matured to the stage of having substantial experience of successfully supporting a number of employers through accreditation. At the same it has also developed its network of universities, with systems in place to be responsive in providing in-company accreditation.

In this next key phase of development, the EBTA Service is eager to strengthen the network of universities participating in the Community of Practice. For universities who are not currently part of the EBTA Community of Practice but would like to find out more about how to get involved, please contact Ken Phillips or Bop Dhillon.

Over the next academic year we will be building upon the two successful Community of Practice events with a number of workshops, to include such areas of common interest such as the relevance of shell awards for accreditation purposes, good practice in engaging with employers, and developing e-resources to support employers undertaking accreditation of their training.

We also wish to raise awareness of the EBTA offer more widely amongst employers. In addition we would like to work in collaboration with skills stakeholders and brokerage services. In particular, we wish to look at innovative ways in which we can make the EBTA Service more inclusive to small and medium-sized enterprises.

References


For further information contact:
Kate Fletcher, Bop Dhillon or Ken Phillips
Tel: 01543 301150
E-mail: ebta@fdf.ac.uk
Workforce development for the retail sector: from partnership to a community of practice via a Foundation degree

Helen Dewhurst
Associate Director, fdf

It is now three years since the fdf-led consortium that devised a Foundation degree for the retail sector was first established. Much has been achieved over that time and fdf continues to work with partners from the retail sector and higher education institutions (HEIs) on this programme and the design of further workforce development solutions for the retail sector. This article provides a review of this development to date and outlines some of the plans for the future. This is particularly timely given the graduation this summer of the first Foundation degree learners with Tesco plc.

The five organisations comprising the consortium that led this initiative from its inception were: fdf, Tesco plc, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), University of the Arts London (UAL) and My Knowledge Map (MKM). Over the past few years, this consortium has met formally every four to six weeks, chaired by fdf. It is perhaps useful to consider the original objectives of the consortium in order to review the achievements of the group to date.
Curriculum development

The key initial objective of the consortium was to develop a Foundation degree programme in retailing, aligned to the Skillsmart Retail Foundation Degree Framework, that would help meet the higher level workforce development needs of the retail sector. The Foundation degree was validated by MMU and UAL in the spring of 2007 and the first pilot cohort of learners from Tesco plc enrolled across the two institutions in September 2007. In essence, the university partners jointly developed parallel programmes that are identical in content yet respect the regulatory differences of their institutions. The intention being that the student will receive the same overall educational experience regardless of the delivering institution, thus facilitating national accessibility to a consistent Foundation degree programme for the sector.

The programme content focuses specifically upon management, consumer behaviour, in-store marketing, management of information, retail law and retail leadership and draws upon the workplace to structure and inform the development of the learning materials. Work-based learning and academic study is integrated through work-based projects, assignments, a reflective log and portfolio. All formal assessment activities are based on the reality of the students’ workplace and employers have contributed to the development of the activities.

Figure 1 illustrates the linkage between the Skillsmart Retail Foundation Degree Framework, developed in consultation with over 50 retailers and the Foundation degree. This also identifies the components that were devised specifically for multiple mixed retailers with the specific guidance of Tesco plc.
Figure 1 Foundation degree retailing: from framework to programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fd Retail Framework</th>
<th>Fd Retailing: Generic Core</th>
<th>Fd Retailing Tailored</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Self manage performance and development</td>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Mixed Multiples (TESCO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Understand retail consumer behaviour</td>
<td>Personal and professional 1 (20 credits)</td>
<td>Level 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Manage retail operations</td>
<td>Consumer behaviour (20 credits)</td>
<td>Retail environment (20 credits)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Manage retail information</td>
<td>Retail operations (20 credits)</td>
<td>In store customer marketing (20 credits)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Manage and lead people in retail</td>
<td>Managing information (20 credits)</td>
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<td>• Develop people in retail</td>
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<td>• Manage retail stock</td>
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<td>• Understanding laws relating to retail management</td>
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<td>• Manage retail customer service</td>
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<td>• Undertake independent research into retail</td>
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<td>220 credits</td>
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Teaching and learning approach

Since September 2007, the programme has been delivered by MMU and UAL using a blended learning approach that utilises a bespoke online classroom for e-learning delivery, supported by face-to-face induction and module workshop sessions. For those that wish to achieve the qualification within two calendar years, delivery is structured over a three-term university academic year on the basis of two 20-credit units concurrently each term. This delivery pattern was designed to suit the needs of employers in terms of trading patterns and employee workloads, that is the need to avoid students having study requirements over the Christmas and Easter periods because of high volumes of trading, and a similar avoidance over the summer period because of the complex nature of holiday arrangements and trading patterns.

With regard to the student effort as defined in learning hours, the requirement of 400 hours to achieve 40 credits per 13-week term is broken down as follows:

- intensive workshops: 32 hours
- online learning: 104 hours
- peer networking: 78 hours
- work-based evaluation and reflection: 186 hours

This equates to the following study profile each week:

- online learning: 8 hours
- peer networking: 6 hours
- work-based evaluation and reflection: 14 hours

This learning is supported by employer mentors and tutor support through the online classroom. As with the more conventional full-time students on traditional degree programmes, the breakdown is notional and an 'on average' estimate, given that each student would apply an individual level of effort to the work.

Clearly this is an intensive but achievable study programme that can only be achieved through integrating academic and work-based learning, and valuing the workplace as a learning environment. The concept that employees ‘leave their brain at the door’ when entering the workplace is consigned to the past; this programme provides an approach to learning that stimulates critical thinking and reflection in the workplace. These are exactly the skills that retail employers are seeking from their staff.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) comments that flexibility is what is required in a mode of study, as different students require differing amounts of time on different study activities. Learners are required to achieve the necessary learning outcomes and standards established by the programme of study, determined and controlled by the higher education institution (HEI). These may be achieved via alternative approaches to the traditional ‘serving of their time’ associated with campus-based education. There is evidence from HEFCE that numerous HEIs are utilising comparable two-year Foundation degrees for the development of individuals who are full-time employees.
The work undertaken to date recognises that not all employees have the capacity to embrace the intensive programme. In practice a percentage of employees might require a more relaxed pace of learning to achieve a work/study/life balance more attuned to their personal needs. There is no reason why the pace of learning cannot be adjusted to meet the needs of different business environments and individual learners. However, those employees who are motivated and able to achieve the award within a two year timescale should not be denied the opportunity to significantly enhance their personal and career objectives.

We should also remember in this discussion that these employees are extremely unlikely to access higher education in the traditional format. Unless the higher education offer is attuned to their and their employers’ needs, they will not engage with the process.

**Technology assisted delivery**

It is imperative that Foundation degrees are genuinely accessible for learners from within the workplace. Full-time learners wishing to enter a particular employment sector often have their needs met via traditional classroom-based education. It was always a key objective of this project to develop a technology-assisted programme as part of a solution to reach work-based learners. MMU and UAL use different virtual learning environments (VLEs) (WebCT and BlackBoard, respectively) to support teaching and learning. As a result, a tailored e-learning platform was created by MyKnowledgeMap (MKM) to deliver the programme, independently of the institutional VLEs. In many institutions, the VLEs do not include portfolio functionality or they operate a separate portfolio system that requires learners to become familiar with and continually switch between the two systems. The online classroom developed by MKM for the Retail Foundation degree provides both the delivery system and the portfolio and offers a common learning interface for students at both universities. As Rob Arntsen, Managing Director of MyKnowledgeMap, explains:

“The usual model of delivering a course is that you have one institution teaching many different learners. For this project, multiple universities are delivering to learners from multiple employers. This is where the model of a learning environment that is bound to one institution fails: as they move towards offering more work-based learning, there will be an increasing need for educational institutions to work together if they are to engage with the larger national employers.”

MMU and UAL have also contracted a helpdesk service specifically to support learners on the Foundation degree. The project team considered this to be an essential requirement because the university helpdesk facilities already in place did not cover the full range of times that the work-based learners were likely to be most active on the system. This was a planned intervention to remove the obstacle of not being able to access support at a convenient time for the user and has operated very effectively in supporting learners with connection issues from home. It has also helped identify and iron out any glitches in the system so that they could be remedied before they affected the majority of learners.

Learners on the programme have been overwhelmingly positive in their feedback on the system, with many echoing the views of one current learner who simply commented “the e-learning is superb and easy to use”. Tutors are also convinced about the value of the helpdesk facility and have taken the decision to continue to invest in this service as the programme has progressed to full, post-pilot delivery with multiple employers.

**The customer experience**

The programme has enrolled over 170 learners since 2007, across the two institutions, and is attracting increased employer interest with learners now enrolled from Booths and the Southern Co-op as well as Tesco, which enrolled its third cohort of learners in September 2009.

During this period, *pdf*, MMU and UAL have worked with the employers to continuously monitor and evaluate the programme and implement refinements to the content and delivery mechanisms. The main findings of the pilot with respect to the programme of study and student commitment and effort were:

- Strategies for the recruitment and selection of learners for the programme (by employer and HEI) need to be carefully considered and clearly articulated. This is particularly important to ensure that learners are clear about the commitment required to successfully achieve on such an intensive work-based learning programme. Learner performance on the programme to date has demonstrated that a focus on learner selection leads to high retention rates and excellent academic performance.

The approach taken by Tesco to address this was to develop an assessment centre for final selection of Foundation degree candidates, in conjunction with the HEIs. In addition, many employers are now also ensuring that there is a contractual agreement in place with their employees that links employer support of student fees to continued employment.

- This is a blended learning programme and the importance of face-to-face contact for learners, subsequent to initial induction and workshop, should not be underestimated. This is particularly important for learner socialisation and in order to contextualise the assessment requirements. Following the first delivery of the programme, additional one-day support workshops were introduced mid-term.

As the programme reached the conclusion of the pilot delivery in the summer of 2009, there is now clear evidence of the value being placed upon the qualification by learners and employers.
Joe Wheeler, one of the first Retail Foundation degree graduates from Tesco said:

“Taking part in the Foundation degree has been a great opportunity for me to learn whilst on the job. It has given me an opportunity to get qualifications without having to leave my job or face the staggering amount of debt most students are faced with nowadays. Although the degree was hard work, the paid study leave and days off to see our tutors were really useful. I’m extremely proud to now have the qualifications to match my work experience and hope that what I have learnt during my course will really help me progress my career even further.”

Tesco UK operations Personnel Director, Hayley Tatum, said:

“This is a flexible, innovative approach to training. Tesco staff can learn while they earn and this has shaped the approach Tesco has taken to the Foundation degree - you don’t need a string of A-levels or months away from the shop floor. The opportunity to study in the workplace is a key element of Foundation degrees. I am very proud of what our new graduates have achieved.”

At Booths, self-assessment by learners has confirmed that the most significant impact of the course has been in ‘the way managers think about retail questions’ and ‘the willingness to look at new ideas and do things differently’. As one learner commented:

“I am surprised at how much of the course content I can relate to my area of work and also how much I have learnt about internal company departments, their functionality and added value to the business. You could say I had my blinkers removed.”

Similarly, the programme has proved to be highly motivating for staff. Almost all of the learners have been with the company since leaving school and never expected to achieve a higher education award.

Therese Edmonds, Training Manager at Booths, is keen to emphasise the impact this can have upon business image:

“Businesses are competing for the best employees. Most applicants are not just interested in the terms and conditions on offer but what they will also get out of the working relationship. Since offering the Foundation degree the number and quality of applicants has increased, promoting Booths as an employer of choice.”

Moving forward as a community of practice

As we move into the 2009/10 academic year, facing new challenges in a turbulent economic environment, the work of the fdf Retail Consortium is attracting increased interest from employers and higher education delivery partners. The core intention of this work remains unchanged: to facilitate national accessibility to a consistent Foundation degree programme for the retail sector. Whilst the support, particularly of Tesco, has been invaluable over the past three years, the intention was always to develop an award that would be seen as relevant to the retail sector as a whole. This distinction may appear semantic but is in fact crucial – the programme is not a Tesco Foundation degree but a national sector qualification that has been subject to scrutiny and evaluation by one of the UK’s leading retail employers. Evidence that the Foundation degree is ‘fit for purpose’ is now being demonstrated by the participation of other employers.

The programme and supporting materials have been made available via fdf for partnerships of retail businesses and higher education providers to utilise. As a result, the consortium is extending to develop a national network of provision that now includes more than 10 higher education providers, alongside a strategic partnership with Skillsmart and the National Skills Academy for Retail. The focus of work going forward includes the development of new strands of retail provision and delivery models for different specialist areas of retailing, and will include other, shorter awards that can stand alone and build towards the Foundation degree as required. An increasing number of employers are now making use of fdfs Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA) service and this is often an important first step to engaging with the Foundation degree. Employees at Tesco and Booths are now able to accumulate 40 Foundation degree credits via completion of in company management development programmes.

This work is increasingly demonstrating the value of partnership working to offer an integrated solution to workforce development that is applicable to all sectors. Moving forward, it is important that the Consortium continues to evolve into an inclusive community of practice that can further innovate for the benefit of all concerned - but particularly for work-based learners.
In the eight years since their inception, there have been significant changes to the context in which Foundation degrees have been developed. There has been rapid expansion in the number of programmes on offer and the number of students enrolled. Institutions have become increasingly innovative in their development of programmes and large numbers of employers have engaged with Foundation degrees and work-based higher education more generally.

During the same period, a substantial quantity of literature concerning Foundation degrees has been published. An extensive review of research focused on Foundation degrees has been undertaken on behalf of, but independently from, fdf. The review provides an up-to-date compilation of material on Foundation degrees. It also provides a basis for an agenda for future research work focused on Foundation degrees.

Higher education research is characterised by a proliferation of small-scale, often practitioner-oriented studies. The research on Foundation degrees is no different. Much of the research is very localised and is often a reflection on practice augmented by a small survey or the collection of qualitative data. There are few examples of well-planned and resourced substantive studies.

The review identified 317 items that refer to Foundation degrees. These include items listed in the fdf literature catalogue developed by researchers at the University of Sheffield. Other items were located through extensive searching. Of the 317 items, 108 appear in forward, the fdf journal. Of these, 13 were included in the review. Of the remaining 209 items, 54 were either not relevant to the review because they only made passing reference to Foundation degrees, were unobtainable in the available time, or were superseded by similar publications, such as conference papers that were subsequently published in a journal or key statistics that have been updated. This resulted in a total of 168 items that were used, to varying extents, in the review. These consisted of 80 journal articles, 58 reports, 17 conference papers, 13 books or chapters in books.

Two types of material inform the review in the main. The first are accounts that use original empirical data, which range from anecdote and reflections from course tutors, through student evaluations to fully-developed research projects. In the vast majority of cases, this empirical material relates to a single programme, sometimes with a national or regional focus but more frequently with a focus on a single institution and its partners.

The second type of material that informs the review is made up of analytical and critical analyses of the Foundation degree initiative, often based on policy documents, and sometimes augmented by
re-analysis of available data. The available material most naturally fell under the following headings:

- Foundation degree policy, context, aims and implementation
- value of Foundation degrees
- collaborative working and employer engagement
- student experience of learning
- work-based learning
- student support and guidance
- programme design, development and pedagogy.

The review is structured under these headings, each constituting a chapter of the report. Some reviewed research appears in just one chapter but others occur in more than one. Each chapter has a summary of the main points, usually identifying the key lessons learned from the implementation of Foundation degrees. There is a final chapter that outlines a potential research agenda.

Lee Harvey’s review can be downloaded from the fdf website at www.fdf.ac.uk/page.aspx?id=21
There are also limited stocks of printed copies. If you would like to receive a free copy please email Katharine Price at k.price@fdf.ac.uk
I sometimes catch part of Terry Wogan’s programme on BBC Radio Two while driving to a meeting. An email from Dublin one morning commented on a bus advertisement drawing attention to the importance of neonatal care; something like, “the first six minutes of life is the most dangerous”, to which the correspondent remarked that he was quite worried about the last few minutes as well. For many of us, the end of life process will take longer than six minutes. It is therefore comforting to hear and experience new thinking, backed by a Government strategy, on end of life services that will focus on more than our spiritual well being at the final moment.

The hospice movement has been at the forefront of end of life and palliative care for many years, and therefore it was appropriate that \textit{fdf} should link with Help the Hospices and others to support workforce development in this important sector. I am really pleased to have joined the project team as the \textit{fdf} lead for the project and invite you to read about it in this briefing from Chris Mullen the project lead and Jo Blackburn Director of Practice at Help the Hospices, or to contact the team for more information or to contribute to the work.

\textbf{Margaret Seiffert}

Associate Director, \textit{fdf}

\textbf{Background}

\textit{fdf} has been working with Help the Hospices to explore how Foundation degrees can support palliative and end of life care in England. The national End of Life Care Strategy, launched in 2008, included a very strong theme on the importance of workforce development to ensure high quality palliative and end of life care services are consistently provided in all environments.

Help the Hospices is the national charity for the hospice movement and supports over 240 hospices across the UK. Qualifications are used within palliative and end of life care services for registration, regulation and public protection as well as for career development and meeting the skills needs of employers. Because of this, and because of the need to maximise limited resources, Help the Hospices is keen to explore ways in which new programmes can become part of the ‘family of qualifications’ for palliative and end of life care services. Help the Hospices and \textit{fdf} are also keen to explore how this work will provide consistent and coherent models for adoption by other palliative and end of life care providers and higher education providers. The ‘care pathway’ approach is consistent with the Next Stage Review led by Lord Darzi.
Who is involved in the project?

\textit{dfs} and Help the Hospices have selected three pilot sites to take the project forward:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Lead contact</th>
<th>Region</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Margaret's Hospice</td>
<td>South West Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset Carole Hewitt, <a href="mailto:ch@st-marg-hospice.org">ch@st-marg-hospice.org</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| St Nicholas Hospice Care (SNHC) | East of England Region |
| Suffolk Madeline Bass, madeline.bass@stnh.org.uk |

| St Ann's Hospice | North West Region |
| Cheshire Esther Kirby, ekirby@sah.org.uk |

The outputs for the project include:

- a consortium of partners in palliative and end of life care committed to the development of their clinical support workforce
- a framework that has national application and adds value for employers
- a new role and level of support worker for palliative and end of life care services
- a Foundation degree that is recognised by employers and staff in palliative and end of life care services
- a Foundation degree that is valued by commissioners of education and palliative and end of life care services
- an evaluation of the impact of the project that will include information and data collected from each of the pilot sites
- communication across England to all palliative and end of life care services on the outcome.

We are looking to develop a common approach to Foundation degree qualifications that supports transferability and recognition in palliative and end of life care services across the country. Some work is already in progress nationally to identify national occupational standards, which is anticipated to be ready later this year.\textsuperscript{2} The aim is to work with the pilot sites to develop and test these standards within the hospices and to identify common core learning requirements leading ultimately to a Foundation degree programme. Through this approach employers will be assured that the Foundation degree graduates have a core of knowledge and skills appropriate for an enhanced carer role and that they have the specific knowledge and skills relevant to palliative and end of life care services. Ultimately this will secure the currency and transferability of the qualification across the sector.

The project is designed to test out various ideas and possibilities across England that will inform regional developments and national models of good practice. Upon successful completion, these ideas will then be shared with other service and education providers to give regional and national reach.

Why a Foundation degree

The principles

\textit{dfs} and Help the Hospices wish to support the development of a common Foundation degree approach based on principles that provide:

- involvement of employers in the design, development and delivery from the outset
- involvement of those who access services, their carers and families in the design, development and delivery from the outset, as appropriate
- opportunities for students to learn with and from others working in the sector and/or other relevant sectors
- learning that incorporates a minimum set of National Occupational Standards (NOS)
- the option for specialist NOS or other standards, as appropriate
- the identification of core learning requirements
- the concept of shared and specialist learning
- choice
- flexibility in mode of delivery that accommodates learners’ and employers’ needs
- substantial and supported work-based learning
- opportunities for education providers to interpret/make live employers’ requirements in their development of Foundation degrees
- employers with the opportunity to ensure that staff are educated for their role
- consistency of approach with national recognition to the particular Foundation degree
- transferability of staff across services.

\textsuperscript{1} For more information about this review see \url{www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Highqualitycareforall/index.htm}

\textsuperscript{2} Skills for Health and Skills for Care national programme for developing national occupational standards.
Foundation degrees - some general information

Models and delivery mechanisms vary depending upon the needs of the local partners but the common features are:

• completion in two to three years
• learning through work
• models of supported learning in the workplace, including such things as supervision and mentoring, some include learning facilitators based in the work place
• staged awards within a Foundation degree framework
• articulation and progression to an honours degree.

Why now?

The end of life care pathway is one of the key priority areas for improving the quality of the patients’ and clients’ experience.

“How we care for the dying is an indicator of how we care for all sick and vulnerable people. It is a measure society as a whole and it is a litmus test for health and social care.”

End of Life Care Strategy - promoting high quality care for all adults at the end of life (Department of Health, 2008), page 10

This is a real opportunity for organisations working in health and social care and across statutory and non-statutory organisations to work together in partnership. The palliative and end of life care pathway involves specialist palliative care services, hospices, nursing homes, primary care providers, community district nursing services, voluntary sector and private sector providers.

“In the past, the profile of end of life care within the NHS and social care services has been relatively low. Reflecting this, the quality of care delivered has been very variable. Implementation of this strategy will make a step change in access to high quality care for all people approaching the end of life. This should be irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, disability, sexual orientation, diagnosis or socioeconomic deprivation. High quality care should be available wherever the person may be: at home, in a care home, in hospital, in a hospice or elsewhere.”

End of Life Care Strategy - promoting high quality care for all adults at the end of life (Department of Health, 2008), page 2

The project is timely for a number of reasons:

• it will be able to encompass the new national palliative and end of life care standards currently being developed by Skills for Care and Skills for Health
• it will aim to link across the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and higher education
• it supports the development of new roles
• it supports the development for new ways of working
• it supports the need to create flexible workers with enhanced skills, based on the needs of employers and the service in which they work
• it supports managers to review their staffing skill mix needed for the future.

The project will hopefully be the beginning of a journey that goes on to create a framework for employers that will be of interest across the many providers of palliative and end of life care services. A satisfactory outcome would be to see the Foundation degree incorporated in to the plans of employers and commissioners for the workforce education and training needs of the future.

‘Help the Hospices is pleased to be working with fdf to take a strategic approach to workforce development that ensures high quality palliative and end of life care services are consistently provided in all environments.

As a resource, hospices are well positioned to work with other providers and stakeholders to develop practical solutions to workforce development. This project will allow hospices to not only benefit from accessing the Foundation degree framework to develop their own workforce, but as a natural partner of choice in delivering practical and effective solutions to other statutory, independent and voluntary sector providers to support the provision of high quality end of life care in the communities they serve.’

Jo Blackburn
Director of Practice Development, Help the Hospices

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jo.blackburn@helpthehospices.org.uk

Reference

Expressions of interest: helping employers to find the right higher education partner

Introduction

Over the past three years, fdf has successfully presented and facilitated sessions at a variety of business summits, including the International Business Development Group’s (IBDG Ltd) Human Resources and Finance Directors conferences, and The World Trade Group’s (WTG Ltd) business seminars. This has given fdf access to over 1000 employers representing a wide range of companies across the UK, from small and medium-sized enterprises to FTSE 250 listed companies. In engaging with employers at these events, fdf aims to raise awareness of, and generate increased demand for, work-based higher education. fdf also works in partnership with regional employers networks such as Chambers of Commerce, with the same aim.

These engagements have enabled fdf to build relationships, at senior levels, with employers. fdf has then worked in partnership with employers to understand their training and workforce development needs and to source, or develop, higher education provision that addresses these requirements.

In some cases, fdf has managed an ‘expressions of interest’ (EOI) process on behalf of employers, whereby HEIs are invited to tender for work to develop higher education provision on behalf of employers. In this article we explain what is involved in an EOI process, giving examples of fdf’s recent work within three different employment sectors.

Expression of interest

In the previous edition of forward, the article Learning from Employer Engagement tells the story of the University of Huddersfield’s work with the Royal Mail Group (RMG), a partnership facilitated by the fdf EOI process. The article described the journey from identifying RMG’s business development requirements through to the development of a new Foundation degree programme for RMG. This article examines how the EOI process worked in practice with the RMG and gives further examples of fdf’s work with the National Policing Improvement Agency and in the Heritage sector. We also consider how fdf may offer and develop the EOI service in the future.
Case study 1:  
**The Royal Mail Group**

The RMG has its own training centre based near Rugby where it offers a number of professional qualifications to its staff. The Director of Shared Services for the group approached *fdf*, stating that it was interested in considering new development options for their staff within the Human Resources Business Unit. The centre already offered ILM qualifications at level 3 and CIPD accreditation (level 6/7) for senior staff. Having identified a gap at level 4/5, it was envisaged that a Foundation degree could potentially fill this gap. With support from *fdf*, RMG then completed an analysis of its development requirements at level 4/5. The resulting specification of RMG’s requirements outlined:

- RMG’s vision
- what RMG could contribute
- core content for provision
- number of potential students/employees
- delivery mode
- accreditation
- assessment
- the timetable for development and communication.

This specification was used as the basis for the EOI. *fdf* distributed the specification to the HEIs, inviting them to register their interest in working with the RMG on Foundation degree development. Responses were received within two weeks from 13 HEIs. The RMG then used specific assessment criteria in order to rank the EOIs in order of preference. The criteria used were: experience of working in partnership with employers on curriculum development; subject expertise; experience of developing work-based learning; innovative curriculum development; and pricing model. The outcome from this process identified four HEIs who were invited to present their business case to the RMG at its Rugby training centre. The outcome was the University of Huddersfield being appointed as the preferred partner. This process was concluded within a six-month time frame.

**The model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>*fdf support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial discussion with company</td>
<td>Background to <em>fdf</em> work and companies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HR strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scoping exercise</td>
<td>Brainstorming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mapping to NOS, professional requirements and QAA benchmarks</td>
<td>Referencing, desk research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulating the business need</td>
<td>Linking back to business outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalising the EOI paper with the employer</td>
<td>Preparing the paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying a list of potential HEIs</td>
<td>Agree with employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute EOI to HEIs</td>
<td>14-day turnaround, strict guidance over EOI return</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer to grade EOIs</td>
<td>Employer decides which HEIs to invite to next step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation to employer by chosen HEIs</td>
<td>Employer makes decision as to which HEIs they wish to work with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative employer-led curriculum development work commences</td>
<td>Leading to product development</td>
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</table>
Case study 2:  
Crime Scene Investigators

The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) is a Home Office Agency which, amongst many activities, provides forensic training to UK police forces.

The criminal justice service relies heavily on the confidence and accountability of forensic evidence to ensure the safe prosecution of criminals. The knowledge and skill, and increasingly the level of qualification, of police Fingerprint Officers (FOs) and Crime Scene Investigators (CSIs), plays a vital part in the gathering and presentation of evidence.

FOs and CSIs are trained at the NPIA Forensic Centre in County Durham using extensive programmes which incorporate practical skills training, scientific education and work-based learning undertaken across the country at individual police forces.

As a consequence of the successful accreditation of the FO training programme as a Foundation degree in Fingerprint Identification, the NPIA contacted fdf when the CSI programme was ready for review and redesign, to see if the new programme could also be designed as a Foundation degree.

Following the principles of the fdf Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA) Service, two members of fdf staff spent a day with the CSI training team, examining the training programme and training materials. They were quickly satisfied that the level and volume of the programme was consistent with the requirements of a Foundation degree, and listening to the team’s plans for the programme regarding design convinced them that there were plenty of opportunities to introduce reflective practice and supported work-based learning.

Over a period of weeks, fdf worked with the NPIA design team, ensuring they understood the principles of higher education (HE) accreditation. At the same time, they worked with the management team to help them consider the requirements for a validating partner.

As a publicly-funded agency, it was most important to the NPIA to be able to demonstrate transparency in the process used to select any ‘contractor’ providing services to the agency. A tendering process was essential to ensure value to the public purse. It was clear, however, that that cost alone was not an appropriate basis on which to select an educational partner.

Benefitting from previous experience in creating, developing and managing employer partnerships, fdf suggested that a shortlist of higher education providers, who could tender for the work of accrediting the CSI Foundation degree, could be devised using the EOI process.

Acting on fdf’s advice, the NPIA drew up a specification of requirements for the EOI. The specification covered:

- technical and academic expertise in the subject area of forensic science
- experience of a wide range of partnership activity
- understanding and experience of work-based learning pedagogy, assessment and quality assurance
- flexibility in quality assurance and validation processes
- ability to meet specified timescales (in this case, six months)
- the provision of a transparent costing model.

This specification was circulated, through fdf, to all HEIs through JISC mail and fdf’s own Quality Enhancement Network mailing list. Interested parties were allowed two weeks to express their interest directly to NPIA.

NPIA drew up decision criteria and convened a panel to judge the expressions of interest received. Four HEIs were shortlisted and invited to give a presentation at the NPIA Forensic Centre. Each of the HEIs gave a 30 minute presentation, with questions, to a panel of around 12 people.

Vital to the integrity of the EOI process is the position of the employer as the client, leading the process and understanding and managing their own choices and decisions. fdf’s role in the process is advisory and facilitative, offering interpretation, guidance and advice about the process, but not about the eventual decision.

The Foundation degree in Crime Scene Investigation was validated in July 2009 by Teesside University and the first 80 students enrolled in September 2009.
Case study 3:  
*The Cathedrals’ Workshops Fellowship*

The Cathedrals’ Workshops Fellowship (CWN) is a partnership of eight Anglican cathedrals that was established in 2006 to develop a specialist higher-level apprenticeship for cathedral stonemasons, to be delivered as a distributed in-house training programme. *fdf* has been working with the Fellowship since 2008, helping them to secure accreditation of their programme under the auspices of EBTA.

Whilst the individual cathedrals already had working relationships with a variety of colleges in the context of level 2 and level 3 provision, the Fellowship wanted to establish a new partnership specific to the context of the higher-level training programme they had designed. As part of the EBTA engagement, *fdf* was able to manage the selection process on behalf of the Fellowship.

Given the subject specialist nature of the provision, the Fellowship felt that a general call for EOIs would not be appropriate in this case and asked for guidance regarding potential partners. A long-list of possible partners was drawn up from *fdf*’s knowledge of the sector and each of the eight cathedrals considered this in the context of existing partnerships. One or two queries and additional suggestions were made, and following further consideration, a short-list of four universities was identified. The four institutions were first contacted informally to establish their interest in principle in being considered for this accreditation. All four responded positively, and the formal invitation to tender was issued. The Fellowship identified the key criteria on which it would base its choice; these were:

- reasons for wanting to work with the CWF
- experience in relation to accrediting work-based learning and in-house training
- relevant subject expertise within, or available to, the institution
- perceived benefits to the institution of undertaking this accreditation
- the timescale and management of the accreditation process
- costs to CWF involved in gaining accreditation - initial and ongoing
- funding model and indicative fees structure, assuming students complete 120 credits at level 4 over two years
- management of the relationship with CWF during the preparation process and beyond
- support and development they would provide for the CWF trainers (Master Masons, Architects, Archaeologists and so on) including any requirements/expectations for them to work towards HE level teaching qualifications
- thoughts on ways to effectively and efficiently accommodate level 2/3 requirements into the geographically dispersed delivery model.

The participating institutions were invited to a selection event which was arranged in the geographically convenient and contextually appropriate venue of St Paul’s Cathedral. In order to provide an added dimension of independence, a member of *fdf* with prior experience of managing EOI selection, but no knowledge of the cathedral programme or the Fellowship, attended the selection event. This proved extremely helpful in providing an additional impartial view.

Presentations lasted 20 minutes, followed by 10-15 minutes’ discussion (although one team was interrupted by a fire alarm and full evacuation of the cathedral!). All the presentations were well received and the variety of approaches suggested by participants provided the Fellowship with a good feel for the range of options open to them. All the institutions were represented by senior staff, and demonstrated a genuine interest in this opportunity.

An initial ‘reaction’ of the employer group was captured at the end of the day, but to ensure that everyone was completely comfortable with the decision, this was reflected on overnight and all the tenders were discussed afresh the following day. This resulted in one proposal receiving unanimous support and a decision being taken to invite this institution to enter into further discussions. At the time of writing, the accreditation is proceeding, with the first learners due to commence their accredited programme in January 2010.

“...working with universities is new territory for us, so having an EBTA facilitator to translate the language of academia and guide us through the process of choosing a validation partner has been extremely helpful.”

Peter Lyddon, CWF
To conclude

These EOI selection processes identified a number of points of interest for institutions considering participating in similar exercises with employers:

• HEIs’ expertise in developing educational programmes is valued and recognised by employers, but providers also need to acknowledge employers’ expertise in relation to their ‘business’ and training needs.
• Providers need to be realistic and completely transparent about the costs involved in accreditation, and be able to explain their pricing model to employers.
• Employers who have developed an in-house training programme which meets their needs are unlikely to be persuaded that a ‘similar’ programme offered by an institution will meet their needs.
• Employers value the quality assurance dimension of HE accreditation, but providers need to consider how quality assurance procedures will be translated effectively into the work-based environment.

The basic EOI model

- Employer: business demand
- Choice: employer decision
- Development of specification
- Response: HEI selection process
Dispatches

Paul Groves  
PR and Marketing Manager, fdf

Tesco graduates make headlines

Following two years of on the job studying, 17 retail managers have become the first to graduate with the Tesco Retail Management Foundation degree.

The successful pilot class students were awarded their degrees by Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of The Arts London, and the story was picked up by regional, national and trade media, including the Manchester Evening News, Metro and HR Magazine.

The course, which runs alongside Tesco's existing A-level Options programme and its graduate recruitment scheme, combines academic study with workplace learning and equips graduates with the relevant knowledge, understanding, and skills to improve performance and productivity.

Some of these core skills include consumer behaviour, in-store marketing, management of information, retail law and retail leadership.

The first 17 students ranged in age from 21 to 48 and graduate Joe Wheeler said: "Taking part in the Foundation degree has been a great opportunity for me to learn whilst on the job. It has given me an opportunity to get qualifications without having to leave my job or face the staggering amount of debt most students are faced with nowadays.

"Although the degree was hard work, the paid study leave and days off to see our tutors were really useful. I’m extremely proud to now have the qualifications to match my work experience and hope that what I have learnt during my course will really help me progress my career even further.”

Tesco’s UK operations personnel director, Hayley Tatum, is delighted with the flexible, innovative approach to training the Foundation degree provides the company:

“Tesco staff can learn while they earn and this has shaped the approach Tesco has taken to the Foundation degree - you don’t need a string of A-levels or months away from the shop floor,” she added. “The opportunity to study in the workplace is a key element of Foundation degrees. I am very proud of what our new graduates have achieved.

“The launch of the course two years ago led to criticisms that largely centred on the ‘further dumbing down of the education system’. But this degree is no easier to achieve because it is employer-led and work-based. Not only is it subject to the same quality assurance standards as any other higher education degree - it’s also subject to quality assessment and evaluation by an employer.

“The commitment required from undergraduates on the course should not be underestimated. They spent two days at one of the universities at the beginning of term, as well as one-day mid-term. They also have to spend up to 12 hours a week of e-learning - and had to complete numerous essays, projects and exams. On top of this, they had to hold down a full-time job.”

Employer engagement matters

fdf sponsored the Employer Engagement category at this year’s Times Higher Education annual awards.

The awards took place in London on 15 October and prior to that Professor Derek Longhurst was one of the main speakers at a conference on Employer Engagement organised by THE and sponsored by fdf.

The conference brought together the UK’s sector leaders and opinion formers to discuss the Government’s plans and how higher education institutions can compete for funding.

It also covered a range of topics, including:

• high-level skills: next steps
• learning working
• valuing the views of employers
• how universities can help small businesses survive the recession and reposition for the upturn
• engaging with business to mutual benefit
• workforce skills for the 21st century - an employer’s view
• universities and businesses: a powerful partnership.

Professor Longhurst’s speech covered issues around work-based learning and the lessons learned from the development of Foundation degrees.

He told delegates that work-based learning, which often forms part of Foundation degree curriculums, is challenging the way universities are structured, the mindset of academics and their methods.
Degree of difference for the public sector

Public sector employers attended a special event at the House of Commons to showcase the way Foundation degrees can professionalise work-based training.

A diverse range of organisations were present at the event, which was hosted by fdf and Universities UK.

The event highlighted how the flexibility of Foundation degree programmes is perfectly suited to the way public sector organisations operate and offer a work-based qualification tailored to meet specific requirements.

For example, one of the major problems for the civil service is mobility or ‘churn’. With the recent Cabinet reshuffle, the department responsible for universities (DIUS), itself formed only two years ago, was merged with the department responsible for business and enterprise (BERR) forming the new, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

A Foundation degree in Government provided by the University of Portsmouth takes such changes into account and supports the learner across changing roles and departments. Learners come from a cross-section of departments and the retention rate is excellent – 100 per cent.

“The Foundation degree in Government is a unique programme having been designed with and, especially for, the civil service,” explained Dr Sue Tatum, fdf’s Director for Employer Partnerships (Public Sector).

“The Government’s Capability Review indicated considerable failings across Government departments with the need to enhance skills and ‘professionalise’ working practices.

“This programme provides a relevant and exciting learning opportunity for civil servants that addresses the areas of shortfall but also prepares learners to work flexibility and creatively. It is being very well received.”

Science Fds get £2.9m funding injection

Cogent, the Sector Skills Council for the science-using industries, is supporting the development and roll-out of modular, work-based Foundation degrees for the chemical, polymer, petrochemical, bioscience and nuclear industries.

The £2.9m project piloting bespoke courses for the science-based industries is being led by the University of Hull. It is called Working

Higher and the project fund includes a 50 per cent subsidy of the cost of the provision to the sector.

Working Higher is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) under their Employer Engagement Fund.

Cogent is responsible for stimulating demand and leading on employer engagement across these strategic industries. It will recruit an Employer Champion for each part of the sector to ensure a robust, employer-led programme.

The Cogent industries - Chemicals, Petrochemicals, Polymers, Nuclear and Bioscience/Pharmaceuticals - make strategic and economic contributions to the UK. They deliver at least 6.5 per cent of UK gross value added, with a turnover equivalent to the combined annual Government spend on health and education.

Although the industries are vital to the UK economy, Cogent has identified higher level skills gaps across the sector in areas such as project management and innovation as well as in higher level technical skills.

The Working Higher programme aims to fill that skills gap across these vital industries. It will support people already working in sciences to develop their talents and reduce shortages of expertise in a sector where many highly experienced individuals are moving closer to retirement.

While the University of Hull will be the administrative lead and some courses will be delivered at Hull, other key universities across the country, with relevant expertise, will deliver the programme for specific industries. The universities chosen to deliver Working Higher are:

• University of Hull (Petrochemicals)
• University of Portsmouth (Nuclear)
• University of Central Lancashire (Nuclear)
• University of Kent (Bioscience)
• London Metropolitan University (Polymers)
• Manchester Metropolitan University (Chemicals)

The Foundation degrees will consist of a number of core common modules, as well as bespoke elements for individual workers, and will be a mixture of university and work-based learning.
New Publications

**Apprenticeships and the role of Lifelong Learning Networks**

This publication identifies Lifelong Learning Network (LLNs) strategies that support apprentice progression to higher education. It captures effective practice that LLNs and others can learn from and build on. It also contains some clear messages for a wider range of stakeholders, including those with a policy remit.

**Review of research literature focused on Foundation degrees**

A substantial quantity of literature concerning Foundation degrees has been published in the eight years since their inception. This extensive review of research focused on Foundation degrees provides an up-to-date compilation of the material as well as suggesting an agenda for future research.

*fdf* produces a range of publications. A PDF of our publications can be downloaded from the *fdf* website at: [www.fdf.ac.uk/page.aspx?id=3](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/page.aspx?id=3). If you require printed copies please contact Kat Price [k.price@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:k.price@fdf.ac.uk)
Events

‘Do I really need to write an essay?’
Authenticity and assessment in Foundation Degrees

26th November 2009
Lakeside Conference Centre, Aston

A Student Assessment and Classification Working Group (SACWG) conference, supported by fdf

Following the SACWG November 2008 seminar on assessing work-based learning, SACWG are holding a one day conference to explore further current practices in this aspect of assessment on Foundation degrees.

If you would like to attend the conference or have any questions about the Guide or SACWG more generally, please contact Harvey Woolf at H.Woolf@wlv.ac.uk or Marion Redding at Marian.Redding@anglia.ac.uk.

Quality and responding to employer needs - Sharing good practice

1 December 2009
Lakeside Conference Centre, Aston University

A joint fdf, Higher Education Academy and QAA event, supported by HEFCE.

This conference builds on a QAA event held in July 2009 where participants were presented with the general findings of a survey into approaches to the quality assurance of employer responsive provision and discussed the contents of a forthcoming QAA publication on this area of activity.

The aims of this conference are:

1. to present the QAA survey findings in more detail
2. to launch a QAA publication on the quality assurance of employer responsive provision
3. to present a range of approaches to quality assurance of employer engagement from 9 HEFCE funded projects that have been identified and supported by the partnership
4. to have an understanding of fdf’s: Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA) Service

Outcomes:

1. the launch of a QAA publication
2. an appreciation of the implications for institutions in responding to this agenda
3. experience of the range of approaches to the quality assurance of employer engagement and work-based learning
4. knowledge of the fdf EBTA Service

For further details and to book a place go to:
www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/detail/1_Dec_2009_QAA_HEA_FDF_Conference
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