Browne Review: the future of fees policy and financial support

Progressive thinking helps employers

fdf and e-learning
The publication of this issue of forward coincides with announcements that will result in widespread changes in the higher education sector over the next five years. The Browne Report has recommended shifting the bulk of the costs of higher education away from the state and over to the student. Government has also announced 40% cuts to higher education teaching funding in the comprehensive spending review. In an article on page 3, Derek Longhurst considers the impact of Lord Browne’s recommendations and George Osborne’s spending plans and forecasts the shape of things to come for higher education.

forward continues to examine the impact that Foundation degrees have had on improving the skills of the UK workforce and widening participation. In the previous issue of forward researchers presented compelling evidence of the positive impact of Foundation degrees on the lives and careers of part-time students. In this issue Mantz Yorke and Jane Artess discuss the findings of research that explored the experiences of full-time students.

Other articles summarise the outcomes of some of the projects that forward has led. These include our work with unionlearn on raising awareness, and stimulating demand for, work-based higher education among employees. Pauline Maden reports on work to develop Foundation degrees for the Oil refining and Petrochemicals sectors.

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.

Esther Lockley
Editor
e.lockley@fdf.ac.uk

Welcome to forward

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The Browne Review: the future of fees policy and financial support

Derek Longhurst
Chief Executive, fdf

When ‘top-up’ tuition fees were first introduced by the Labour Government in 2006, the legislation required that there would be an independent review of the cap on fees in 2009-2010. The introduction of top-up fees was regarded as controversial and there was particular concern that fees may have a negative impact upon widening participation and social mobility. The Blair Government, despite its huge majority, only just won the parliamentary vote on the introduction of fees into higher education.

At the time there was also widespread concern across the higher education sector that the introduction of top-up fees remained just that – ‘topping-up’ state support for higher education and not its replacement.

The introduction of the cap on fees was regarded by elite universities somewhat negatively as they felt they could command higher fees from the students who gain access to them. It is notable, perhaps, that the percentage of state school-educated students entering Oxbridge has actually declined during the period despite OFFA requirements and injunctions about fair access.

This, then, was the context for the establishment of the independent review of higher education funding and student finance commissioned by the Labour Government in November 2009. The Commission, led by Lord Browne of Madingley, was charged with reviewing the operation of variable tuition fees after these had been in force for three years and making recommendations to Government on the future of fees policy and financial support for full and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The Browne Review published their final report (Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, 2010) in October and recommended a number of very substantial changes to the fees and financial support policies for higher education. Browne clearly anticipated a divided reaction from interested parties. This was reflected in the foreword of his report.

“Our recommendations will lead to a significant change; we do not underestimate the work that will be required. Since this review was commissioned the pressure on public spending has increased significantly. This will add urgency to make funding sustainable. We hope that, as these recommendations are debated, no one loses sight of the powerful role that higher education will play in continuing to build the greatness of this nation.”

Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, 2010, p3

Tuition fee cap

Prior to the publication of the Browne Report the media speculated that it would recommend removal of the £3,290 cap on tuition fees. This speculation proved to be accurate.
The report recommends shifting the cost of higher education away from the state and onto students. Consequently, there would be proposed drastic cuts to the teaching funding that the Government currently provides directly to institutions as a block grant and a huge rise in tuition fees for students. With exceptions in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) as well as medical and some healthcare provision, fees will cease to be ‘top-up’ fees but will replace state support for higher education other than through the provision of loans to students in order to be able to pay whatever fees institutions may charge.

Browne recommends that universities should be able to charge unlimited tuition fees and envisaged that fees would be set at between £6,000 and £12,000 per annum. There is a suggestion that those who can charge more than £7000 should ‘pay back’ a levy of a percentage of the fee payment in order to support families from poorer backgrounds gaining access to higher education. This seems to be regarded as one of the ‘progressive’ proposals in the report but is unlikely to be adopted by the government.

While Browne proposes that Government continue to meet the upfront costs of university education through tuition fee and maintenance loans to students, he also recommends that graduates repay these loans with real rates of interest and with penalties for early repayment. This recommendation is again thought to be ‘progressive’ in that it penalises wealthier families from paying off loans earlier and thus paying less interest on their loans than those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Government has now indicated that it is supportive of a rise in the cap on tuition fees. In a speech to the House of Commons on 3 November, David Willetts announced that the cap should be £6,000 with fees of up to £9,000 allowed if universities demonstrate commitment to recruiting students from lower income families and contribute to a £150 million scholarship scheme aimed at these students. In practice a fee of £6000 would represent a significant cut in current funding levels available through the combination of the HEFCE block grant and top up fees. This is in the region of £7250 p.a. for an undergraduate degree programme. Presumably institutions will either have to exceed the £6000 benchmark or make ‘efficiency gains’.

The Minister also confirmed that students will be required to repay loans once they earn over £21,000 per annum, as suggested by Browne, rather than the current arrangements that require students to begin repaying loans once they earn £15,000 per annum. He also outlined proposed interest rates for loans. Graduates on less than £21,000 will not be charged interest, while those earning between £21,000 and £41,000 will pay a rate increasing to a maximum of inflation plus 3%. For many subject areas the Browne recommendations will mean an end to HEFCE teaching funding, with departments relying on tuition fee income to cover the costs of teaching activities. The exception is for clinical subjects, science, technology and engineering and courses where Browne suggests additional public funding for these economically important areas. It is proposed that institutions will be allocated additional funding for a fixed number of places in these subject areas. One of the most dynamic sectors within the UK economy is Creative Industries, often drawing upon cross-disciplinary expertise, and it is far from clear how such issues will be addressed under the new regime.

**Student numbers**

The Browne Report indicates that universities should be allowed to expand and offer more places. Indeed, the report anticipates a 10% rise in student numbers. Many commentators have argued that the rise in fees proposed by Browne will have a negative effect on students applying for higher education with potentially disastrous effects on widening participation. The Government’s response seems to be to assume that this will not be so as the introduction of top-up fees in 2005 did not appear to deter students from poorer backgrounds entering higher education. This is a very big assumption.

A more controversial aspect of the Browne Report concerns the ways in which Government may increase its level of macroeconomic control on funding and maintenance costs. It is unlikely, at this point, that Government will pursue the recommendation that it should set a threshold each year, based upon the UCAS tariff, for students to be able to access loans. In a sense this would be regarded as an intervention too far in institutional autonomy especially in relation to the admission of students.

If the NUS and others are right and students are deterred from entering higher education because of the cost, competition among institutions may prove too much for some institutions. There is acknowledgement in the Browne Review that failure of some institutions is a real possibility. Strikingly, the Browne report recommends that the Higher Education Council (HEFCE without its ‘funding’ role) should become more regulatory and should have a budget of £100 million to manage mergers and institutional failures. HEFCE currently expends in the region of £4 million p.a. to support institutions needing assistance under ‘special measures’.

**Part-time students**

The Browne Review recognises that part-time students are disadvantaged by the current funding arrangements as they are required to pay fees up front and are typically entitled to very little financial support. Browne recommends that part-time undergraduates should be subject the same loan entitlements are full-time students. This will mean that part-time students will have access to tuition fee and maintenance
loans for the first time. This has been widely supported for some time by the sector and was endorsed by Government when David Willetts spoke on 3 November 2010.

While this may be regarded as one of the more positive developments, there may be some complications that will need to be addressed. Currently, institutions often subsidise their current part-time provision for social and educational reasons. Under the new market economy model being introduced it is quite likely that they will be forced to charge pro rata fees for part-time programmes. It is also not clear what will happen to those people in employment who may already be earning £21,000 as the Browne Report, like so much else, is shaped by the traditional model of full-time, campus-based higher education for younger students. There is no significant analysis of higher education access for those without UCAS tariff points in the Browne review more than an awareness that such people do exist and may come to higher education with work-based experience. It is suggested that institutions will be able to admit a percentage of such students.

**Securing a Sustainable future for Higher Education: a ‘paradigm shift’?**

In the event, the Browne Report attracted all of the media and sector attention just a few days before the Comprehensive Spending Review cut higher education spending by £2.9 billion and further education by £1.1 billion. Interestingly, this just seemed to reflect the ‘recommendations’ in the Browne report, adding to the sense that its ‘independence’ was very much informed by the deficit-cutting strategy of the Coalition Government. There are a few improvements in current arrangements for student funding and Ministers have been at pains to ‘talk up’ the significance of the Report and its recommendations as paradigm-shifting. Indeed, it difficult to see the report in any other way. Consequently, the Browne Report has been hailed as the successor to the Robbins and Dearing Reports into Higher Education.

This, it is not.

Robbins and Dearing were informed by a vision of higher education and were inspired by a sense of higher education as a ‘social good’ as well as a significant contributor to economic growth and performance. They were carefully-evidenced analyses of higher education and rooted in a concept of higher education that may be understood as the liberal tradition. Both commanded a high degree of consensus across the higher education sector. The Browne Report essentially provides the basis for a political fix around fees and public expenditure cuts by the Coalition Government. (For a more detailed analysis of the report, please see Thompson and Bekhradnia (2010)).

Where Robbins and Dearing commanded a high degree of consensus across the sector, the Browne report will be divisive. It will be broadly supported by elite institutions and serve to foster a more differentiated higher education sector. It will stimulate institutional competition as, apparently, an unalloyed ‘good thing’ and it remains to be seen what impact this will have, for instance, on higher education in further education contexts and collaborative partnerships between universities and colleges. The report takes an astonishingly simplistic and casual attitude to the possibility that some institutions may ‘fail’ in this new market economy taking no account whatever of the social and economic geography of the UK and the role of many institutions and colleges in their communities and regions.

Essentially, then, the Browne Report is informed by an ideological position that assumes that the introduction of a market economy into higher education will result in improved quality and accessibility of provision. It assumes that turning the student into the ‘consumer’ will ensure that institutions are kept up to the mark, a position that seems to cut no ice with the NUS. As the HEPI analysis details, it asserts many positions as if they were ‘givens’ or self-evident truths and is very short on evidence in many areas. Even Ministers have recognised that some of the Report’s proposals are unworkable and this is informing, therefore, the parliamentary approach to implementation of the Report’s recommendations.

In the first instance, there will be legislation to amend the previous legislation on fees to introduce the Browne Recommendations. Given the sensitivity of the issue within the Coalition Government itself (the ‘political fix’) this is likely to be pushed through parliament before Christmas so that the new funding arrangements can be in place for introduction in 2012-2013.

A White Paper on Higher Education will follow at some time in the New Year and this will address, it is assumed, more detailed proposals for the ways in which the Coalition Government will implement the Browne Report recommendations.
Conclusion

Despite protestations to the contrary, it is difficult to see the Browne Report and the Government’s proposals for future funding of higher education as ‘progressive’ in any sense. The amendments to existing arrangements that are improvements are relatively minor and could have been made without transferring the whole burden of cost and debt to the students and their families. In place of a concept of higher education as a general social good to which everyone desirably should have access, we now have the doctrine of ‘Who pays, wins.’ There seems to be some commitment to ‘fair access’ (how could there not be?) in both Browne and in Government policy but very little to the very different agenda of widening participation. It is not clear that this is a distinction that is understood.

As with so much else, the Government’s focus upon cutting the deficit seems to drive policy in higher education. There is, of course, rhetoric around growth, fairness, progressive policies, the ‘big society’ but most commentators have difficulty in understanding where there is any substance to this side of the equation. Highly respected economists such as David Blanchflower and Will Hutton have argued persuasively against the Coalition Government’s economic strategy, challenging the ‘spin’ of the UK being ‘on the brink’ and on the verge of bankruptcy. The point that is being made here is that there is evidence that deficit-slashing is not the only way to address the problems created as a consequence of the previous government’s bailing out of the financial services sector and major banks. This being the case leads to the suspicion that the Coalition Government is, indeed, pursuing an ideological agenda to cut the public sector.

If further evidence were needed, it is offered by UUK research The Global Picture (UUK, 2010) which provides a range of international comparisons, all of which demonstrate that other governments see higher education as an investment for long-term growth rather than a sector subject to ‘paradigm-changing’ cuts.

Dismantling is well under way across the public sector in the UK. It is very difficult to see any strategy for re-building.

References


The future of fdf

Derek Longhurst
Chief Executive, fdf

Foundation Degree Forward was established by government in 2003 to support the qualitative development of the (then) new Foundation degree qualification. A major aspect of our remit was to stimulate employer demand for – and engagement with – Foundation degree provision so that it did not become just another supply-side development. The priorities we established were focused upon generating employer partnerships that were sustainable and that integrated innovative approaches to work-based learning practice as well as greater degrees of flexibility in modes of learning and delivery.

Following a positive HEFCE Evaluation, fdf’s funding was extended in 2006 and the organisation was given a wider remit for developing employer partnerships with higher education generally and not just for Foundation degrees. As with the HEFCE investment of £100 million in institutional capability to deliver provision that is responsive to employer and employee demand, fdf’s funding was clearly supported by previous government policy and by the commitment to implementation of the Leitch Review of Skills (December 2006).

That policy context has changed under the Coalition Government and in October the HEFCE Board took the decision that it could not renew core funding for fdf beyond July 2011. A press release is available explaining some aspects of the rationale for this decision on the HEFCE website as well as at www.fdf.ac.uk. This focuses largely upon the successful achievement of the original remit for which fdf was established.

In line with the introduction of a market economy following the Browne Review recommendations it would seem that state support for ‘employer engagement’ will no longer be available. While government policy is not entirely clear on the matter, it is reasonably safe to assume that it will be predicated on the perspective that if there is demand for it, then those who benefit (employers, employees) should pay for it.

What does this mean?

In the short term the organisation will ensure that it is ‘business as usual’ and that we will fulfil all of our obligations to existing contracts, projects and initiatives. We will discuss existing work with the appropriate partner organisations with whom we are collaborating. We will also be looking at ‘legacy’ issues and securing arrangements that will support the continuation of much of our work and activities in different ways beyond 2011-2012.

As an organisation funded by HEFCE fdf will close down on 31 July 2011. The Funding Council is providing some limited funding for a further three months to ensure an orderly transition essentially to wind up accounting and auditing reports for the current financial year.

As HEFCE has stated, fdf has been a successful organisation that is particularly valued by the employers with whom we have worked. This is evidenced in an independent evaluation commissioned from the Work Foundation which will be published in 2011. We will be seeking new and creative ways of sustaining what has been achieved in what promises to be an uncertain and turbulent environment.
**Students’ experiences of full-time Foundation degrees**

In this short article we summarise a recent report commissioned by *fdf* and undertaken by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU). The report draws upon findings from the Futuretrack study of the career development and progression of the 2006 cohort of entrants to higher education (HE) being conducted by the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick on behalf of HECSU.

**Jane Artesse**  
Director of Research  
Higher Education Careers Services Unit

**Introduction**

Recent studies commissioned by *fdf* and others illuminate the complexity of the Foundation degree student experience and particularly the experiences of those who are studying on a part-time basis. However, rather less is known about the experiences of Foundation degree students studying on a full-time basis. In this report we seek to remedy this by using Futuretrack data to illuminate the experiences of full-time Foundation degree students as they apply to, enter and leave HE.

**Increasing their employability via HE was fun but hard work**

Most Futuretrack Foundation degree applicants decided to enter HE because they saw it as part of their longer-term career plans and believed it would enable them to get a good job. However, they also felt that HE was valuable in its own right, and expected the experience of being a student to provide them with opportunities for personal growth. At the end of their course, Foundation degree students described being a student as fun, but hard work. They felt that the experience of being a student had made them more employable, and were optimistic about their long-term career prospects.

Around a third of Foundation degree applicants indicated that they had chosen to study a subject because they enjoyed it, while over half applied to courses they believed would enable them to enter a particular occupation or lead to good employment opportunities in general. At the end of their course, four out of five Foundation degree students felt that the subject they had studied would give them an advantage when looking for work, and over three-quarters believed the skills they had developed on their course had made them more employable.

**Choices, advice and guidance**

Most Foundation degree applicants indicated that their choice of institution was determined by their desire to study a particular course. They were much less likely than students on other courses to be influenced by an institution’s reputation or its ranking in ‘good university guides’, and when they were reflecting on their experience only half felt that being a graduate of their university would give them an advantage when looking for work.

When asked about the advice and guidance they had received before applying to HE, Foundation degree

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1 Futuretrack is a four-stage study and the following numbers of Foundation degree participants form the basis of the data used in this report: Stage 1 is comprised of 3,681 applicants who were accepted to study full-time in HE in the 2006 UCAS application round and said they planned to study for a Foundation degree. Stage 2 is comprised of 1,279 applicants who said that they started a Foundation degree in 2006 and were currently in HE. Stage 3 is comprised of 237 applicants who were in their final year in HE and who said at Stage 1 that they planned to start a Foundation degree in 2006 and were accepted to enter HE, or who said in Stage 2 that they started a Foundation degree in 2006 and were currently in HE. Stage 4 is due to take place in 2011.
applicants indicated that the material provided by the institutions themselves was very useful, but felt that they would have benefited from more help and advice when choosing which course to study. Over a third felt that they had not received enough information about the relationship between HE courses and employment options, and more than half were dissatisfied with the advice they had been given about the career implications of their post-16 subject choices. Foundation degree applicants found teachers and lecturers to be a useful source of advice and guidance, but only a third found their school careers advisers helpful.

Throughout their studies Foundation degree students continued to turn to tutors and course leaders for careers advice, but in their final year nearly two-thirds had not used their university careers service at all. Some indicated that they did not need to use the service because they already knew what they wanted to do after they finished their course, but others appeared not to know what the service offered or why it would be applicable to them.

They would do it all again!

At the end of their HE experience, most Foundation degree students were still happy with their course, and two-thirds indicated that they would still choose to do the same course if they had their time again.

However, despite describing HE as a ‘good investment’ when they first applied, only around 40% of Foundation degree students felt that their course was ‘good value for money’. For many HE students, value for money is a judgement made on the relationship between cost and (employment) outcome. For Foundation degree students, their view may be a consequence of the structure of the degree, which enables some to choose to qualify after two years and enter the labour market, while others continue to ‘top up’ the Foundation Degree to honours by taking up further study.
Thus the progression to completion for Foundation degree holders is more complex than for (for example) bachelor’s degree holders. This particular context may affect the perception of value.

This finding is interesting in light of the Browne Review\textsuperscript{2} proposals, made on the basis of the following six principles:

1. There should be more investment in HE – but institutions will have to convince students of the benefits of investing more.
2. Student choice should increase.
3. Everyone who has the potential should have the opportunity to benefit from HE.
4. No student should have to pay towards the cost of learning until they are working.
5. When payments are made they should be affordable.
6. There should be better support for part-time students.

Specifically the Browne review notes:

“We have made the case that investment in HE should increase; the decision on whether this case is convincing will rest with students....This is an important choice, so it is vital that it is in the hands of the students who will be asked to pay more….We want to put students at the heart of the system. Students are best placed to make the judgment about what they want to get from participating in HE.”

(2010:25)

Our data here suggests that up to two thirds of Foundation degree students may be among those for whom the case for increasing the level of students’ investment in HE has yet to be made. As one of the students expressed it:

“I think that top-up fees are unfair as they stop a lot of people going into HE as it will take them at least 20 years to pay, which means they have to put off having a family, buying a house and/or a car. I believe that it is crippling this generation who have to have a degree for them to get anywhere in this world.”

Nonetheless, it appears likely that Foundation degree students would welcome the Browne proposal to streamline the processes of application to courses and to sources of finance. Our findings also suggest they would be likely to agree that more information about employment outcomes beyond HE is needed, along with better pre-HE advice and career-related support while studying.

In conclusion, comments from two students capture what they value about their HE learning:

“The time I spent at university has opened by eyes to opportunities that I have not been aware of previously. I have realised that there are subject areas that we sometimes make ourselves think are hard but are in fact interesting once you get involved in them. I have met people from every corner of the world, which has broadened my ideas and my views on some countries, as well as learning about a variety of different cultures.”

“Although I’m not sure what career I want to go into, the experience of being a full-time student has broadened my views of the world and given me a better outlook on how I will achieve my short-term goals.”

The report can be downloaded from the fdf website at www.fdf.ac.uk (see the publications library).

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\textsuperscript{2} Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: an independent review of HE funding and student finance, known as the Browne Review report is available at www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/s/10-1208-securing-sustainable-higher-education-browne-report.pdf
How was it for you?

Full-time Foundation degree students report on their placement experience

Mantz Yorke

Surveying ‘the placement experience’

Surprisingly little is known about the experience of students when undertaking placements with employers or voluntary organisations, especially in relation to Foundation degrees. A narrow window of opportunity presented itself in the spring of 2010 to undertake a small-scale and rapid survey in a limited number of institutions, focusing on full-time Foundation degree programmes. There is a spectrum of work-experience that can be seen in terms of work placement, and hence the term ‘placement’ was interpreted rather broadly.

The survey consisted of a short questionnaire that contained a mixture of ‘check-box’ and open-response items. Eight institutions circulated an electronic invitation to their full-time Foundation degree students to respond to the survey via a ‘hot-link’. The timing of the survey was not ideal, as institutions were coming up to the end-of-year assessments, and the pressure on staff was increasing due to cutbacks in the further education sector as a consequence of national economic retrenchment.

The survey attracted 43 responses, three-quarters from female students. As would be anticipated for full-time programmes, the majority of respondents were no older than 25, and almost all indicated that they were of white, British origin. The bulk of the respondents were on programmes with a leaning towards the social sciences; one in three was on a programme related to crime. Clearly, the respondents were not representative of the breadth of Foundation degree programmes.

The placement experience

On the whole, the respondents had a good appreciation of what their placement demanded of them. They were evenly divided regarding whether the placement work had been agreed with the employer beforehand; this may reflect the level of the students’ previous connection with the employer.

A majority (and in most cases, a substantial number) of the respondents said that:

- they had had sufficient opportunity to achieve what had been expected of them during the placement
- they had been supported by their academic institution
- they had been supported by their employer
- their placement had been challenging to at least a moderate degree
- they had been able to relate their academic studies to their workplace experience, and vice versa.

However, a majority felt that there had been little or no liaison between the academic institution and the employer.

The value of the placement experience

Twenty-seven respondents pointed to the value of the experience gained during the placement, such as the training provided by the employer; the actual workplace experience; working as a member of a team; and ‘shadowing’. In general, students saw the benefit of their placement experience for their future career. Some examples of what they said are:

“I now have a better understanding of the conditions and opportunities that are needed and have a better understanding of how the service functions in today’s society.”

“Now I have got an idea of what the world of work within IT involves and I would be more confident as I know what kinds of things to expect.”
"I know where I want to work as well as exactly what I want to do. It has also taught me to work a lot more productively within a short [space] of time and not lose my head with pressure."

"It has shown me different situations which a manager must deal with and the best ways in which to do so."

The gaining of personal confidence was mentioned explicitly by only two respondents, but is implicit in many of the comments that students made.

The great majority of students would recommend their placement fairly or very strongly.

Some specific issues

A few student responses pointed to issues that might benefit from attention, but it is important not to let apparent weaknesses cast clouds over a landscape that is generally bright.

Induction

Induction into the workplace is important where there has been no previous connection with the student. Although induction seems not to have been an issue in the vast majority of cases, one respondent made very clear just how important the initial phase of a placement actually is:

"I think the first day is very important, I felt as though they were unprepared for me, like they stuck me in a corner and forgot about me, and as time went on I got more confident, but I was very upset for the first two or three days of my placement, and it was only a three-week placement. It took me a while to get the confidence to ask what I was supposed to be doing when I ran out of things to do and I don't think that should happen, although I don't wish to have a babysitter I think guidance and reassurance on the first day would have been brilliant, I didn't even get a proper tour of the building or introduced to many people."

Induction (including the possibility of student lack of confidence or assertiveness) is an issue that could be addressed via institution-employer liaison.

Challenge

Three-quarters of the respondents had found their placement very or moderately challenging. On a couple of occasions, it appeared that the level of challenge by the employer had been excessive for the programme in question – though the success of one of the students had led directly to a good job. One-quarter of the respondents had found their placements not at all challenging. These varied responses point to the need to ensure that the expectations laid upon the students are commensurate with those of the Foundation degree programme as a whole.
Mentoring

A narrow majority of employers had provided the respondent with a mentor. However, in some circumstances the provision of a mentor by the employer is difficult, in that the employer may be too small or the student may be working on an employment-related placement based at the academic institution itself. In others, the line manager may in practice adopt the role of mentor. The provision of a mentor was associated with higher perceived levels of employer support (which is hardly surprising), higher levels of employer feedback, stronger liaison between institution and employer, and enhanced transfer of learning (in both directions) between the institution and the workplace.

Students received most of their placement feedback from the employer, whether or not from a designated mentor. In free comment, a few respondents testified explicitly to the value of support from their mentor. One wrote:

“The mentor had trust in me, and so did the other staff. This gave me confidence in situations I'd never been in before, such as classroom assistant, computer technician. This helped me realise my potential.”

In a handful of instances, the mentoring proved less successful. There were two instances of the mentor's absence through illness: the absence of a 'plan B' on the part of the employer left the placement student to drift, rather rudderless.

Assessment

Judging by the respondents' comments, the assessment of placements varied considerably. Some respondents were assessed by a member of their institution's staff (such as their tutor), others by a mentor or other person from the employer. The assessment of work-based learning raises a number of issues that are currently being addressed in a separate project sponsored by fdf.1

In summary

Within the limitations of this survey:

- placements seem generally to have been successful, giving students real insight into working for an employer
- the transfer of learning between academic institutions and workplaces seems generally to have been successful in both directions.

These points are entirely consistent with the rationale for the establishment of the Foundation degree qualification. Where, in the generally small minority of instances, respondents expressed reservations about their placement experiences, there are pointers towards the enhancement of the placement experience in the following areas:

- briefing regarding the placement
- strengthening the way in which expectations of the student are agreed
- induction into the placement
- clarifying roles and responsibilities, including the support system for students and the formative and summative assessment process.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to the institutions that supported this study, to the students who took the time to respond to the questionnaire, and to colleagues at fdf (in particular to Susan Hayday and Penny Blackie).

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1 fdf commissioned the Student Assessment and Classification Working Group (SACWG) to produce a guide to the assessment of work-based learning in Foundation degrees. A guide consisting of 18 principles supportive of good practice in the assessment of Foundation degrees and examples of practice offered by providers was published in August 2010. The guide is available from the publications library at www.fdf.ac.uk
Progressive thinking helps employers

Kim Langford
Marketing Consultant, fdf

Paul Groves
PR and Marketing Manager, fdf

As the concept of training and career progression becomes a key Government consideration, Kim Langford and Paul Groves look at employers adopting innovative programmes to develop their workforce.

The coalition Government is increasingly looking to higher education and further education in order to establish a skilled workforce ready to take advantage of emerging employment opportunities.

As the UK economy and employers come to terms with the effects of the recession, it is now more important than ever to identify and implement strategies to prompt growth, aid recovery and get Britain back to full employment.

The Government has signalled the importance of progression routes. Employers in both the public and private sector are looking to develop innovative workforce development solutions to help upskill, motivate and retain staff.

Vince Cable, Secretary of State at the Department Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), talked passionately about the importance of lifelong learning in his own background during his first major speech on higher education. Since then BIS ministers for Universities and Science (David Willetts) and Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (John Hayes) have spoken of the need to further develop the concept of progression.

In recent years there have been well-documented examples of successful progression routes developed by employers, such as BT’s flagship Higher Apprentices initiative. Now more employers are looking to enhance existing in-house training and work with higher education providers and other key stakeholders and partners to create original and bespoke workforce development and progression programmes.

Two leading household names in the UK economy – Airbus and Boots – are benefitting from such programmes. Here we look in more detail at these two employers.

Airbus apprentices fly high

Airbus is one of the world’s leading aircraft design and manufacturing companies. Innovation and excellence sit at the heart of the company’s mission and it boasts an impressive record of technological firsts.

The Airbus Higher Engineering Apprenticeship programme is a prime example of an employer-led, work-based progression route designed by industry, sector bodies and higher education partners to develop a higher-level workforce.

The company understands that both the need for its workforce to be adaptable and responsive to ever-changing market needs, and the recruitment and retention of a highly talented workforce, are essential if it is to continue to stay ahead of the game. It has developed the largest engineering manufacturing apprenticeship programme in the UK, with up to 600 in training every year.

To attract new talent from a diverse range of backgrounds, Airbus has led on the design and development of an innovative work-based learning progression route that has
the potential to take school leavers with GCSEs through to university level and professional qualifications. The Higher Engineering Apprenticeship scheme blends higher-level theoretical study with extensive ‘on the job’ learning. As Airbus has been involved in its creation and delivery, programme content is completely focused on the business needs of the organisation.

The programme brings together partners from industry, sector bodies and education. Airbus works with Deeside College, Glyndŵr University and the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (Semta) to develop, validate and deliver the apprenticeships and related training programmes and qualifications. The programme is now regarded by Semta as a model progression route for apprentices, and is also accredited by the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS) and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE).

Win-win for employer and employees

The apprenticeship scheme offers an opportunity to gain invaluable work experience, with most going on to secure permanent posts alongside the company’s 52,000 employees worldwide.

One of the biggest attractions of the programme is that it offers a great alternative to the traditional university approach. It offers a competitive salary on entry and paid holiday. Also, apprentices pay no tuition fees.

There are two levels: the Craft Apprenticeship (level 3) and the Higher Apprenticeship (levels 4 and 5), including the Foundation degree (FdEng) in Aeronautical Engineering. A bridging programme provides a route to a BEng (Hons) degree, and an MSc in Composite Manufacture for Aerospace Technology will be available from September 2010. A continuing professional development (CPD) programme is also in place to support apprentices in gaining Chartered Engineer (IMechE) status, which Airbus actively encourages. The route from Craft Apprentice to Chartered Engineer typically takes nine years to complete.

Co-funded by Airbus, the Welsh Assembly Government Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the scheme represents a significant investment for the company. It estimates that each fully qualified higher apprentice costs the company well over £50,000 including salaries, benefits and training costs. However, Airbus considers that the rewards to the company make this investment worthwhile, impacting directly on loyalty and staff retention.

“Many of our qualified engineers have come through the routes of Craft and Higher Apprenticeships and 70% of the company’s Senior Management Team have also come through this route,” comments Peter Ford, Training Partner for Airbus. “Several ex-Craft apprentices have completed the Higher Apprentices programme, incorporating the Foundation degree, and then subsequently progressed through to complete their BEng Honours Degree.”

Paul Brotherton is in the second year of his Higher Apprenticeship at the Airbus site in Broughton, North Wales. “My progression at work has allowed me to experience first-hand and understand many aspects of jobs at Airbus,” explains Paul.

“During my Craft Apprenticeship I was involved in manufacturing aircraft parts and now in computer-based design. Once I have completed my Higher Apprenticeship, I will have achieved Professional Engineer status and will have the choice of working in manufacturing, quality or design. My preference would be to work in design and I aim to progress to a master’s degree while working for Airbus.”

“The Higher Apprenticeship for me is very different to the Craft Apprenticeship in that it has more academic content, but because it is so closely linked with the practical aspects of my work I am coping well with studying for the Foundation degree.”

A typical week for Paul combines a demanding job with studying - three and a half days working full-time, gathering evidence and undergoing NVQ assessment, one full, 9-7 day at college working on the Foundation degree and a half day studying for all qualifications and meeting with tutors and assessors on site. He feels more than adequately supported to complete his apprenticeship.

“Support for learners is extensive and fully integrated with the working environment,” adds Paul. “Some of the staff teaching on the Foundation degree route are ex-apprentices and employees of Airbus, so are in touch with its changing business needs.”

Staff from Deeside College are based on site and offer support when needed through regular meetings or drop-in ‘surgeries’. Support is also provided by the company’s
Ashley Hayden (Ash) is proof of how new and innovative work-based higher education programmes can support working adults in gaining university-level qualifications and advancing their careers.

Despite leaving school with just one A-C grade GCSE, Ash is now pursuing a highly successful career in logistics and the 33-year-old is currently Operations Manager at Boots, with 400 staff and a multi-million pound budget. He owes his success to the support of his employers and his successful completion of a Foundation degree (FdA) in Logistics and Supply Chain Management.

Ash had little careers advice on leaving school. After a series of roles in manufacturing and being made redundant twice, he secured a post as a supervisor with Boots head office in Nottingham.

Boots makes considerable investment in training and development for employees and supports management progression through its ‘BABM’ scheme, where it pays the university fees of participants taking a BA (Hons) in Business Management and provides placement and mentoring support. Ash was too old to join the scheme when he started at Boots, although he now mentors BABM students.

Ash’s manager agreed to support him when he became one of the first cohort of learners to complete the Foundation degree in 2007. He has since gone on to complete his honours degree, which took a further two years. Boots funded Ash’s degree and provided time off for studying. Ash found learning as an adult and at work easier and more enjoyable than learning in school.

“The Foundation degree was brilliant – everything linked to Boots,” he says. “The course leader and tutors have all had careers in manufacturing and have a good understanding of current practice. I now understand the whole business and the supply chain and have had the opportunity to question why things are set up in the way that they are. It’s great how studying is totally linked to work and combines both theoretical and practical aspects of logistics and supply chain.”

Bill Esmond, Curriculum Manager for Higher Business and Computing at Chesterfield College and course leader, explains that the Foundation degree is geared to the needs of part-time students in work who having worked their way from shop-floor roles and are looking to progress through study.

“Like Ash, they are already outside traditional routes into higher education and ‘too old’ to follow these routes to successful careers by the time they are in their late twenties. At Chesterfield, as at other colleges, staff have taken the opportunities presented by Foundation degrees to create innovative paths for part-timers, leading from the workplace into higher education.

“That Ash now acts as a mentor to students on the same graduate training scheme he was earlier ruled out from reflects the way that he has grown during his time on this course. It also shows the potential for part-time students on innovative routes to make a real difference in the workplace.”

Ash’s course included just eight one- and two-day workshops in college, meaning he didn’t have to negotiate lengthy periods of study leave, a key plus point for his employer. Other study was undertaken through weekly online activity. Research, assignments and projects in the workplace, supported by his manager, were also part of the course.

“This kind of study requires commitment and self-discipline from students,” Bill adds. “They need to keep up with weekly reading, taking part in online discussion and completing assessed work, almost entirely in their own time. The programme requires students to produce work to the same academic standard as other undergraduates.”

Making progress

Ash believes it has all been worth it, in spite of the hard work and upheaval.

“There is no doubt that I have changed enormously as a person over this period of time and the experience has had
an impact on my whole life. I am convinced of the benefits of having taken this route. I have level 6 qualifications, letters after my name and my salary has doubled; I also have an enormous sense of achievement and am very grateful to Boots for investing in me.”

The benefit for Boots is that it has a loyal employee hoping to progress his career within the company. Ash can contribute much more to his work as a result of his new skills and knowledge, and has recently led a large strategic project.

Other large companies including Wilkinson and the Co-op have also followed suit. Bill comments:

“Employers find this model attractive. Wilkinson, whose sophisticated distribution operations are centred in nearby Worksop, sends students on the course every year and others are starting to follow this lead. This is one of the reasons why the course has been the only logistics Foundation degree in the country to run throughout the last five years.”

There is a recognised skills issue in the logistics sector, with 32% of those in management roles qualified to below level 2 (GCSE level) and less than a third qualified to degree level.

**Neli Dlamini**, Higher Skills Manager at Skills for Logistics, the Sector Skills Council, says:

“To maintain its competitiveness in a global environment logistics needs to keep developing the skills of its workforce. The Chesterfield College Foundation degree is a prime example of a work-based higher education programme that can support the upskilling of the logistics workforce and help it stay competitive.”

Reflecting on his last four years, Ash regards himself more of an enigma than an academic.

“I am one of the people from the shop floor who has done well,” he concludes. “I could only have done it from the workplace, I understand the context. Doing the Foundation degree showed that I was willing and able to learn. I have proved that to myself and to the company.

“I now feel passionate about the value of staff development for myself and others in the workplace. I hope to have a long career with Boots and to develop as a leader within the company.”
Apprentice progression to higher education: action research

Madeleine King
Mixed Economy Group of Colleges

Susan Hayday
Director of Workplace Learning Strategy, fdf

Introduction

In April 2009 fdf agreed with the Mixed Economy Group of Colleges (MEG) to undertake action research related to apprenticeship progression. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) agreed to provide support, a dedicated web portal for the project and meeting facilities. The research aimed to respond to selected recommendations in the Skills Commission report Progression through Apprenticeships.1

Recommendation 20: Apprentices should have access to bridging courses which develop additional skills, such as essay writing, enabling them to progress to higher education after completion of their apprenticeship framework.

Recommendation 21: The Government’s Panel on Fair Access to the Professions should ensure that the National Apprenticeship Service and the relevant Sector Skills Council’s work with the professional bodies to create clear pathways from apprenticeship through to the professions. All apprentices should be made aware of the qualifications and experience required to join the professions.

Recommendation 23: The Government should commission research into apprentices’ attitudes towards advanced further education and higher education and progression.

The research also aimed to demonstrate the feasibility of developing within apprenticeship programmes some of the features identified in University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) research2 for fdf into apprenticeship programmes that facilitate progression. We agreed to test out and apply relevant aspects of the research findings, with the aim of making a discernable difference to the prospects of apprentices progressing to higher education and influencing apprenticeship programmes more widely by developing models of transferable practice.

The project began in September 2009. It has been extended through to July 2011 to enable practices developed as part of the project to be tried and tested, and to allow some assessment of the impact made by each one.

A small number of MEG Colleges expressed interest in participating in the research. These were Wigan and Leigh College, Stockport College, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, St Helen’s College, New College Durham, City of Sunderland College, Newcastle College and Colchester Institute. The initial planning meeting identifies the following sectors in common: Health and Social Care, Engineering and Construction, Creative and Cultural – all sectors with a high volume of both advanced apprenticeships and higher-level skills needs.

Project overview

Each college undertook to investigate and develop a particular area of work and then share findings with others in the group. Those colleges would in turn implement the programmes or approaches developed by the initiating colleges and further refine them over the course of six months. Any significant changes were shared with other members of the project via the portal hosted by the HEA and discussion at regular project planning meetings. At the end of the project, a detailed report will be made of the nature of the programmes and their impact on apprentices and employers.

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The key project activities are as follows:

(a) Investigating the views of apprentices and their employers about onward progression to higher-level programmes/training

Questionnaires were devised (by Durham, Sunderland and Newcastle Colleges) to capture the views of apprentices and of employers. All colleges administered these to selected apprentice cohorts and their employers early in the academic year, and the results were collated. The responses indicate sector differences and a need for information and advice. It is intended to compare these responses with exit questionnaires which will be administered at the end of the academic year.

There were differences of view among apprentices over the extent to which higher education was of interest, or whether or not they were capable of it. However, a shared view among nearly all apprentices was that if they were to proceed to higher education it would be with the sole purpose of getting a better job more quickly. In most minds, higher study was seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Among the sector groups, interesting differences emerged. The hairdressing apprentices were well informed about higher education, but while they were interested in the option, they were the only group who considered themselves less capable of the academic study involved.

Painting and decorating apprentices were equally informed but the least interested in the option, citing the impact of having to take time off work and the cost involved in pursuing higher education. Few had friends who had gone on to degree-level study. A similar pattern of responses was gained from joinery and construction apprentices.

The group most likely to move on to higher education were those pursuing engineering or electrical apprenticeships. They were well-informed and were confident that they had the ability to progress. A large percentage had friends who were graduates.

What emerged from the apprentice questionnaires was not unexpected. The apprentices have begun to get into a work routine and by the time they qualify, they will be used to earning money – and many can expect to earn reasonably well for their age. Giving this up, even if part-time study was arranged such that they could continue in work across the day, was not something that they would readily consider.

The results of the employer questionnaires varied between sectors and with the size of the company, but a common thread was that they would support apprentices who wanted to continue their studies to a higher level.

(b) Focus groups of apprentices were held by each college to explore attitudes in more depth

The focus groups were held in June/July and were established to track the changes in apprentice perceptions and confidence about higher education from the time they first joined the college. While not all apprentices answered both the initial questionnaire and then took part in the focus groups, they had all been exposed to the same programme inputs. Little change had taken place in the initial attitudes found on entering college, with the hairdressing groups remaining the least interested in moving on to higher education. In part, this is due to the current economic climate – most are concerned with immediate issues such as remaining in employment. Among other sectors, recent inputs from careers and teaching staff about related higher education courses had obviously been taken seriously, but
still with the caveat that it would be undertaken in order to achieve a career advantage, and almost certainly not undertaken immediately upon completing an apprenticeship.

In almost all cases, apprentices considered that their parents would be supportive of any plans to go on to degree-level study. The only exception to this was the hairdressing cohort, where parents were perceived to be disinterested and to know little about higher education.

The focus next year will be on advising and updating employers.

(c) Advising and preparing apprentices for onward progression – Wigan and Leigh College, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education, Stockport College

The main aims of this strand were to work collaboratively to:
• develop a method for structuring sessions in apprenticeship programmes to embed understanding of higher education progression, and
• develop a plan for delivering information, advice and guidance (IAG) that normalises higher education progression for learners, advisers and employers.

The key activities agreed by the group were to:
• provide on-going advice to apprentices about higher education and potential progression opportunities, utilising specialist guest speakers where appropriate
• provide training for all workforce assessors and tutors involved with apprentices to develop their understanding of higher education and the progression routes available to apprentices
• offer the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance ‘Step into HE’ programme to apprentices and begin development of a flexible online ‘Step into HE’ module to develop and build the necessary higher education skills and understanding for apprentices
• share and utilise relevant Aimhigher resources for training and IAG, such as an Aimhigher flow chart showing apprentices how they can progress via vocational routes
• ensure Aimhigher and Foundation degree routes are given higher priority at open evenings, higher education progression events and employers’ events to generally raise awareness about higher education progression.

(d) Health and Social Care – Colchester Institute, New College Durham and St Helens

The focus in this strand is on sharing practice through two events:
• New College Durham will host a one-day workshop event on ‘Progression Week’
• Colchester Institute will host a one-day workshop event on ‘Sharing Best Practice in Developing Foundation Degrees in Health and Social Care’.

These workshops will be delivered in October but in the meantime one-page briefings on the key content of each of the events will be produced and shared.

(e) Engineering and Construction – Newcastle College and New College Durham

There are two strands of activity:
• to build knowledge and understanding of apprentices and their employers of existing Foundation degree progression routes
• to explore progression through awarding body/professional body qualifications and recognition.

For the latter a central meeting is being planned to enable each area to discuss how craft apprentices can progress through to higher education and potentially achieve professional status. A paper has been produced outlining engineering pathways to professional status.

(f) The Creative sector – Newcastle College and Stockport College

The original plan was to produce a comparative study of the different apprenticeship models being developed in the North West and North East to take account of the self-employed status of many creative workers and the consequent different relationships with employers. However, the main college concerned has withdrawn from the project. It was agreed that Newcastle College would provide a case study based on Newcastle’s Creative and Cultural Foundation degree.

An alternative approach

In the creative and cultural sector, apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 are unsustainable because there is no demand for skills at that level. Rather, the demand is for higher apprenticeships, for which the Foundation degree provides a good basis in a range of creative and media-related subjects. The case study describes how Newcastle College went about meeting sector demand for higher-level skills in the areas which provide the infrastructure for companies which recruit Creative and Culture graduates — that is business, finance and senior management skills. The case study therefore includes:
• the ways in which Newcastle College has worked with employers on workplace progression for employees
• how the workforce became engaged with the opportunity to progress on to higher education
• the nature of the students, how their needs for ‘stepping up’ to higher education were assessed and addressed
• the nature of induction and use of webcams to simulate face-to-face engagement.
This provides a useful comparator study to the work currently being undertaken within the project group. It offers a number of lessons for supporting transition to higher education of advanced apprentices in other sectors.

**Other emerging factors**

The current state of local economies has clearly had an impact on many apprentices in terms of their approach to higher education. While few are sufficiently concerned about the costs of higher education for this to be a barrier to progression, many are taking the view that the basis for future prosperity is to remain in employment and to pursue higher education if it is clearly the means to better pay and prospects. It is not seen as an end in itself.

So far, employers have proved supportive of the idea of employees undertaking further study. What has not yet been tested is their willingness to fund this activity, either in cash or in kind.

**Outcomes from activities**

(a) **Organisational factors**

Colleges are reporting that involvement in the project has stimulated new thinking and new practices wider than the scope of the project. While curriculum change was identified as a likely outcome of the project, the colleges involved were also aware of the possibility of organisational changes that cooperation between college departments concerned with higher education and with apprentices might bring.

One interesting finding is that college structures can inhibit/support putting in place activities to support progression. For example, where higher education departments are separate from work-based learning departments there is a lack of shared knowledge about apprentices as potential higher education learners, and of potential progression pathways for apprentices. This is something the project is addressing. In Stockport College, for example, the project has instigated closer working between the higher education and apprentices departments in the form of joint meetings and collaborative working, and has laid the foundations for further collaboration. The key role adopted by the Higher Education Widening Participation Officer as link between the two departments has produced a lasting change in the collaborative working of two areas of the college, and in the development of shared values and objectives.

Other colleges have found that where responsibility for apprenticeship programmes is distributed between schools or subject areas, it is much more difficult to introduce and embed new practices.

The project has generated very positive cross-college working and relationships. The three organisations share good practice and provide each other with solutions to problems or difficulties any one of them is experiencing.

Anecdotal feedback from students suggests completing the questionnaires and attending the focus group sessions has acted as a catalyst for more consideration of the opportunities available to them regarding progression as an option.

(b) **Impact**

Destination data will be analysed for 2008-10 and 2009-11 cohorts. Additional questions regarding attitudes to higher education and apprentices’ intentions to move on to higher-level learning are being introduced into exit interviews for advanced apprentices in July 2010 and again in 2011 to see if there are observable changes.

**Conclusion**

While the work described is in progress, there are nevertheless some emerging messages. Colleges are recognising the difference that inclusion in apprentice programmes of information and guidance about higher learning opportunities can make to apprentice aspiration, albeit the value of higher learning is perceived differently across sectors. It is clear that for this group that traditional campus-based higher education is not an option they are considering; local work-based higher education that they can access while still drawing down a wage is what will attract.

The project has also generated messages for providers about the benefits of structuring links between work-based and higher education departments and of embedding effective practice, such as for provision of advice and guidance and development of higher-level skills. We expect the final project outcomes to also suggest the further elements that need to be in place to support transition to higher learning for apprentices and to draw down support from their employers.
**Introduction**

The ‘**fdf** Employer and Provider Partnership Tool Kit’ was described in a previous issue of **fdf**’s journal, *forward*.1

Why revisit the Tool Kit now? The Tool Kit encourages institutions to review employer engagement in terms of where they are, where they want to be and how they are going to get there.

The impact of the recession, changes in government policies, funding for higher education and the external environment, along with the current government’s pledge to put employers “at the heart of a responsive and flexible skills system”, mean that successful employer partnerships and engagement are even more crucial for sustainable higher education.

Institutions who have utilised the Tool Kit have requested that we provide an analysis of the lessons learned and outline how institutions are making effective interventions in moving forward with the employer partnership agenda.

This article brings together the views of staff attending the Employer Partnership Tool Kit workshops during the period 2007-2010 and seeks to encapsulate the lessons learned and changes that need to happen in supporting the development of successful employer partnerships and engagement.

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Over the period 2008-2010, the Tool Kit workshops have evolved, taking in a broader environment and more stratified audiences, in line with the changes in the external environment and the needs of the institution(s) concerned. Each workshop was customised to the particular requirements of the provider institution through an initial briefing session with an agreed proposal for each institution taking up the FDF offer.

The Tool Kit was used successfully at a number of different levels within institutions including partnership teams, senior management teams, business support teams, individual faculties, and cross-institutional teams. This provided a sound basis for raising a range of opportunities and challenges that will face institutions over the next period. The most effective model was to deliver to the Senior Management Team and then provide support materials for cascade within the institution, as many of the key issues raised by participants related to decisions required by senior management.

**Content**

In addition to the basic ‘Tool Kit’, which focuses on the self-assessment and building partnerships, the content of the workshop has been considerably extended over the period to meet the challenges of the changing external environment, including:

- strategic planning for employer partnerships focused on numbers, income generation and diversification, sustainability and choosing the right partners
- organisational models for off-campus learners – dealing with transition, up-skilling staff, maintaining quality of learning experience for students and not overloading employers
- curriculum models for integrating professional qualifications, private providers and bite size chunks of learning, including more extensive use of accreditation of prior learning (APL)/accreditation of certificated learning (ACL)
- shell frameworks – development of innovative curriculum, efficiency savings and modernisation of processes
- APL – implications, policy and processes determined by planned scale and scope of APL integrated with ACL
- employer-based training accreditation (EBTA)
- workplace learning – linked to higher skills and knowledge requirements, differences between sectors, drivers for change, building on the work of Sector Skills Councils, Regional Development Agencies and so on, integration of in-house training, private provider/supplier training, voluntary work and college/university modules.

**Outcomes from the sessions**

The type of educational institution is important when considering employer engagement. There is no ‘one size fits all’. While the Tool Kit holds for LLNs, universities and colleges, the emphasis and presentation changes with each institution depending on their culture, their specialism, location and size and the level and range of participants in the workshops. However, the outcomes from the sessions were very similar, despite the different pattern of attendance.

Staff had a clear view on the implications arising from their discussions, how to move forward and the action required in terms of required interventions and implications. Participants identified several challenges in relation to:

- the purpose and detail of the employer/economic engagement strategy
- the ‘ad hoc’ approach to the development of partnerships
- the fundamental culture shift in meeting the needs of off-campus learners
- organisational models for managing off-campus learning
- curriculum development
- resources – the need to identify new resource allocation models
- increasing and expanding learning support services for off-campus learners
- working in silos between faculties and/or service units
- perspectives of academic staff, capacity, capability and staff development
- human resources – HR policy, strategy and staff contracts, reward systems, work allocation models, succession planning
- systems not geared up to off-campus learner support and management
- finance – the need for adequate costing and pricing models with the need for improved commercial practice, employer contracts and the move to income generation rather than funding
- information systems – learning platforms, management information systems, customer relationship management together with appropriate data collection, analysis and management
- marketing – the role and function of marketing.
Lessons learned

Institutions largely funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and with a vocational emphasis, will face radical change over the next few years. The move towards diversification of income streams, demographics, and government policy will lead to a continued requirement for higher education institutions to engage more effectively with employers and initiate new forms of partnership in learning.

Institutions who engaged with the ‘Tool Kit’ found it instructive. Although many institutions already had employer engagement, APL, work-based learning and an innovative curriculum, they found, by undertaking the self assessment, that their current operations were not scalable or sustainable in the new environment. They also identified the need for more effective data collection, analysis and management of employer engagement at an institutional level.

Effective interventions

The challenges that exist in managing the transition period and moving employer engagement from a peripheral to a core activity will need effective interventions. Participants identified a range of interventions. However, successful intervention depends on the profile of the institution, where it is now and where it wants to be. Participants were in general agreement that there will be more mature, off-campus learners who cannot attend institutions and must learn in the workplace. Effective interventions need to be underpinned by a change in culture from provider centric to employer centric. This will result in a change to core activity and is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Institutions need to be encouraged to utilise the ‘Tool Kit’ since it is easy to shrug off the need for the self assessment by saying “we already have a strategy for employer engagement and we have work-based learning, APL and innovative curriculum”. On closer inspection, they were not always effective in communicating the scale and scope of employer engagement that will be required over the next five-year period and they were not scalable to the new environment. Major challenges identified by participants are detailed below.

Strategy

Participants identified the need for further development of an economic engagement strategy, fully supported by senior management champions and resources, which is associated with a business plan for employer engagement that quantifies the scale, scope, income generation and net income requirements. The time scale for developments will need to be a five-year period and can be achieved through incremental steps supported by appropriate resource and work allocation models.
**Employer engagement**

Employer engagement has, in the past, often been achieved through serendipity or on an ‘ad hoc’, scatter gun approach. This will not work as more institutions see employer engagement as a core activity. Institutions will need to plan how to manage and organise employer contacts. Employers are faced with multiple approaches from even single institutions and higher education in general is in danger of ‘killing’ the potential market. In addition, some institutions, working on a devolved faculty/school basis, may not hold sufficient management data at an institutional level to make appropriate decisions or monitor and evaluate success in employer engagement. Key challenges arose in relation to the level of income to be generated, the numbers of students involved, the balance of numbers between engagement with large employers and SMEs, the type of relationship and the products/services to be offered.

**Partnerships**

Partnership development, within employer engagement, was another key challenge in terms of definitions and practice. Collaboration and partnership tended to take on specific meaning according to the regulatory framework within which the institution operated. Participants felt it may be more useful to adopt a more open approach and explore new opportunities with employers, other higher education institutions and further education colleges, regional bodies and private providers. It was also identified that many academic regulatory frameworks were written primarily for 18-25 year-old, on-campus learners and that a review of the regulatory framework may be necessary.

**Organisational models**

Participants identified the next five years as a transition period within which there may be a need for a range of organisational models for managing off-campus learning as the growth and scope of employer engagement development was achieved. There is a need to ensure consistency in approach, quality and standards and costing and pricing of services to any one employer, but the management and organisation of the relationship changes as growth is achieved. There is also a need to know what not to develop. This can be a challenge for many institutions. Finding the right criteria, and using management tools to select what not to do, has implications for data collection, management and analysis.

**Curriculum development**

Innovative curriculum development, building on the current shell frameworks, together with the development of full-cost economic activity is essential in securing sustainable, effective, cost-efficient employer engagement. Part-time, off-campus learners cannot usefully be offered a full-time award offered in ‘bits’. Issues arose relating to their past learning, their preferred learning style, opportunities for learning, the quality of the learning experience, the need for different types of learning support and progression. In addition, the differences between off-campus and on-campus learning involve a fundamental culture shift from teaching to facilitating learning. All of these issues need to be considered carefully.

Participants identified the need to adopt a holistic approach and integrate the development of innovative curriculum (shell frameworks, short courses, bite-sized learning, in-house training and private provider training) with work-based learning, APL, and employer engagement (see Figure 2).
Staffing

There were a number of issues in relation to strengthening employer engagement and the cultural shift in moving from a teaching to facilitating learning focus. Staff recruitment, succession planning and development needs to be informed by the employer/economic engagement strategy if these initial developments are to be sustainable.

There was a genuine fear expressed by staff in terms of maintaining quality and standards, their capacity and capability to work in this environment and a distrust of the concept of learning in the workplace. Staff development to enhance capacity and capability is essential in planning for work in the new environment. This has implications for HR and the employment contract, and also the need to profile staff and keep a database of expertise and capacity.

Participants also expressed concern about their ability to deliver where there are silos between faculties and/or service units that lead to ineffective use of resources, and also where there is an inability to meet employer demand, even where a product/service has been requested.

Resources

Participants identified the need for improved resource allocation models. The identification of appropriate materials and resources that will support full-time, part-time and work-based learners will provide the highest return on investment. There needs to be a focus on the collection, storage and development of such materials for sustainability and a reduction in the carbon footprint. Participants identified the importance of online learning to employers and students. However, staff also noted the need for blended and not distance learning for those who cannot be released regularly to attend an institution. This will mean the development of improved delivery models where face-to-face activity can be either institution based or online.

Information systems

Systems need to be geared up to off-campus learner support and management. The infrastructure for managing and delivering higher education in the workplace often needs to be reviewed. This results in revised policies and procedures (depending on the scale and scope of employer partnerships), the location of learners and the use of work-based learning as part of the student experience. The impact on systems is variable and determined by the organisational model for economic engagement. However, discussion covered the following essential areas:

- Learning platforms – Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) – together with appropriate data collection, analysis and management
- Management Information Systems (MIS) – the developments in workplace-based learning and employer engagement have substantial implications for data collection, management and analysis, which in turn impact on the VLE, MIS and CRM systems.

Marketing

Workshop participants reported a general need to improve communications vertically and horizontally within institutions to achieve employer responsiveness, enable greater dissemination and sharing of good practice and reduce/eliminate duplication of effort. It was felt that often there was inappropriate marketing not focused on the potential market with appropriate support materials. Marketing and market research with an employer focus is essential.

Continuous environmental scanning is required for government policies and strategies, regional developments, related agencies and industry-based trends to ensure that information is focused on future needs of employers and students in the workplace. What does the employer need to know, and how quickly can they satisfy their need for information? Participants identified the need for a product/service catalogue and an employer prospectus (both hard copy and online). Information needs to be focused on opportunities for the industry/profession, short courses and expertise not, initially, on qualifications and awards.

Finance

Participants identified the need for effective costing and pricing models and employer contracts to underpin employer engagement and employer contribution analysis. This would ensure improved commercial practice and a move to income generation. There is a need for further debate on what constitutes employer contribution and the need to track and record it properly.

Human resources

Issues here related to HR policy, strategy and staff contracts. Participants felt that often there was an inflexible approach to deployment for this type of activity. This has implications for contractual arrangements, reward systems, work allocation models, succession planning, capacity and capability.
Conclusions

All of the participating institutions were very positive in their approach to the workshops. It was also evident that they were already:

- building on a wide range of good practice and experience
- recognising the true impact of the internal and external environment
- seeking to move forward constructively in line with government policies and sound educational practice.

However, in the future, the scale and scope of employer engagement, together with the number of potential students off campus, requires a radical rethink of institutional operations and processes.

Two major outcomes of the workshops were:

- universities and colleges benefited from undertaking the self assessment in reviewing their readiness to take on large-scale employer engagement and off-campus learning
- off-campus activity is not just a quick modification of on-campus learning, rather it is a separate business strand and requires a number of interventions for success.

Do you want to take on the challenge of the Tool Kit? If so, contact Susan Hayday, *fdf* Director of Workplace Learning Strategy at susan.hayday@fdf.ac.uk.
Accessing higher education in the workplace – a joint project between fdf and unionlearn

Sean Ruddy  
Project Worker, unionlearn (SERTUC)

Susan Hayday  
Director of Workplace Learning Strategy, fdf

Introduction

Much of fdf’s on-going work is with employers and employer representatives, working in partnership with higher education to support workforce development. The overriding concern is to help generate provision that meets identified higher skills gaps. However, fdf is also concerned with supporting adult workers to identify and access higher education opportunities that will enhance their career development and has developed a range of resources for workplace advisers and learners.1

In this context fdf values its partnership with unionlearn. We share with unionlearn a commitment to transforming workers’ life chances through higher-level learning and as a result signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with unionlearn in 2009 to underpin our joint working. One outcome of that memorandum was a joint project with SERTUC (South East Region Trade Union Council), Accessing higher education in the workplace.

1 Resources for advisers and learner support www.fdf.ac.uk/page.aspx?id=49
As detailed below the project has had a number of successful outcomes, but notably it has enabled involvement of unions in fdf’s workforce development initiatives with employers and sector bodies. The project has been instrumental in drawing together unions, their employers and higher education providers in new initiatives.

While making effective use of existing fdf and unionlearn resources to increase the capacity of unions and union learning reps to promote higher-level learning, the project has also generated new resources to meet further needs identified by union members. As this article demonstrates, the project has developed and identified a range of effective practices, and fdf looks forward to further work with unionlearn to embed these practices more widely in workplaces.

**Higher learning and trade unions**

As representatives of many individuals in the workplace, trade unions and the TUC have long campaigned to raise the skills of Britain’s workforce to the benefit of all stakeholders; it is good for the country’s competitiveness and helps people find more fulfilling and better paid jobs.

From the early 1990s, the TUC and then unionlearn have become more involved with lifelong learning. The establishment of the Union Learning Fund in 1998 helped trade unions to recruit Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) – volunteers who provide expert advice and guidance and securing learning and training opportunities for the learners. This activity was greatly enhanced through the statutory recognition of ULRs. This work has grown so much so that the now 22,000-plus ULRs helped over 200,000 of their colleagues to re-engage with learning and drive up the skills level of the workforce in the last year alone. Trade unions, members and employers recognise the benefits of ULRs and learning through unions.

During this period, trade unions and their ULRs have been linking into the higher education sector and encouraged and supported more learners to undertake higher learning. Unions have worked with their members, ULRs, employers, higher education institutions (HEIs) and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to overcome barriers and provide support.
Trade unions now aim to put higher education on the agenda in their engagements with employers, providers and members – while providing members with the flexibility and support to undertake higher learning.

**Higher learning and government**

The project Accessing higher education in the workplace was initiated under the previous Government. They were committed to increasing work-based higher learning in order to help achieve the Leitch Review’s target of 40% of people of working age to have obtained a qualification at level 4 or above by 2020. The current Government has indicated that they will continue on the same course by taking action to create more college and university places, foster stronger links between universities, colleges and industries, and review support for part-time students in terms of loans and fees.

**Accessing higher education in the workplace project**

The Accessing higher education in the workplace project, the first higher education-specific project by SERTUC unionlearn, aimed to raise awareness of higher education among ULRs and union members, and to enhance the information, advice and guidance available to them by providing a practical guide and toolkit, as well as a two-day training course for ULRs.

The project aimed to bring together trade unions and their respective employers with higher education providers, to encourage development of relevant work-based higher education. Subsequent to the project SERTUC will work with the ULRs and HEIs to set up workplace union learning clubs to support employees that are engaging with higher learning.

**Project aims**

The key project aims were to:

1. raise awareness of work-based higher learning among ULRs and union members
2. enhance the information, advice and guidance available to union members
3. engage trade unions and their respective employers in consideration of higher-level learning
4. develop partnerships with higher education providers to the benefit of union members.

1. **Raise awareness of work-based higher learning among ULRs and union members**

Existing unionlearn and fdf material, along with examples of existing union higher education activity, was used to inform workshops at national unionlearn and fdf conferences, at unionlearn SERTUC conferences, at a promotional event in July 2009 and at briefings at over 20 smaller ULR forums.

Overall, the project worker briefed over 400 ULRs/union members about the project. Briefings were followed up with one-to-one meetings where ULRs were interested in finding out more.

2. **Enhance the information, advice and guidance available to union members**

A pre-existing unionlearn publication Supporting union learners into higher learning – a toolkit for union learning reps, was promoted and distributed to ULRs. A two-day Supporting learners in higher learning module for ULRs was also promoted and run at a number of trade union education centres in the region.

Posters and leaflets were developed for use in the workplace to promote higher learning, and information about higher learning was uploaded on to the unionlearn website. These were signposted to ULRs via email alerts and the unionlearn SERTUC newsletter update. ULRs were also signposted to the unionlearn Climbing Frame2 and the fdf adviser web pages.3

In order to enhance ULRs’ information, advice and guidance, and to make higher learning self-sustaining in the future, a number of case studies and a guide Higher education at work: making the case to employers – a guide for trade union reps4 have been produced. The guide aims to assist union reps negotiating with employers about higher learning and has been developed with the help of ULRs.

2 www.climbingframe.unionlearn.org.uk
3 www.fdf.ac.uk/page.aspx?id=49
4 www.fdf.ac.uk/downloads/279/20100616105431HE%20at%20work%20guide.pdf
3. Engage trade unions and their respective employers in consideration of higher-level learning

Trade unions, employers and SSCs have been engaged throughout the project. Four key sectors were targeted. Priority was given to the:

- **Finance sector** (Unite)
- **Local authorities sector** (multi-union Unison-engaged, LB Waltham Forest- Middlesex University and multi-union GMB-engaged, Brighton City Clean)
- **Energy sector** (Unite and Prospect)
- **Logistics sector** (Unite) – Skills for Logistics and Thames Valley University

Progress was made in all these sectors with a higher education awareness session held for Unite’s ULRs in the finance sector; a proposal for involvement in higher education being developed for Unite’s Energy Sector (with potential involvement of Cogent and fdf); and through work being undertaken with Unison, Middlesex University and fdf to develop a Foundation degree for local authority staff in London.

During the project over 45 engagements have been made with trade unions (officials and reps), 10 direct engagements have been made with employers and six engagements have been made with SSCs. Links have also been made with other unionlearn/TUC and fdf projects. Support and information, advice and guidance was also given to the learning at work day (LAWD) events held in the region at 27 workplaces.

Overall, the project has worked with 16 trade unions in 19 sectors that encompassed 43 employers in over 60 workplaces. These included:

- **LB Waltham Forest** (multi-union, Unison-engaged)
- **Royal Mail** (CWU)
- **EDF** (Unite and Prospect)
- **Britannia Building Society** (BSU)
- **BT** (Prospect and CWU)
- **London Fire and Rescue Service** (FBU)
- **Kent Fire and Rescue Service** (FBU)
- **Brighton City Clean** (multi-union, GMB-engaged)
- **St Edmundsbury Borough Council** (multi-union, Unison-engaged)
- **Royal Sun Alliance** (Unite)
- **Royal Bank of Scotland** (Unite)
- **HMRC** (PCS)
- **Addenbrookes** (multi-union, Unison-engaged)
- **BT** (multi-union, Prospect-engaged)
- **HMRC** (FDA)
- **Air France** (Unite)

4. Develop partnerships with higher education providers to the benefit of union members

Meetings were held with over 10 HEIs and Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) to inform them about the trade union role in higher learning. They included the Open University, Birkbeck, Anglia Ruskin University and Middlesex University. Subsequently, four of the HEIs made offers to union learners, for example a two-thirds reduction for Foundation degrees in Management starting in September with Anglia Ruskin University for staff at Addenbrooke’s Hospital, which were promoted to URLs/trade unions, and 12 joint meetings have been held between trade unions and HEIs. Additionally, an HEI checklist has been developed for HEIs to enable them to work more effectively with unions.

Engagement with HEIs has lead to the project signing three Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs):

- Kingston University’s MoU gave union members the opportunity of signing up for a Foundation degree at a 50% reduction in course fees
- the LLN National Forum MoU focused on the link between higher education and apprentices
- Birkbeck’s MoU includes a 10% reduction in course fees for all courses (subject to the course being a progression for the learner).

Talks will continue with other interested HEIs.

The project also engaged ULRs/trade unions and their respective employers in discussions about relevant higher education programmes and opportunities. It also facilitated talks between stakeholders to generate higher-level skills activity in the region. Initially, the project assisted:

- the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) to sign up 21 learners to its Supporting Teaching and Learning Foundation degree
- two learners from Britannia Building Society to enrol on the Kubis higher education course via the Britannia Staff Union.

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5  www.fdf.ac.uk/page.aspx?id=35
6  www.unionlearn.org.uk/advice/learn-3625-f0.cfm
Additionally connections have been made with existing *fdf* work in local authorities, with *fdf* work in the energy and ICT sectors, and with TUC Education and the TUC’s Recession and Recovery Project, Apprenticeship Project and with Skills Policy Officers.

The project worker has assisted:
- FBU to sign up 62 learners from the *London Fire and Rescue Service* to the Open University’s opening courses
- Unison to sign up 30 learners from *Addenbrookes*’ Hospital to the ARU Management Foundation degree that commenced September 2010
- FDA to recruit 30 learners to a two-day higher-learning course provided by Middlesex University in September.

Overall, over 150 learners have been signed up to higher-learning courses. In the months to come, ULRs in the workplace will be encouraged to work with HEIs to set up union learning clubs.

In addition, progress has been made with stakeholders to identify progression pathways for level 2/3 learners into degree programmes. For example, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in Kent is accessing Kent University’s *Making Your Experience Count course*; Prospect at Ordnance Survey is developing a learning agreement with progression routes; and Unite is identifying needs in the energy sector.

As a result of the project, higher learning activity in the following areas is in the pipeline:
- **Energy sector (Unite):** A proposal has been developed with Unite which should bring together the union, employer and interested parties
- **The *fdf*-Open University mentoring resource:** The enhancement of ULR skills will lead to better support for union learners – some Prospect ULRs are undertaking this training
- **Air France (Unite):** A learning agreement and work with the Open University is in train
- **St Edmundsbury’s Borough Council (multi-union, Unison-engaged):** A learning agreement, recruitment of ULRs and work with the Open University is in train
- **HMRC (FDA):** Union-initiated work between *fdf* and a large public sector organisation regarding the accreditation of their internal training should result in more higher-skilled employees
- **Local authorities (multi-union, Unison- and Unite-engaged):** Unions and *fdf* are fully engaged with Middlesex University and should continue to develop the Foundation degree for workers in local authorities while continuing to gain the support of the employers via *fdfs* relationship with London councils
- **Birkbeck’s discount offer to union learners:** Launched at the unionlearn southern and eastern region conference in November with the signing of a MoU
- **Recession and Recovery Project:** The project made links with the R and R project at unionlearn, which in the future should generate some courses and learners
- **Apprenticeship project:** The project made links with the apprenticeship project at unionlearn. In the future, some apprenticeship progression events may be held with LLNs to promote higher learning.

**Evaluation**

There were three phases to the project with specific targets agreed for each phase.

**Phase 1**
1. Design and deliver a workshop at the unionlearn national conference to find out information needs of ULRs in raising higher education with their employers.
2. Produce a practical guide/toolkit for ULRs on negotiating higher education with employers.
3. Update and improve the *fdf* pages on the unionlearn website.
4. Gain support from at least three employers and their respective unions to participate in pilot project activities to support workers wanting to access higher learning opportunities.
5. Organise a briefing and promotional event for approximately 40 ULRs and union officers.

**Phase 2**
1. Sign a minimum of four new MoUs with higher education providers that offer discounts to union learners.
2. Draw on existing *fdf* IAG and Train to Gain broker training materials to brief ULRs about higher education, with case study examples and links to further information about higher education, local provision and provider contacts.
3. Deliver a minimum of two higher education training modules for ULRs involved in the pilot project.
4. Sign up at least 30 workers to higher learning courses/programmes.
5. Set up three workplace union learning clubs to provide study skills support.
6. Work with trade unions and HEIs to identify progression pathways for level 2/3 learners into Foundation degree programmes.
7. Work with trade unions and HEIs to identify need/want in higher-learning provision.
8. Design and deliver a workshop at the SERTUC ULR and *fdf* conferences on the impact and lessons learned from the pilot project.
Phase 3

3.1 Produce approximately 10 high quality case studies about the experiences of union learners and employers of Foundation degree programmes.

3.2 Carry out an evaluation of the project and produce a final report.

3.3 Organise a dissemination event to share good practice and enable the lessons learned from the pilot work to be spread to other regions.

The project fulfilled all of the first phase outcomes (1.1-1.5), with events held at the conferences, the guide developed to help ULRs/reps make the case for higher learning in the workplace, and support secured from a number of unions and their respective employers.

A majority of the outcomes of the second stage (2.1-2.8) were achieved. These included two MoUs with a higher education provider and a higher education stakeholder, workshops, the higher education ULR module and the signing up of over 140 learners to higher learning courses/programmes. Progress was made on two more MoUs (that is, Birkbeck) and on working with the trade unions and HEIs to identify need/want in higher-learning provision and progression pathways for level 2/3 learners into Foundation degree programmes. Once learning is underway the setting up of workplace union learning clubs will be supported and encouraged.

All of the outcomes of stage three have been achieved (3.1-3.3) with the production of 10 case studies and a project report (with the lessons learned), along with the holding of a dissemination event (3.2).

Key achievements

These include:
- briefings for over 400 ULRs
- activity with 16 trade unions in 19 sectors that encompassed 43 employers in over 60 workplaces
- MoUs with discounts with HEIs and the signing up of over 150 learners to higher-learning courses.

Furthermore, early evidence suggests that learners engaged come from diverse backgrounds. So far we have evidence from just four unions who have provided information on 103 learners:
- male – 61; female – 52
- white – 75; BME – 24; no answer – 4
- 81 learners aged 20 to 50; 22 learners aged 50-plus.

Potentially, the follow on work with the energy sector (Unite), Air France (Unite), HMRC (FDA), the local authorities (multi-union) and the Birkbeck offer to union learners could lead to many more learners in the next academic year.

As the learners have just started or are beginning to start their courses, the true benefits cannot be realised at this moment in time but we believe that over time the learners will:
- earn more
- improved their job-related skills
- increase their employability
- gain personal benefits and financial rewards
- enhance their job mobility
- be more satisfied with their union.
Also, we have seen that union-influenced higher learning can be more representative, inclusive and relevant and can change perceptions of trade unions. Union-influenced higher learning may well attract more members, for example through discounts for union learners, increase credibility with the Government and employer, and could help in industrial relations. Furthermore, union involvement will build activism via more skilled and confident members and reps.

**Recommendations for future practice**

The project has learnt a number of lessons on effectively raising awareness of union members about higher learning and higher learning opportunities, and engaging them and their employers in higher-level learning. It has also produced and utilised resources that are key to awareness raising and engagement. A ‘lessons learned’ document is being produced on effective practice in the following areas:

- work with learners: learner demand – information, advice and guidance and aspiration raising
- work with provider: learner support and flexibility plus offer/bite size/tasters/modular
- making the business case for employer funding/subsidy/support
- promoting offers to learners and supporting learners.

**Next steps**

Trade unions, ULRs and unionlearn have made great progress in influencing the workplace learning agenda, especially Skills for Life. However, as the demand from union learners to progress has grown, trade unions, ULRs and unionlearn have become more involved in higher learning by putting it on the workplace agenda and engaging with employers, providers and members while providing members with the flexibility and support to undertake higher learning. The project’s strategy was to:

- increase awareness of union members about higher learning and enhance the information, advice and guidance available to them
- engage trade unions and employers in discussion about higher-level workforce development needs
- develop partnerships with higher education providers, and bring together the key stakeholders to stimulate higher-learning activity.

As the report demonstrates, despite the economic climate, the project has fulfilled the vast majority of the outcomes and has put in place the means to achieve the few that are outstanding.

Potentially, the follow on work will lead to engagement of more union learners in the next year. In time, the learners, unions, the Government and the wider economy will benefit from trade union-led higher learning. Most importantly the lessons learned will influence the formation of good practice to benefit future trade union-led higher learning.

The project has demonstrated that trade union-supported Foundation degrees and higher education can provide the flexibility and support to overcome barriers to higher education, build on trade unions’ existing higher education learning and benefit key stakeholders, even in the midst of an economic downturn.

Awareness of higher education among ULRs and union members has been raised, and the information, advice and guidance available to them enhanced (by, for example, providing a practical guide and toolkit, along with a two-day training course for ULRs). Trade unions and their respective employers have been engaged and brought together with higher education providers to support greater employee engagement in higher-level learning.

The project has also provided the foundations to build wider and deeper links between trade unions, employers and higher learning providers and interested stakeholders in the region, which will be reinforced through the updated unionlearn strategy in the autumn. The key remains the ULRs in the workplace; trade unions and information, advice and guidance; HEI discounted offers, flexibility and support available to ULRs; and officers, as they will directly engage employees and employers in higher learning.

However, barriers for working people remain. These will become even more entrenched in a period of budget constraints, with the expected increases in fees and possible reduction in the earnings threshold for graduates to begin having to repay their loans.

Nevertheless, the trade unions and their ULRs, who have a unique role, must continue to ensure that they help the union learners to overcome the barriers by working with members, employers, HEIs and SSCs to put higher learning on the workplace and Government agenda, and provide members with a flexible and supported route to higher learning.
Illustrative case studies

St Edmundsbury’s Borough Council (multi-union, Unison-engaged):
The project briefed a number of Unison ULRs about the project at their East of England Forum. One of these ULRs was from St Edmundsbury’s Borough Council. He organised a meeting with the project worker, the Unison Learning Organiser and the Council’s Human Resources staff. The project worker told the group about the project and the benefits of trade union-supported higher learning. After some discussions, it was agreed that a learning agreement should be put in place, more ULRs should be recruited and that the Open University’s Opening Courses should be promoted to members, especially those under the threat of redundancy. In the future, this should generate more trade union-supported higher learners.

Unite in the Energy sector
Discussions between unionlearn and fdf indicated that this would be an area that could be fruitful to trade union-led higher learning. The project worker held a meeting with the Senior National Officer at Unite. This was followed by a joint meeting with fdf and Cogent. Subsequently, a proposal has been sent to Unite regarding higher-learning activity centred on one of its workplaces in the SERTUC. This proposal was welcomed by the Senior Shop Steward and will be taken to the employers for discussion and considerations. It should bring together the union, other unions, unionlearn, employer and interested parties, including fdf and Cogent.

Britannia Staff Union and Kingston University
The project met with Kingston University to discuss a Business Processing Foundation degree. During these meetings, the project worker informed the University about learning through unions, the advantages of engaging learners through the union route and the barrier faced by union learners. After more dialogue, the University came back with an offer to reduce the cost of the degree by 50%. This offer was promoted to the project’s contacts. A Project Worker from Britannia Staff Union informed the project worker that she and her colleague would be interested in the offer. Subsequently, a meeting was arranged between Britannia Staff Union and Kingston and two learners from the Britannia Building Society enrolled on the course.

Recession and Recovery Project
Links were made with the R and R project that’s currently been undertaken at unionlearn, as a number of learners want to re-skill and upskill at the higher-learning level to help them attain the transferable skills that they require to obtain a new role. One such initiative being explored is to work with the project’s contacts at the Open University to run an open day on their courses.

FDA and Middlesex University
As part of the project’s activities, the project engaged Middlesex University. During these meetings, the project worker informed the University about learning through unions, the advantages of engaging learners through the union route and the barrier faced by union learners. After more dialogue, the University came back with an offer to run a two-day continuing professional development (CPD) higher-learning course that would be free to attend but would be accredited at a discounted rate to union learners.

The project worker promoted the offer through trade union project workers, which include the FDA project worker. He forwarded the information to his ULRs and members. A number of members were interested. The project worker organised a meeting between FDA and Middlesex University to arrange a date and venue for the course. Once agreed, the offer was promoted to all unions via the project. Over 30 learners were interested, 25 learners will attend the course in September and more courses will be organised for the other interested learners.
Local authorities (multi-union, Unison and Unite-engaged)

Local authorities were identified as a key area for higher skills. The project worker made contact with Unison’s Learning Organiser and a Unison ULR from Waltham Forest Council (who had been made aware of the project through a briefing session). It was agreed to take this forward by meeting with the Council Leader. The ULR, Unison and unionlearn met the leader and made a proposal. Subsequently, the ULR, Unison and unionlearn have held a meeting with Middlesex University and the Hampstead Institute, along with FDF, to devise a Foundation degree for public sector workers. More Unison ULRs from other London boroughs have become involved and the project worker has now involved Unite and Unison’s MiP project. At the same time, FDF has been talking to London councils about Foundation degrees in order to gain London-wide support for this initiative, as this is key to its sustainability. This work will be joined up with the work with Middlesex University (once the content, cost and delivery of the degree are agreed) in order to put a joint union, unionlearn, FDF and Middlesex University proposal to the councils.

Air France (Unite)

The Unite ULR at Air France attended an event where the project worker was given a presentation about the project. Interested to find out more, she contacted the project and arranged a meeting with the Branch Secretary and the other ULRs. The project worker informed the ULRs and rep about the project and the benefits of trade union-supported higher learning. As the group were interested to find out more about the Open University, the project promised to send information and arrange a meeting with his contact at the Open University and include the Unite Project Worker. The project worker arranged a meeting with the reps from Air France, Unite’s project worker and the Open University. After some discussions, it was agreed that the parties would make a proposal to the company to engage with higher learning (via a learning agreement) and enable the Open University to run an open day around their Opening Courses. The Branch Secretary believes that the company would be willing to engage in this agenda and so in the future, this should generate more trade union-supported higher learners.

HMRC (FDA)

The project’s contact at the FDA informed the project worker that one of his ULRs at HMRC required more information about higher learning, especially worked-based higher learning. After an initial discussion, the project worker met with the ULR, who also happened to be leading on the accreditation of tax inspector training at HMRC. The issues were explored and the project worker agreed to set up a meeting with his contacts at FDF as they would be able to provide the ULR with more information about employer-based training accreditation (EBTA). Subsequently, a meeting was held between the ULR/training-leader, her manager and two contacts from FDF. This has resulted in FDF working closely with the HMRC to help find an HEI to accredit their internal tax inspector training. This union-initiated activity should generate tens of learners each year.

Apprenticeship project

The project made links with the apprenticeship project that’s currently been undertaken at unionlearn, as we are trying to encourage the progression of apprentices from levels 2/3 to 4 and beyond. This will be aided by the MoU with the LLNs that was agreed during the project. In the future, an apprentice progression event will be held in the region with support from the LLNs to promote trade union-led higher learning and its benefits.
Introduction

Over the past few years, fdf has worked with a wide range of partners on several projects that have either had as their focus, or as part of their focus, the development of e-learning systems and materials. These e-learning systems have been developed to support access to, and the delivery of, work-based higher education. All fdf projects that have an e-learning dimension are being co-ordinated such that consistency of practice remains a key priority and they are being undertaken using an interactive model to gain optimum benefits.

The purpose of this article is to provide some insight into the range of resources and materials that are now available via fdf as a result of this work. Some of these are freely available to download for use now, and this is indicated where applicable. Others are available to partners working with us on specific projects, or will be freely available for piloting during 2010-2011. Anyone interested in working with us to pilot any of the resources identified below is encouraged to get in touch to explore the options. Contact details are provided at the end of this article.

A range of resources to support work-based learning

fdf has developed a range of e-learning materials and resources to support:

- **individuals** undertaking career development
- **employers** interested in offering their people development opportunities
- **learning providers** interested in offering access to resources designed to support work-based learning
- **professionals** whose job it is to offer guidance on routes to and through higher vocational skills training and development.

The resources offer a range of learning materials, activities and tools including, in many cases, a connection into an e-portfolio that offers individuals an institution free, online ‘personal space’ for the recording of learning documentation and evidence. Most of the resources have been developed using open source and/or web-based technology to facilitate accessibility and to support effective collaborative delivery and learning. Many are hosted on an integrated Moodle/Mahara learning and e-portfolio system that has been developed in partnership with the University of London Computer Centre (ULCC).

The resources span seven categories:

1. **Low carbon**

   A range of materials to support learning for individuals involved in addressing the low carbon agenda. These materials are located on the Moodle/Mahara system and currently include:

   - **Low carbon transition**
     Learning materials on climate change, carbon footprint identification and abatement. Resources to support individuals writing a carbon transition plan for an organisation.

   - **Wind technology**
     Learning materials on the topics of wind power and machinery; lift force theory; turbine blade design; using computer modeling to optimise turbine design; turbine control and power output; wind farms; connecting to the grid; and the economics of wind power. These materials are likely to be of most value to learners working in wind power generation and related fields.

   - **Resource efficiency**
     Learning materials on topics related to improving the resource efficiency and environmental management of an organisation. Includes materials on the concept of sustainability and the relevance to business, establishing a strategic position on sustainability and environmental management systems (implementation, measurement and monitoring, communication and engagement).
2 Retail

A full, web-accessed ‘online classroom’, incorporating materials to support the delivery of all modules of the national Foundation degree in Retailing, a resource repository and learning log functionality. The system and materials are hosted on a commercial platform developed in partnership with My Knowledge Map and are available for use by all providers who are delivering the Foundation degree in Retailing. Topics covered include:
- retail law
- in-store customer marketing
- professional development planning
- retail environment
- information management.

3 Innovation

These learning materials are located on the Moodle/Mahara platform and are designed to support the development and application of innovation in the workplace. They can be used either in sequence or as five separate, independent resources:
- understanding innovation
- developing innovation
- applying innovation
- managing innovation
- ideas on innovation, innovative ideas.

4 Work-based project planning

Materials to support individuals who are required to undertake a work-based project (particularly as part of a course of study). These materials take learners through all the stages of a project lifecycle (initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, and control and evaluation). Project planning tools are also offered so that a learner can build their project plan as they progress. These materials are located on the Moodle/Mahara platform.

5 Travel

Also located on the Moodle/Mahara platform, these materials are designed to support the delivery of all modules of the national Foundation degree in Travel Operations Management. These materials are available for use by all providers who are delivering the Foundation degree in Travel Operations Management. Topics covered include:
- people management
- finance and IT
- business operations and management
- employability.
6 Professional development planning (PDP)

These resources guide individuals through a PDP process, including a review of their current skills and knowledge and the organisational context in which they operate. The resources also provide individuals with a framework and a range of tools to plan the next steps in their professional development. The resources include a 360° appraisal tool that can be customised for individual organisational use and a training plan tool that can be customised to fit with different organisational approaches to employee development. This resource is located on the Moodle/Mahara platform to gain maximum benefit from the e-portfolio for personalised learning planning.

7 Work-based learning toolkit

The toolkit includes resources to support those considering higher education or mentoring individuals undertaking a higher-level programme. This includes:

- **Build on your experience: introducing higher education at work**
  This free resource has been developed for people in work who are considering a work-based learning programme at higher education level. It has been created in partnership with Learn Direct and is designed for those who are thinking about higher-level study but need to find out if it’s for them. The resource helps users to draw out and build on the skills and competences they use in the workplace and to prepare for higher-level learning. The resource can be found at: [www.learningthroughwork.org/BuildingonyourExperience](http://www.learningthroughwork.org/BuildingonyourExperience)

- **Build on your experience: starting higher education at work**
  This follow on resource is designed for those who have made the decision to study but need to develop or refresh the skills needed for higher education. This module carries accreditation and is therefore accessed through higher education providers and there is a cost attached. The resource can be found at: [www.learningthroughwork.org/BuildingonyourExperience](http://www.learningthroughwork.org/BuildingonyourExperience)

- **Supporting workplace study: a free staff development resource for workplace mentors and supervisors**
  To assist colleges, universities and employers involved in work-based learning delivery [fdf](http://sws.oucpld.com) has liaised with the Open University to produce this online open resource. It is aimed at professional staff involved in providing mentoring or educational supervision to colleagues (or others on placement in their organisation), as part of a Foundation degree or other accredited work-based/practice-based course of study.

The full resource should take around 10 hours to complete and is modular, so that individuals can study all or some of the seven parts in whatever order suits them best. The resource can be found at [http://sws.oucpld.com](http://sws.oucpld.com)

**Please note:** The resource is copyrighted to the Open University but institutions may embed the link within their programmes. The resource does not have integrated assessment/accreditation but completion of it may be taken into account through an accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) process by colleges and universities.

During the 2010-11 academic year [fdf](#) will be working on a range of further e-learning projects. These include working as part of a JISC benefits realisation project that is intended to provide a generic e-portfolio support infrastructure and promote further personalised learning. [fdf](#) will be working to test this with individuals working for a large employer. A project is also underway to support the development, use and re-use of e-learning resources in health and social care. Finally we are working to develop a set of tools to support individuals and employers who are keen to seek accreditation for their formal and informal work-based learning.

For information about [fdf](http://sws.oucpld.com)’s e-learning project work and advice on e-learning please contact

Deborah Trayhurn, Associate Director, [fdf](#)

e: d.trayhurn@fdf.ac.uk

m: 07769 727 387

For information about [fdf](#) e-learning resources, please contact Helen Dewhurst, Associate Director, [fdf](#)

e: h.dewhurst@fdf.ac.uk

m: 07920 087 242
Foundation degree Framework Specification for the Oil Refining and Petrochemicals Sector

Pauline Maden
HE Curriculum Development Manager
(Working Higher), Cogent

The publication of the Foundation degree Framework Specification for the Oil Refining and Petrochemicals Sector is the culmination of a three-year project led by Cogent SSC and fdf. It has been shaped through research into current provision with existing and prospective providers, both universities and further education (FE) colleges, and consultation with employers, trade associations and professional bodies and education and training providers.

Joanna Woolf, CEO of Cogent said:
“I am delighted that we now have a national benchmark for technicians and operators working within the refining and petrochemical sector, against which providers can deliver Foundation degree programmes which are recognised by industry.”

The purpose of the framework specification is to guide and enable universities and FE colleges to both accelerate and inform the development of a Foundation degree of direct relevance for refinery and petrochemicals operations.

Industry profile

The employers consulted represented a mix of the eight refineries, petrochemical plants, bulk hydrocarbon storage and others in the petroleum supply chain across England, Scotland and Wales. All of whom, through a degree of cooperation, have shared values in relation to skills, training and qualifications.

The experience of Foundation degrees among employers consulted varied from a small number who have been involved with designing potential work-based Foundation degree programmes, to those with limited prior knowledge of Foundation degree qualifications.

EBTA informed

The project was given a flying start by David Smith, Head of Training and Operating Procedures at Murco’s Milford Haven Refinery, who saw Foundation degrees as the ideal enhancement to his in-house training programme. Murco’s interest lay in Foundation degrees’ ability to accredit skills developed in the workplace and fdf worked closely with the company, carrying out an Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA) exercise. This informed the basis of the framework specification. Pembrokeshire College has undertaken much of the packaging of the company’s training programme into credit-bearing modules, which are in the process of being accredited by the University of Glamorgan.
Employer engagement

Through the Working Higher1 programme, Cogent – the Sector Skills Council for the science-using industries – is supporting the development and roll-out of modular, work-based routes for technicians and operators in the chemical, polymer, refining and petrochemical, bioscience and nuclear industries.

As part of the refining and petrochemical strand, industry champion Gareth James (ex-BP) has strengthened the evidence base and presented a solid business case for a Foundation degree within the sector.

What did employers say they wanted from a Foundation degree in refining and petrochemicals?

Recruitment of adequately skilled and knowledgeable staff is a continuing difficulty experienced by Cogent sector employers, including refineries. Employer consultation confirmed that a Foundation degree in refining and petrochemicals should currently be solely targeted at employees as an upskilling and re-skilling intervention.

Learner profile

• Those who are working though managed traineeship/apprenticeship schemes and who are generally in their twenties. One key benefit, particularly for younger employees, is the attractiveness of working towards a degree while being paid and trained.
• More experienced learners who come into the industry later from related careers elsewhere, or who were experienced within the industry and who had recently decided to work towards a higher-level qualification.

Work-based learning

There was a consensus that a work-based Foundation degree should provide a broader knowledge and understanding of the plant and what goes on 'in the pipes'. As a result of this knowledge and understanding workers can make a better contribution to the overall running of the plant, anticipating problems before they arise and dealing effectively and responsibly with crises on a team or individual basis.

Anticipated outcomes

Employers in refining and petrochemicals wanted to see consistency across the Foundation degrees on offer.

However, it was important to employers to maintain a measure of flexibility both in the tailoring of the final qualification to meet specific employer or regional needs and in the selection of modules to reflect the technical and managerial job balance of the learner.

Key features:
• content covers areas such as refining and petrochemical processes, chemical engineering unit operations, mechanical instrument and electrical engineering, quantitative methods, business improvement, process safety, leadership and team work, and a range of specialist technical modules
• the principal knowledge and understanding (1/3 at level 4) is the underpinning academic content, which is relevant to all those working in a refinery or petrochemicals plant
• the skills area (1/3 at levels 4 and 5) focuses on developing key employment skills for the refining and petrochemical industry. These can largely be practised and assessed in the workplace
• the specialisation modules (1/3 at level 5) allow students to specialise in certain technical areas (for example, chemistry, mechanical engineering) and/or management. Modules can be arranged such that students can orientate their Foundation degrees towards a particular engineering discipline
• the higher level and detailed learning outcomes were structured to correspond with the requirements of UK-SPEC for IEng (Incorporated Engineer).

Provider community of practice

As part of this initiative, Cogent and fdf have worked with a range of providers including the University of Hull, who will launch a new Foundation degree for the sector in 2011, Teesside University, Hartlepool College, University of Glamorgan and Pembroke College. The framework specification will be periodically reviewed with an employer reference group to ensure it keeps pace with industry standards.

This framework and the continuing work of Cogent and fdf will help to raise awareness within the sector for the qualification. It is for providers to grasp the challenge and be geared up to both react quickly and positively to employer enquiries and to proactively engage employers with the Foundation degree benefits on a face-to-face basis.

The Foundation degree Framework Specification for the Oil Refining and Petrochemicals Sector can be found on the Cogent website at www.cogent-ssc.com/Higher_level_skills/index.php

1 The Working Higher project is a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded collaboration between Cogent, The UK Physical Science Subject Centre and the University of Hull, and is supported by fdf. The project works with a university consortium comprising:
• University of Kent – Biosciences
• Manchester Metropolitan University – Chemicals
• University of Central Lancashire – Nuclear
• London Metropolitan University – Polymers
• University of Hull – Refining and Petrochemicals
Foundation degrees in Construction Operations Management

(a national framework for providers)

Leslie Peers
Associate Director, fdf

An fdf-sponsored workshop held in June 2008 at Salford University (CEBE) examined the development of Foundation degrees in Construction Management and considered the outcomes from five fdf-resourced pilot programmes.

Aspects of Foundation degree developments that were examined were:
• the employer engagement process
• the employer groups involved
• the target learner profile
• employer demand for higher level skills
• attitudes to work-based learning and delivery
• the content of the programme
• links to industry-accredited qualifications
• professional body recognition
• key marketing issues.

All of the pilot programmes were designed for up-skilling an existing, relatively experienced workforce, with a focus on improving work-based knowledge and skills whilst teaching the necessary underpinning theory. Students were generally individuals who would not traditionally access higher education programmes.

As a consequence of the pilot programmes, the workshop, and emerging practice in other sectors fdf decided to deploy resources to develop a national Foundation degree framework specification in Construction Management.

The purpose of Foundation degree framework specifications is to provide specific guidance on the needs and expectations of employers and learners within sector.

The Foundation degree framework specification is informed by:
• the business context for Foundation degree development
• the current and future skills needs of the sector
• the attributes of sector employees who are likely to undertake Foundation degrees

and sets out:
• the learning outcomes, indicative context and structure
• appropriate assessment methods
• progression options and opportunities.

Further research was undertaken by a specialist fdf consultant to review the pilot programmes within the context of wider sector developments, to disseminate the information gained to date, and to undertake the initial scoping activity necessary to develop the framework specification.

A working group facilitated and resourced by fdf consisting of Lifelong Learning Networks, higher education providers, construction training providers, Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), Construction Skills, the Construction Industry Council was constituted. The remit of the group was to develop a national framework specification for all stakeholders with an investment in construction management higher level skills development, with a timetable for finishing the specification by Easter 2010.

Industry operations

Input from the wide range of partners that constituted the working group provided evidence and specialist insights to indicate that it would be beneficial to the industry to diversify the framework and incorporate the management of site-based operations. This is where there is a significant shortage of people with the skills able to supervise sub-contract workforce operations.

This brought about the name change of the framework to Construction Operations Management.
Learner profiles

ConstructionSkills asked for further emphasis on widening participation within the construction industry. Six categories of potential learners were identified as follows:

- GCSEs or A-level entrants
- 14-19 Diploma entrants
- mature entrants from a non-construction/built environment background
- mature entrants from a construction/built environment non-contracting area
- craft or technical apprentices with level 2 or level 3 qualifications
- mature entrants – from a craft, technical or supervisory contracting role.

The framework details criteria for profiling the learners and offers a cross referencing table for mixtures of the above and other activities.

Employer engagement

The framework ensures that the key learning outcomes and curriculum content satisfies employer requirements. The content also considers national occupational standards which were developed and approved by employers. The framework is sufficiently flexible to incorporate specific regional needs and therefore provides a specification with national recognition whilst achieving local context.

Professional body recognition

Framework specifications should also be cognisant of the professional body requirements in the sector. Initial research and subsequent work has identified the CIOB as the body most widely recognised and used by the industry.

The CIOB has worked on the framework and are fully supportive of the curriculum content. It is intended that
other professional bodies will be involved. This inclusive approach is welcomed by the industry and is seen as way of streamlining validation, accreditation and other recognition processes.

**Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)**

The CSCS scheme is paramount to the industry in ensuring that every individual on a construction site has at least a basic health and safety qualification. It is also a scheme which covers all those in professional, technical and managerial occupations; consequently it is important that a Foundation degree in Construction Operations Management should also support students in progressing towards obtaining the relevant CSCS managers’ card.

The specification offers indicative mapping for occupations relating to the relevant colour card, black generally being the colour for managers to achieve.

**Framework delivery structure**

The delivery mechanisms recommended by the framework include:
- full time
- part time
- distance learning

This framework does offer, however, the benefits of five different models for work-based learning, depending on the profile of the learner.

**Progression from the Foundation degree**

The framework indicates significant progression routes from the Foundation degree through the differing industry roles and accreditation schemes and contains a comprehensive mapping of industry qualifications that reflects the diverse backgrounds of the potential Foundation degree students. This also incorporates the roles leading on to the Foundation degree, tying in also professional body accreditation.

As the construction industry has many diverse roles, part of the section on progression is dedicated to job role progression – cross referencing with NVQ Diplomas at level 3 and level 6.

**Conclusion**

The framework is based upon sound evidence of practice within and beyond the sector. The development process has brought together the appropriate bodies with extensive experience and expertise to support the project. They have made significant commitments of time and resources to ensure that the project ambitions have been achieved.

The outcome is a Foundation degree framework specification that comprehensively articulates the higher level skills needs of employers and employees in the area of Construction Operations Management and presents models of delivery that will meet the needs of the sector.

Providers are encouraged to fully utilise the guidance within the specification to ensure that the industry is equipped with a workforce with the right knowledge and skills.

As the framework becomes embedded in the sector there will be a need for ongoing review and updating. Ongoing feedback is welcome and it should be directed to **fdf** and Construction Skills.
Foundation degrees represent a pioneering and flexible qualification with a high level of support from employers, according to a new study by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

The information bulletin\(^1\) highlights significant areas of good practice, including productive employer engagement based on a close working relationship between employers and providers in the development of programmes.

QAA also praises the innovative and high quality design of assessment and flexibility in its use. The survey reports nearly 50 cases of good practice in developing employer partnerships and work-based learning.

Paul Groves
PR and Marketing Manager, \textit{fdf}

QAA's assessment of Foundation degree provision through its IQER processes provides important evidence that the qualification has achieved credibility with employers on a national scale,” commented Professor Derek Longhurst, \textit{fdf}'s Chief Executive.

“As with any other form of higher education there will be areas for improvement in some programmes but it is particularly pleasing that QAA has provided evidence that the qualification has initiated greater dialogue between institutions and employers, as well as creating the basis for more strategic partnerships between colleges and universities.

“This is a balanced assessment that should be noted by policy makers.”

Other areas of good practice singled out by QAA include:

- effective assessment practice includes constructive, timely, detailed and high quality formative feedback both in writing and verbally
- the valuable opportunities for student support from tutors
- the comprehensive pre-course study skills programmes for students
- specialist support for students with specific learning disabilities and/or difficulties
- information
- clear and explicit information provided for students, workplace mentors, placement supervisors and employers about work-based learning – includes details of the assessment process and the assignment briefs.

**Shortlist for fdf-sponsored award revealed**

The shortlist for the \textit{fdf}-sponsored Outstanding Employer Engagement category in the 2010 Times Higher Education Awards has been announced.

The universities vying for the award are:
- Aston University
- University of Cambridge
- University of East Anglia
- North West Universities Association
- Royal Veterinary College
- Thames Valley University.

\textit{fdf} sponsored the same award last year, which was won by Teesside University for its high quality range of projects, including involvement in the \textit{fdf}-British Chambers of Commerce Learning for Leadership programme aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises. Teesside also won the overall University of the Year award last year.

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\(^1\) Integrated quality and enhancement review: Foundation Degrees (Information bulletin 2010). Available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/infobulletins/foundationdegrees/ibfoundationdegrees.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/infobulletins/foundationdegrees/ibfoundationdegrees.pdf)
For 2010 there were almost 500 entries across the 19 categories of the awards, which are now in their sixth year.

The winners will be announced at a ceremony at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London on 25 November.

Improving skills in the power industry

A new video presentation by the National Skills Academy for Power and featuring Professor Derek Longhurst, Chief Executive of fdf, shows that one of the key benefits of Foundation degrees is that they are developed with employers to meet their workforce development needs.

A common Foundation degree framework has been shaped for the power industry and agreed through consultation at both strategic and operational level. This has been co-ordinated through the National Skills Academy for Power in its new capacity of championing standard qualifications and ensuring that delivery capacity is developed to meet the needs of the sector.

“The Foundation degree Framework for Power Engineering is a tangible output from our Sector Skills Strategy and represents a great step forward for the industry in developing a more consistent approach to higher-level qualifications,” explained Dave Newborough, Chair of the National Skills Academy for Power Shadow Board and Head of HR, Energy Services/Head of Employee Relations, E.ON UK.

“We now have a common standard that can be used by consortia of employers and providers to develop specific programmes to meet their needs, and that ultimately will provide a progression route for existing technicians.”

The framework builds upon previous work that was undertaken by the industry and will sit within the broader qualifications strategy for the power industry, facilitating progression from advanced apprenticeship through to full degree-level qualifications.

More video can be found at www.power.nsacademy.co.uk/education.

Soldier named Foundation degree Student of the Year

Soldier Herbert Goredem has been named fdf-sponsored Foundation degree Student of the Year.

The category formed part of the National Adult Learners’ Week Awards in London and Corporal Goredema was recognised for dedication to his studies while serving in the armed forces.

Corporal Goredema was the lowest-ranking soldier on the Foundation degree course but ended up the highest achiever. The 34-year-old beat officers in the Army, RAF and Navy when studying hospitality and food service management.

The self-confessed technophobe is stationed in Kenya and studied using Westminster Kingsway College’s virtual learning environment.

“Impossible to overestimate the impact of the Foundation degree course at Westminster Kingsway College was advertised in a CPD Newsletter so I applied and I was lucky enough to be accepted,” Corporal Goredema explained. “I wanted to study something that was in my chosen field. When I first started the course, it took a lot of self-control as the demands on your time are very great.

“I am really pleased that I was able to stay with the course and am nearing my goals. Without the encouragement, help and support from my lecturers, I wouldn’t have been able to manage the course. My enquiries by telephone, email and messenger were promptly responded to by my tutors. I also got lots of support from my fellow learners who have been absolutely brilliant.”

Corporal Goredema only had 30 minutes of internet access a day, so he had permission to sit a two-hour finance exam online – only to have the system crash half-way through.

Corporal Goredema was praised by Clare Mannall, his nominator and college team leader, for using his IT skills in challenging circumstances.

“Undeterred, Herbie came back the next day and completed the exam and got excellent marks too,” she said. “He beat all his colleagues in terms of grades and showed them you can study full-time and work full-time without getting behind.”

Corporal Goredema is now used by the Army to encourage other junior ranks to sign up for degree studies. He now hopes to do a master’s degree.

Corporal Goredema was presented with the award by Susan Hayday, fdf’s Director of Workplace Learning Strategy, at a ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster, London.

Further information on Adult Learners’ Week and other award winners can be found at www.alw.org.uk
**New Publications**

*ddf* produces a range of publications. A PDF of our publications can be downloaded free of charge from the *ddf* website [www.fdf.ac.uk](http://www.fdf.ac.uk) (see the publications library).

**Research Publications**

**The placement experience of students on full-time Foundation degrees**

*Pilot Study*

Mantz Yorke’s small-scale study of the placement experience of students on full-time Foundation degrees.

**Students experiences of full-time Foundation degrees**

*ddf* commissioned the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU), to examine the experiences of full-time Foundation degree students. This report by Holly Higgins, Jane Artess and Isla Johnstone was published in August 2010.

**Guidance for the assessment of work-based learning in Foundation degrees**

*ddf* commissioned the Student Assessment and Classification Working Group (SACWG) to produce a guide to the assessment of work-based learning in Foundation degrees. A guide consisting of 18 principles supportive of good practice in the assessment of work-based learning and examples of innovative practice offered by providers was published in August 2010. A literature review carried out as part of this research has also been published.
IAG Resources and Learner Support

The latest additions to our extensive suite of online resources for advisers, learners and those offering learner support in the workplace include:

Workplace Support for Higher Level Learners
An Introductory Guide for Advisers

This guide is for people with a role to play in advising existing or potential work-based higher education learners, i.e. those studying at university level while working. It provides some pointers and information to help you to advise learners on how to get all the support they need for their studies within the workplace.

Workplace Support for Your Studies

This guide is intended for people who are, or planning to be work-based higher education learners. It is designed to help learners: identify the kinds of support that might be useful; look at opportunities for support that can be made available in their workplace; and proactively seek out and request the help they need.

IAG Case Studies

New case studies highlight the journeys and experiences of two work-based higher education learners and the support they received when accessing and studying their chosen course.

These and a wealth of other IAG resources, information and interactive activities can be found on the adviser pages of the fdf website at www.fdf.ac.uk/advisers
fdf’s new blog

fdf has created a Workforce Development blog to highlight the work we do to provide innovative solutions and the work of our key strategic partners.

The blog will act as a news resource for workforce development issues and provide an opportunity for fdf to showcase work-based learning opportunities and effective training solutions for employers.

We will also carry information on the latest Foundation degree developments and other higher level, work-based qualifications.

Other issues covered by the blog will include accreditation of existing in-house training, the growth of e-learning, training developments affecting SMEs, information, advice and guidance resources and skills issues affecting key economic sectors.

See http://founddegrees.wordpress.com/