Winning Hearts and Minds

An Evaluation of the Work of the Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network and Recommendations for a Sustainability Strategy

A report commissioned by the Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network

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Winning Hearts and Minds

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1. Executive Summary

Background

This report was commissioned in May 2011 by the Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network (Lancashire LLN). Its findings are based on the results of an evaluation carried out between June and November 2011 by CGS Education Services Ltd looking at key areas of the work and project activities developed by the Lifelong Learning Network (LLN).

The aim of the evaluation has been two-fold, in line with the requirements of the original Lancashire LLN Business Plan.

- Firstly, it has considered the **effectiveness** and **impacts** of the series of activities undertaken and interventions put in place during the tenure of the LLN aimed at improving the opportunities for students on vocational programmes and those already in work, to progress into and through Higher Education (HE) in the Lancashire area. The evaluation was to identify areas of success, good practice developed, lessons learned and the resulting legacy that would remain as a result of the LLN’s work.

- Secondly, there has been the requirement to develop a **Sustainability Strategy** that will allow the work and achievements of the Lancashire LLN to continue and progress once the LLN has closed at the end of December 2011.

The evaluation initially comprised a period of desk research, looking at relevant academic literature and reports and other documentation provided by the Lancashire LLN itself. This was followed by a series of interviews and focus groups with HE and Further Education (FE) academic staff, Lancashire LLN staff, other education, business and related professionals from a variety of organisations that work in partnership with the Lancashire LLN (‘the Partnership’) including Further Education Colleges (FECs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Private Training Providers (PTPs) and other relevant stakeholder organisations across Lancashire. Meetings were mainly conducted face-to-face with some being conducted by telephone. In a few cases, feedback was received by email questionnaire where other methods could not be used. All interviews and focus groups where permission was granted were digitally recorded and the information gained used to generate a framework of emerging themes relevant to the issues under consideration.

In total some 70 individuals took part in interviews or focus groups, or contributed their views by other means as part of the evaluation.

In seeking to assess the outcomes of the work of the Lancashire LLN, the impacts achieved and the opportunities for a sustainability strategy, the evaluation adopted a modified version of the approach developed by Williams (2008), in looking at the LLN’s progress against five ‘indicators of success’. These indicators are:

- Curriculum developments that facilitate progression
- Establishment of appropriate information, advice and guidance systems
- Establishment of robust progression agreements
- Progress made against objectives/targets as set out in the LLN’s original Business Plan (including the success of the Strategic Board and the Executive Group)
- Evidence of institutional commitment, partnership working and stakeholder engagement
A series of key themes for evaluation were identified and the report discusses the main features of activity and the key findings for each of these. The key themes and key findings are listed below along with recommendations for a sustainability strategy.

All terms and acronyms used in this report are found in Appendix A.

**Key findings and recommendations**

**Governance and Strategic Management**

The Lancashire LLN has been governed and managed effectively in line with the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The Strategic Board has governed in an open and transparent manner and has achieved the formation of a collaborative partnership to secure the work of the LLN. It has established the focus of this work in 5 of the Key Priority Sectors of the Lancashire Economic Development Strategy, aimed at up-skilling individuals and businesses as defined in the LLN Business Plan. The Executive Group has ensured the operational effectiveness of the Lancashire LLN and has provided a positive forum for debate of operational issues and new ideas. Both the Strategic Board and the Executive Group have taken a flexible approach to their respective responsibilities and approved changes to the structure of the LLN when it has been deemed beneficial; equally they have both worked in close co-operation with and supported the work of, the Director of the Lancashire LLN.

Some participants have considered that the Strategic Board has functioned at times, more in an approval role, rather than as a forum for strategic debate and planning.

**Executive Operation**

The Director, as head of the Central Team, has provided effective leadership and direction in pursuit of positively achieving the aims and objectives of the Lancashire LLN. The sector consultants and education consultants have pursued their role actively in ensuring appropriate advice and guidance across the partnership in areas such as curriculum development, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), employer engagement and relationship building. The progression champions have fulfilled a pivotal role in acting as a two-way communication channel between the LLN and their own partner institutions in relation to the cascading of information and the sharing of ideas. The Area Group structure was not regarded as effective after the first year of operation and was replaced by the LLN Forum which has been considered as much more responsive and appropriate. Most of the Working Groups have proved useful and insightful, although some ceased to function after only a short period in operation.

**Collaboration**

The Strategic Board and the Executive Group have succeeded in engendering positive collaboration amongst all partners. This collaboration has ensured effective co-operation between FECs and HEIs across the partnership and at a variety of levels. New relationships have been developed between partners and established ones have been enhanced. In addition improved internal collaboration has been established within some of the partner institutions themselves. The partnership has also been viewed as a support network by many and partners have learned from and supported each other in a wide variety of areas. In addition to FECs and HEIs, some PTPs have also been involved in LLN developments, but their involvement has been limited and there could have been more engagement in this area.
Progression

Improvements in progression opportunities for vocational and work-based learners have been central to the work of the Lancashire LLN and the issue of progression is firmly on the partnership agenda. In this regard the LLN has successfully developed the Visaroute web-based system which provides a comprehensive coverage of progression routes and pathways available for vocational learners and identified gaps in the curriculum. 401 progression agreements have been put in place providing for nearly 125,000 distinct progression pathways into and through HE across Lancashire. In addition, the LLN has been successful in identifying and breaking down many barriers to progression although some still exist. As a result, many more vocational learners including apprentices are now aware of progression to HE opportunities.

The progression strategy adopted has been considered successful, but it has been very difficult to determine precisely how many students have progressed in Lancashire directly as a result of LLN activity.

Curriculum Development

The LLN has developed an effective strategy in relation to HE curriculum development and enhancement in the vocational sector, with employer engagement playing an integral part in this. Additional Student Numbers (ASNs) and Curriculum Development Award (CDA) funds have been utilised effectively and have allowed for new programmes to run, old ones to be refreshed and involved capacity-building on existing programmes. Some partners however, have not benefited from either ASNs or CDAs for a variety of different reasons. ASN numbers have been deployed successfully across the 5 priority sectors supporting 23 programmes; success and retention rates are high and comparable with similar programmes elsewhere.

A total of 39 CDAs have been awarded and have been extremely effective in allowing partners to improve and enhance their curriculum. They have been highly valued for ‘buying out’ practitioners from their regular duties and allowing them time to fully engage with the work of the relevant curriculum changes and developments. The CDAs have demonstrated what a relatively small amount of money can achieve in allowing colleagues to provide new or refresh old curricula and in many partners, the processes developed will continue post-LLN.

The Foundation Degree (FD) developed with North West Higher Level Skills Partnership (NWHLSP) funding, has been validated but has never run. Legacy funding from the HEEL Project (Higher Education in East Lancashire), has been successfully distributed with positive results.

A further curriculum area has been added to the priority sectors meaning that developments now take place in 6 priority areas.

Information Advice and Guidance

The primacy of high quality IAG in the progression process has been recognised across the partnership. Various strategies have been adopted to ensure improved IAG across the LLN including the development of Progression Passports and other materials which have in some cases, been embedded within the IAG processes of partners.

The Visaroute IAG system has been acknowledged as an innovative and technically excellent tool however, its value has been questioned with respect to its cost, overall usage, ease of operation by
individuals and the ability to keep it up-to-date. In addition it has not been used in a consistent manner across the partnership. The CEIAG Conference held in early October 2011 in Preston, has been recognised across the partnership as being highly successful in its aim of engaging with IAG professionals and those involved with admissions policies and practices in FECs, HEIs and other organisations.

There have been some very successful developments as part of the IAG strategy of the LLN. The outcomes achieved across the partnership however, have been variable and the impact of this strategy does not show a consistent picture.

**Employer Engagement**

The process of engaging with employers and employers’ organisations has been seen as a very important area of work across the partnership. However, although improvements have been made as a result of the work of the LLN, this is still regarded as being a difficult area of work by most of the partners. In this respect the sector consultants have played a major part in the strategy in engaging with a wide number of employers, professional bodies, employers’ organisations and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and in doing so have succeeded in bringing the employer voice into the process of curriculum and associated IAG development. Many partners intend that these practices will continue in the future. In addition the sector consultants have produced Labour Market Information (LMI) data that has been regarded as highly useful by the partner institutions in development of their business plans.

It had originally been intended to develop an Employers Advisory Forum and provide a Programme of Employer Continuing Professional Development (CPD). However, neither of these developments occurred with the major thrust of the work being taken over by the sector consultants. To date the sector consultants have successfully engaged with over 300 employers and employers’ organisations operating in the Lancashire area.

**The Apprentices Project**

The materials developed and activities and interventions that have taken place have continued to have an effect since the submission of the original Phase 1 report in April 2011. During this period, enrichment activities have continued to take place and in some instances learners are progressing onto HE programmes as a result of the interventions. Evaluation of previous activities shows positive outcomes such as increased awareness and enthusiasm developed about HE on the part of apprentices who have taken part in visits to HE providers and/or attended master-classes. The Train the Trainers - Preparation for HE CPD programme for staff has continued throughout this period with benefits for both staff and apprentices.

The Apprentices Project has gone a long way to identifying and removing barriers to HE progression for apprentices in Lancashire although some still remain. Many partners have indicated however, that the Apprentices Project has resulted in more apprentices becoming aware of the opportunities provided by HE, with their staff more knowledgeable and confident in their ability to provide better advice and guidance.

Some employers have reacted positively and are supportive of their apprentice’s progression aspirations; the picture however, remains variable and there is still work to be done in terms of convincing employers of the value of HE to their employees and their businesses.
Achievement and Success

The Lancashire LLN has gone a long way towards successfully achieving many of its aims and objectives and leaves behind it a very successful legacy. It has succeeded in forming a collaborative partnership comprising the FECs and HEIs of Lancashire and other partner organisations in order to carry out its work of improving progression to HE opportunities for vocational learners. In this respect, the LLN in completing its work has impacted positively on organisations and individuals. Its work in the areas of progression agreements and pathways, IAG, curriculum development and employer engagement have allowed for the development of processes, practices and relationships, many of which will continue post-LLN.

There were some areas in which the LLN did not achieve, for example in parts of its employer engagement strategy, the Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy FD, parts of its IAG engagement and the Bite-Sized Working Group. However lack of achievement in these areas should not detract from its achievements in other areas of similar work. In any case, it was necessary for the LLN to be flexible in approach and to respond to changing conditions and circumstances; the change of structure at the end of the first year of operation with the abolition of the Area Groups and their replacement by the LLN Forum is testament to this.

The major achievement of the LLN has been in raising the profile of progression opportunities into HE for vocational learners across the partnership and this issue is likely to remain on the educational agenda for the foreseeable future. Both the institutions and many of the learners within them are now much more aware of these opportunities and how to identify and overcome the barriers that get in the way; without the work of the LLN these important developments simply would not have occurred.

Recommendations for a sustainable future

In light of the substantial achievements of the Lancashire LLN to date and acknowledging the requirements of its business plan, the following recommendations in respect of a Sustainability Strategy are proposed. It is recommended that:

1. The Lancashire Work Based Learning Executive Forum (LWBLEF) Board be asked to act as a repository for all the Apprentices Project materials and promote them as necessary to interested parties.

2. The Apprentices Project materials continue to be used by work-based learning (WBL) students through the network of colleges and Private Training Providers who wish to take advantage of them.

3. The partner institutions consolidate the post of progression champion within their institution and make it an established appointment on either a full-time or part-time basis.

4. The Visaroute system continues as a viable web-based IAG tool, initially in the trust of Blackburn College.

5. A series of free digital applications (‘APPS’) are developed prior to the end of the Lancashire LLN for students to easily access Visaroute and its related IAG, plus other relevant progression websites.
6. Each partner sets up a Curriculum Development Award type fund to provide proper ‘buy out’ time and opportunity for tutors to develop new or refreshed HE curriculum.

7. A Lancashire **Strategic Board of HEIs** be established comprising the 4 HEIs in Lancashire. This group to build on the benefits of collaboration that have clearly developed during the tenure of the Lancashire LLN and to provide a pathfinder lead in support of the economic generation of the region.

8. **On-line Communities of Practice** are established using the services of JISC NW Regional Support Centre in the areas of for example, progression champions, employer engagement champions, Preparation for HE tutors, and other groups as necessary.

9. A post-Lancashire LLN ‘rump’ organisation with Charitable Trust/Social Enterprise status be established that would act as a conduit and repository for all of the Lancashire LLN documentation and its remaining work. This ‘rump’ could be funded by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) with the aim of leveraging funding to support its members in their work on vocational progression across the region and their contribution to the provision of the future higher-level skills requirements of the Lancashire economy. It would also continue to function in the LLN’s role as a ‘professional reflective friend’ and an ‘honest broker’.

10. The **Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE module** to be validated by a local HEI so as to provide local ownership of the programme and making it readily available across the present partnership to those partners who wish to deliver it.

11. All progression champions undertake training on the updated Visaroute programme and cascade its use to relevant staff in their organisations prior to the end of the Lancashire LLN.

12. The sector consultants develop and deliver a range of employer engagement CPD workshops/master-classes outlining good practice for partner institutions prior to the end of the LLN. These to include input from employers themselves.

13. Senior Management Teams (SMTs) in the partner institutions consider what commitments they will make in terms of policies, practices and activities as a result of the outcomes of the Commitment to Sustainability Event held by the LLN Forum in October 2011.
2. Introduction

This evaluation considers the quality, effectiveness and impact of the series of interventions and activities that have taken place during the tenure of the Lancashire LLN aimed at improving opportunities for students on vocational programmes and those already in work, to progress into and through HE in the Lancashire area in a series of key priority areas.

The programme of work of the LLN involved the setting up of a network of interested parties consisting of Lancashire based HEIs, FECs the LWBLEF and Aimhigher Lancashire (AHL) to form a partnership that would work together for a period of 3 years with the aim of fulfilling the requirements of the Lancashire LLN Business Plan. Funding for the project was provided by the HEFCE as part of its overall strategy to provide LLN coverage across the whole of England. There were 31 LLNs constituted in total, with the Lancashire LLN being the last one to be set up in August 2008. Due to various organisational and administrative problems however, the Director was not appointed until November 2008 resulting in LLN activity not starting to time as planned. In consideration of this and the fact that the allocated budget of £2.13 million would support it, HEFCE agreed to the request of the Strategic Board to extend the term of the Lancashire LLN by 5 months; as a result the Lancashire LLN will close in its present form on 31st December 2011.

The aim of HEFCE in setting up LLNs was to ensure partnership and collaboration at local or regional level. The LLN would pump-prime activities and develop processes that would improve progression opportunities into and through HE for vocational learners and those already in work, with the intention that these would be continued by the partner institutions once the LLN’s funding streams had finished.

The interventions and activities that have subsequently been developed in Lancashire cover a variety of areas including provision of funding for a wide range of curriculum development and enhancement activities, the award of 400 ASNs to partner HEIs and FECs, the development of employer engagement strategies and provision of a range of CPD activities. In the area of IAG the LLN has developed a series of print-based materials, organised and delivered a major CEIAG conference and developed the web-based Visaroute progression tool. Further, in order to achieve its required outcomes it has also established an operational structure involving the Central Team, various Working Groups and the Lancashire LLN Forum.

This report provides an independent and objective appraisal of progress made to date by the Lancashire LLN and assesses to what extent it has achieved its intended outcomes. Specific emphasis has been focused on the impacts that the LLN has made for the institutions within the partnership, in particular for the learners (and staff) within those organisations. In addition, the report provides an update on the progress of the Apprentices Project, a jointly funded AHL and Lancashire LLN project which started in February 2010. A Phase 1 report on the Project was submitted to AHL in April 2011, with that organisation closing shortly afterwards in July 2011. The Apprentices Project has continued under the auspices of the Lancashire LLN and the update contained within this document forms the Phase 2 report for that project.

This report also contains an overview of the FE and HE educational landscape in which the Lancashire LLN now finds itself, a landscape that has changed remarkably since the LLN was set up 3 years ago and which has implications for the future. Finally the report makes a series of recommendations, derived both from the evidence collated in the course of the evaluation and the opportunities provided by this changing educational landscape, in terms of a Sustainability Strategy for the future.
3. Background and Context

The Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network

In June 2004, HEFCE set out its intention to ‘make a step change in vocational progression’ through the development of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs). HEFCE defined their overall objective for LLNs as follows:

‘To improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through HE.’

In order to achieve this overall objective, HEFCE also identified specific areas for the focus of LLN activity. These were curriculum development to facilitate progression, IAG and learner support systems and network-wide progression agreements.

The Lancashire LLN is one of 31 such networks covering England and was the last to be established. It is a partnership of 5 HEIs, 12 FECs, the LWBLEF and AHL. It also has a number of stakeholder partners with whom it has ongoing relationships. The LLN Business Plan charged the organisation with raising awareness and aspirations of learners at a variety of stages of their education or training to pursue qualifications at HE level.

The Aim of the Lancashire LLN

As outlined in its business plan, the overall aim of the Lancashire LLN is to encourage and promote the FE and HE providers in Lancashire to work together in liaison with employers and related organisations in order to develop guaranteed progression opportunities for learners in key priority sectors of vocational learning, both into and through HE.

Specifically, the Lancashire LLN has intended to:

- Remove barriers to progression for vocational learners, helping them to progress into and through HE.
- Further develop existing IAG and provide information on progression routes for vocational learners.
- Engage employers and facilitate relationships between employers and LLN partners.
- Ensure that the needs of employers for training and staff development underpins all of the LLN partner developments in creating or adapting curriculum.

The aim was considered to be particularly important for the following reasons:

- To give vocational learners parity of esteem and opportunity with learners who follow what is regarded as a ‘more academic’ route and in so doing to ensure that there are equivalent opportunities for vocational learners to achieve their full potential.
- To contribute to the provision of higher level skills that is essential to the future of the Lancashire and the North West economies.

(Lancashire LLN Business Plan, 2008)
Objectives of the Lancashire LLN

For the aim and its rationale to be realised, the Lancashire LLN set itself the task of achieving the following objectives:

1. To create or enhance progression opportunities up to honours degree level for all the County’s learners in the priority sector areas.
2. To facilitate and ensure progression opportunities into and through HE on vocational and work-based routes by developing negotiated agreements between the providing institutions.
3. To put in place a system of check and balances that ensure the supporting tools provided to vocational learners across Lancashire, such as progression passports and a common bank of vocational modules, really do provide the access and progression they need in the relevant priority sectors.
4. To identify gaps in provision that are acting as barriers to progression and develop and create courses to fill these gaps.
5. To enhance the supply and relevance of HE provision for employers and individuals through improved institutional processes and procedures.
6. To stimulate demand from employers and individuals for higher level education and skills.
7. To improve the coherence of, and accessibility into and through HE by better information, advice and guidance for employers, vocational learners and their advisers.
8. To undertake course development to ensure all necessary steps are in place on the various progression ladders and curriculum development to ensure compatibility of course content for progression purposes.
9. To build upon current networks to create even stronger, sustainable partnerships between the FE and HE sectors, work-based learning providers and employers.
10. To improve performance in five of the key priority sectors of the Lancashire Economic Development Strategy by up-skilling individuals and businesses.
11. To train and develop staff to support the above objectives.
12. To ensure the future sustainability of the outcomes of the LLN post-funding.

In order to maximise achievement of the aims and objectives of the Lancashire LLN, the strategic focus concentrated activity on those economic areas of the Lancashire County Council Economic Development Strategy that were considered to be county-wide priorities at Levels 3 and above. The five priority sectors subsequently identified were:

- Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing
- Construction
- Digital and Creative Industries
- Health and Social Care
- Leisure and Tourism

A further sector, that of Environment and Sustainability was later added to this list.

Targets and Outcomes

From the list of specified objectives, a series of targets and milestones were developed within the original business plan. These related to all areas of the LLN’s work including its structural development, groups to be formed and activities and interventions to be developed. Clearly, in order to meet its original objectives, the LLNs would need to ensure completion of these targets and milestones. It should be noted however, that a Business Plan of this nature is a working document
and hence allowed for a flexibility of approach as the work of the LLN has developed. As a consequence, several of these targets and outcomes have been changed or revised during the lifetime of the Lancashire LLN.

The Partnership

The Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network Partnership comprises the following institutions:

Further Education Colleges

Accrington and Rossendale College
Blackburn College
Blackpool and The Fylde College
Burnley College
Lancaster and Morecambe College
Myerscough College
Nelson and Colne College
Preston College
Runshaw College
Southport College
St. Mary’s Blackburn College
Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College (Now West Lancashire College)

Higher Education Institutions

Edge Hill University
Lancaster University
University of Central Lancashire
University of Cumbria
*Open University in the North West

Other organisations

Aimhigher Lancashire
Lancashire Work Based Learning Executive Forum

Each of the partner institutions contributed to the original aims and objectives of the Lancashire LLN during its development and has played an active role in the activities of the LLN during its tenure. Each institution is represented on the LLN strategic Board and the LLN Executive Group and each has provided a progression champion who acts as a conduit for information and ideas between the LLN and their own organisation.

*The Open University in the North West withdrew from the partnership in February 2010 having been a member since 2008. An internal re-structure within the Open University resulted in a situation where the necessary resources to support the work of the LLN were no longer available within the institution.

Stakeholders

A range of stakeholder organisations which have been able to contribute to, or benefit from the work of the LLN are listed in Appendix B.
Methodology of evaluation

In carrying out this evaluation a mixed-method approach was adopted that combined:

- Desk research and review of existing literature to set the work in context
- Review of the Progression, IAG and other materials developed by the Lancashire LLN
- Semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews with staff in partner organisations and stakeholder groups
- Feedback questionnaire data and other information collated from staff following CPD initiatives developed by the Lancashire LLN
- Overview meetings with various other individuals and groups
- Attendance at Lancashire LLN group meetings such as the Executive Group and the LLN Forum.

Desk research of organisational and other documentation

In addition to the general background research of relevant literature the following documents have been taken into consideration as part of the evaluation process:

- Lancashire LLN Business Plan
- The Lancashire LLN Key Milestones Plan
- Lancashire LLN Annual Monitoring Reports
- Update on Key Project Developments
- Director’s Reports to the Lancashire LLN Strategic Board
- Apprentices Project Reports to the Lancashire LLN Executive Group
- Lancashire LLN Baseline Data Collection and Updates
- ASN Update Reports and Final Reports
- CDA Updates and Reports
- HEEL Legacy Funding documents
- Minutes and documentation of the Lancashire LLN Strategic Board
- Minutes and documentation of the Lancashire LLN Executive Group
- Working Group Notes
- Lancashire LLN Forum Agendas

The strategic overview and vision of the Lancashire LLN provided the initial focus for the development of the evaluation. The formative evaluation was undertaken in the period June - October 2011 with the summative report being submitted in early November 2011.

Meetings as part of the evaluation process

An initial fact-finding meeting was held with the Lancashire LLN Director in May 2011 with a series of update meetings and telephone conversations taking place during the course of the evaluation. The initial meeting was followed by a series of semi-structured interviews, meetings and focus groups comprising individuals and groups from a variety of institutions across Lancashire, between June and September 2011.
Those interviewed or attending focus groups included:

- Members of the Lancashire LLN Central Team
- Progression Champions
- Sector and Education Consultants
- Members of the Strategic Board
- Members of the Executive Group
- Members of the Marketing Group
- Members from various stakeholder groups
- External Consultants
- Staff in Private Training Providers

A full discussion of the evaluation methodology adopted is included in Appendix C.
4. Governance, Management and Structure

The Lead HEI and Accountable Body for the Lancashire LLN is the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan).

The corporate structure of the Lancashire LLN comprises two distinct groups:

- **The Strategic Board** - mainly comprising members of the SMTs of the partner institutions with responsibility for oversight, review and monitoring
- **The Executive Group** - responsible for oversight of the effective operational management of the LLN

In addition, several other committees and working groups have been developed to drive forward particular aspects of the work of the LLN. These include the Working Groups and the Lancashire LLN Forum.

The structure of the Lancashire LLN is illustrated in Figure 1.

It should be noted that Figure 1 is for illustrative purposes only as it cannot portray the dynamic processes which underlie the work of the LLN. The membership of the Executive Group, for example, comprises all of the progression champions plus all members of the Central Team, plus some other members. The Group performs the work required of it in terms of operational management decisions; however the group members also carry out their own duties within the LLN or in the case of the progression champions, within their own partner institutions. Likewise, the Working Groups are composed mainly of progression champions and members of the Central Team.

**The Lancashire LLN Strategic Board**

The Strategic Board comprises a senior representative of each of the partner institutions and members drawn from the Sector Skills Council related to each of the priority sectors. The Board is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor of UCLan or his representative. The Board has met twice a year and its responsibilities have been to:

- Oversee the delivery of the aims and objectives of the LLN
- Set governance, management and operating policies
- Appoint an Executive Group
- Approve the strategic plan
- Develop and cement the commitment of each partner institution
- Ensure that agreements and frameworks effectively bridge those already existing across individual HEI’s networks with FECs
- Approve financial plans and receive reports on expenditure and income
- Monitor and approve activities via a report from an annual evaluation process
- Handle any conflicting issues

The Lancashire LLN Strategic Board oversees the approval of agreements and provides strategic guidance where negotiations between institutions reach an impasse or fall behind the schedule agreed by the member institutions.

(LLN Business Plan, 2008)
Figure 1

The Structure of the Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network

- Strategic Board
- Executive Group
- Central Team
- Working Groups
- LLN Forum
- Progression Champions
- Partner Institutions
Effectiveness of the Strategic Board

A review of meetings using the documentation provided and from interviews with members of the Strategic Board shows the board fulfilling its role in an effective manner of providing strategic direction and decision making. Chaired originally by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of UCLan, Alan Roff, this role is currently held by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Student Experience), Professor Roderick Dubrow-Marshall. The Board has continued to meet regularly at c. 6 monthly intervals and has considered the mainstream business of the LLN involving areas such as, determining policy, functioning and development of the partnership, progression issues, development of the Visaroute system, budget management, approval of changes to the structure of the LLN and oversight of funding awards. The Board also approves the LLN Update Reports required by HEFCE. The Board has worked closely with the Director of the LLN, receiving and supporting his regular reports. The continued support of the Board by all members of the partnership, has led to decisions being made by consensus rather than through dispute.

The Board has acted in a transparent manner, ensuring that all issues are debated thoroughly with the views of relevant partners and stakeholder groups being taken into account. It has worked continually in the best interest of the LLN and its partners in for example, ensuring fair and appropriate distribution of funding such as through ASNs and CDAs. It has operated flexibly in approving changes to the structure and working of the LLN where it has been considered beneficial and apposite. All documents evidenced are clear, detailed and well-presented and show clearly how decisions reached have been made. Members’ commitment to Board meetings has been variable with minutes showing an average of 60% attendance over the tenure of the LLN. The business of the Strategic Board at these meetings however, has always been completed.

The operation of the Strategic Board has been noted by some of its members as being ‘paper heavy’ and concerned with a lot of ‘approval of documents’ giving not enough time for strategic debate. Equally, it has been noted by others as ‘too much of a talking shop’. However, the evidence provided in document form and through individual interview shows that the Strategic Board has been efficient in carrying out its role as the strategic lead and fulfilling its responsibilities of oversight, monitoring and approval, for both the Lancashire LLN and HEFCE. In particular, the actions of the Strategic Board and the way in which it has conducted its business have ensured that the LLN has focused its attention on achieving its objectives as set out in the original LLN Business Plan. It has also played a major role in determining the future of the LLN post-December 2011.

The Lancashire LLN Executive Group

This group has provided the operational arm of the LLN and reports to the Strategic Board. It has had executive responsibilities to:

- Direct and coordinate the work of the Area Groups and ensure that progression and other institutional agreements are in place across Lancashire
- Set and monitor progress towards achieving the aims and objectives of the LLN
- Handle planning, in particular, developing, managing and updating the strategic plan, endorsing the implementation plans from each Area Group, overseeing and monitoring their delivery
- Co-ordinate those collaborative areas identified in the strategic plan
- Develop protocols, progression accords and the necessary arrangements for the allocation and funding of ASNs
- Recommend any necessary adjustments to the governance, management and staffing structures
- Set the overall communications strategy for the LLN
- Set the monitoring, evaluation and research strategies for the Area Groups and approve implementation and marketing plans  
  \[\text{(Lancashire LLN Business Plan, 2008)}\]

The Group comprises of:

- The Central Team
- The progression champions
- A representative from AHL
- Representatives by invitation from the other Lancashire-based organisations as required.

The Executive Group is chaired by the Director of Advancement at UCLan, Lynne Duckworth who has responsibility for overseeing the work programmes, activities, reporting to the Strategic Board and linking the other key components of the LLN.

**Effectiveness of the Lancashire LLN Executive Group**

The group has met regularly at c. 8 week intervals during the tenure of the LLN. The group was established to oversee operational management and control working in close cooperation with the Director. The group has engendered effective engagement with its constituent partners across Lancashire and responded flexibly during its tenure to the changing needs of the LLN. It has performed its duties effectively in a variety of areas such as ‘sounding out’ new ideas, monitoring progress of budgets and projects, ensuring collaboration between partners, providing direction for progression agreements, IAG and CDP developments, making decisions on the award of ASNs and CDA funding in respect of new curriculum developments and ensuring effective engagement strategies with employers. Operations in some of these areas have proved more successful than in others, but the Executive Group working closely with and in support of the Director, has successfully guided the operational management of the Lifelong Learning Network through various periods of transition to ensure that its aims have continued to be achieved. The Executive Group has worked in a spirit of co-operation and collaboration which is clearly recognised across the partnership and has resulted consistently in positive and objective agreement on issues such as funding and project development; areas which in other circumstances could well have caused disagreement.

Documentary evidence from meetings and attendance at two Executive Group meetings by the evaluator all indicate that the LLN is managed effectively in terms of, transparency of business, open debate, budgetary considerations and the discussion of a broad range of issues which are of importance in enabling the LLN to achieve its overall aims. The meetings are consistently attended with listings in the minutes showing an average of 67% attendance during the lifetime of the LLN. Attendance has always been sufficient to ensure that the business of the meetings has been satisfactorily completed.

**Summary**

- The Lancashire LLN has been governed and managed efficiently, with direction and in line with the requirements of HEFCE.
- The Strategic Board has governed effectively in an open and transparent manner and has achieved its objective of forming a collaborative working partnership involving the major HE providers in the region in order to secure the aims of the Lancashire LLN.
The Strategic Board has on occasions been seen as having too much of an approval role rather than as a forum for strategic debate and planning.

The Executive Group has ensured the operational effectiveness of the Lancashire LLN and has conducted its business in an open manner and in a spirit of co-operation. It has provided a positive forum for debate of operational issues and for the ‘sounding out’ of new ideas.

The Strategic Board and the Executive Group have approved changes to the structure of the organisation when this has been considered beneficial for the effective working and outcomes of the Lancashire LLN.

The Strategic Board and the Executive Group have both worked in close co-operation with and supported the work of, the Director of the Lancashire LLN.
5. Operational Management

The Central Team and Progression Champions

As part of its remit the Lancashire LLN was required to develop a viable infrastructure in order to carry out its work. This involved the appointment of both full-time and fractional employees based as a Central Team at UCLan. In addition the LLN directly funded the progression champions at the rate of £10,000 per annum for 3 years, this money being awarded to their employing institution. Further payments of £5,000 per annum were provided to each of the partners in respect of institutional expenses relating to their work on LLN agendas. Extra pro-rata payments were made to cover the extended 5 months life of the LLN. In return the institutions agreed that the progression champion would be released for time appropriate to the partner institution to fulfil their relevant duties. It was also agreed that the champions would be available each Tuesday as necessary to attend meetings and other engagements as specified by the LLN Director.

Although not formally members of the Central Team, the progression champions worked very closely with its members on a week-to-week basis, often as members of the same project teams and/or working groups. As their work has been highly integrated with that of the Central Team, the impact of the work of the progression champions has been included here.

Operational Management structure

At an operational level the following structure has been adopted:

**Director of the LLN** (Full-time)

The Director has overall responsibility for the effective working of the LLN and successful achievement of the aims and objectives and its financial management.

**PA to the Director and Team Administrator** (Full-time)

The PA and team administrator has overall responsibility for the administration of the project, including setting up and delivering an administrative system, dealing with financial issues, liaising with partner institutions and dealing with Central Team matters. In addition the PA provides full personal assistant duties for the Director.

**Sector Consultants** (Part-time)

These were to identify the needs and demands of employers and employer groups in the relevant Priority Sectors and to articulate and represent them to the partner institutions in the LLN for purposes of progression agreements, curriculum development and IAG. A total of 4 sector consultants were appointed on a two day per week basis with other external consultants being brought in as necessary. The original intention of the LLN Business Plan was to appoint a total of 5 sector consultants one for each of the following Priority Sectors:

- Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing
- Construction
- Digital and Creative Industries
- Health and Social Care
- Leisure and Tourism
It should be noted however, that ultimately only 4 Sector Consultants were formally appointed with
the Construction sector brief being taken up by the Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing sector
consultant. The Environment and Sustainability sector was added later, but no consultant was
appointed in this area.

**Education Consultants (Part-time)**

These were to provide a key resource to the LLN for the achievement of its educational aims in
respect of progression agreements, curriculum development and IAG, including (originally)
supporting the Area Groups and liaising with stakeholder groups. In all, 3 educational consultants
were employed on per 2 day per week basis.

**Progression Champions**

The role of the progression champion was to lead and promote the full engagement of their home
organisation with the aims, objectives and activities of the Lancashire LLN. Each champion was
employed by the individual partner institution and funded by the LLN. In total there were 18
Progression Champions, one for each FEC and HEI and one for the LWBLEF.

**Financial Administrator and Sustainability Officer**

In addition there was a Financial Administrator and Sustainability Officer (Fractional equivalent to 1
day per week seconded from UClan Advancement)

Individual roles and responsibilities for members of the Central Team and Progression Champions
are included in Appendix D.

**Other LLN staff**

Other specific expertise in relation to matters such as communication, data collection and analysis,
was funded on an ad-hoc basis with appointments preferably being drawn from experienced staff in
the existing partners. On various occasions, external consultants were appointed on variable
contracts to carry out specific tasks on a full-time or part-time basis.

**The Marketing Group**

A Marketing Group was established using the expertise of marketing professionals from within the
partner institutions.

**The Impact of the Central Team and Progression Champions**

The work of the LLN was to be complex and wide-ranging and the structures adopted needed to
ensure effective working over a sustained 3 year period whilst at the same time allowing a flexible
approach. Within this structure the roles that people played were to be paramount and the impacts
of the Lancashire LLN would be a measure of their success.

In themselves, the roles provided wide-ranging remits for the Director, sector consultants and
education consultants to operate across the Lancashire region in overall pursuit of the aims of the
LLN, in ensuring progression agreements and progression pathways, curriculum development and
delivery and appropriate IAG. Likewise, the role of the progression champions allowed them to
pursue these aims within their own institutions.
Initially the role of the education consultants was regionally based within Lancashire functioning in three distinct Area Groups. These were:

- Lancaster and The Fylde (Blackpool and The Fylde, Lancaster and Morecambe, and Myerscough Colleges)
- East Lancashire (Accrington & Rossendale, Blackburn, Nelson and Colne, Burnley and St Mary’s Colleges)
- Central Lancashire (Preston, Runshaw, Southport, and Skelmersdale and Ormskirk Colleges)

This situation however, lasted only for the first year of the LLN. It became clear during this period that the Area Group approach was causing overlap and repetition, for example, HEI members and members of the Central Team at times having to attend 3 meetings with identical agendas looking at similar or identical issues. This situation was resolved in December 2009 with the area groups being abolished and the formation of the Lancashire LLN Forum. This Forum allowed for all issues to be discussed in a pan-Lancashire framework and has been considered to be mutually beneficial for all participants.

**Impact of the Director**

The Lancashire LLN has benefited from the drive and operational style of the Director, Alan Mould. In the early part of the LLN the Director undertook substantial research and visited a number of other LLNs in order to ascertain the direction and strategies that the LLN might adopt, at the same time seeking out areas of good practice that were evident across the LLNs nationally. As the Lancashire LLN was the last one to be set up by HEFCE, so it was ‘able to benefit from the experience of others in what to do and what not to do’. In addition, as Chair of the National LLN Forum from March 2011 until its closure in July 2011 he was able to bring a national perspective into the workings of the Lancashire LLN. The Director has made a determined effort to ensure that all of the actions taking place across the LLN have been considered fairly, debated at the appropriate forum and that any decisions have been openly and objectively made. He has maintained very clear channels of communication across the LLN, reporting back appropriately and clearly at all of the Strategic Board and Executive Group meetings. Further, he has provided regular, Key Policy Update reports to the members of LLN, looking at policy developments that are occurring on national or regional agendas that will have an impact on the work of the LLN and its partners. Recently, updates have included issues such as the outcomes of *Securing a Sustainable Future for HE* (Browne, 2010) (*the Browne Review*), relating to changes in HE funding and student support methodologies and the potential effects on partner institutions from the changes outlined in the government report, *Skills for Sustainable Growth* (BIS, 2010). In addition, the Director has consistently endeavoured to ensure that the Lancashire LLN partnership has remained strong in a collaborative sense, continually encouraging the sharing of good practice and opportunities for partners to work in collaboration with each other. Feedback received by the evaluation process has included ‘Alan has provided good direction to the LLN’ and ‘…..he has provided good leadership’. There have been detractors from this view but the main thrust of comments received and evidence collated has been that the Director has steered the course of the LLN with direction and a unified sense of purpose during a three year period which has endured major social and educational policy changes.

The overall impact of the Director has been one of active direction and continual challenge to the partners and maintaining the momentum to drive through the agenda of aims which have been and continue to be achieved across the LLN.
The Sector Consultants and Education Consultants

The work of the sector consultants and education consultants has been highly valued across the network. They have been seen as networking and working very closely with progression champions and other staff in partner institutions in order to make ideas into reality. The partners consider that they will leave a legacy of networks and contacts across Lancashire, sharing of ideas and finding solutions to common problems that can only be beneficial.

Impact of the Sector Consultants

The Sector Consultants have been particularly involved in engaging with employers, employers’ organisations and SSCs and bringing this employer-led perspective into FECs and HEIs to influence and support new curriculum and delivery development and IAG strategies. At the same time they also engage with employers themselves in looking at the needs of their workforce in terms of upskilling at higher level. In addition, they have worked at providing up-to-date LMI data to inform partners in their curriculum and other planning.

‘The sector consultants have given excellent value and provided useful LMI information and advice with regards to employer engagement and employer needs. The consultant for our sector was excellent.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘The sector consultants were very good for our college altogether - they brought in new perspectives and helped inform curriculum developments and provided an employer view.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

As a result of the work of the sector consultants, many employers have become much more engaged in the process of curriculum design and development. The consultants have been instrumental in helping partner’s access appropriate funding streams such as CDAs and then engaging partners and employers to work together to refresh the curriculum, in for example, the areas of FDS, Honours Degree top-ups and CPD modules. They have also worked with partners and employers in ensuring that modes of delivery for courses are appropriate to the needs of industry, that employers clearly understand the concept of progression and how higher-level upskilling is important both for their employees and for their business.

‘They [the sector consultants] have been pointing people into colleges from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) etc., and embracing employers and SSCs and cluster organisations, for example, Automotive, Textiles, Aerospace, Business etc. They have spent time talking with business clusters about upskilling their workforce, higher-level skills and learning and spreading progression ideas; they have also sowed the concept of improving progression opportunities. They have utilised the present employers’ forums to good effect and as a result have really impacted their thinking onto the employers.’

(Executive Board Member - FEC)

‘The sector consultants helped us in our in employer engagement at Level 4. This was an area in which we were lacking and their help was excellent.’

(Progression champion - FEC)
The work of the sector consultants has been commented on widely at all levels across the partnership as to its value and effectiveness in driving forward the employer engagement agenda. The evidence points to remarkable success in bringing employers and delivery providers together across the full range of priority sectors to jointly consider the most effective way of designing and delivering new curriculum which will be appropriate for both employers and employees.

‘The work of the sector consultants has been very important - we would not want to lose their skill and expertise. Hopefully their work can be linked to the LEP.’

(Strategic Board member - HEI)

‘The sector consultants have done an excellent job providing really useful and vital labour market information intelligence. They have proved an excellent link into the local employment agenda and information - these people really are worth keeping.’

(Executive Group members - HEI and FEC)

Impact of the Education Consultants

Reference has already been made to the fact that the responsibilities of the education consultants changed in February 2010 following the abolition of the Area Group structure. Up to that time, the consultants acted as a focus for the work of the partner institutions in their defined geographic area in terms of support and dissemination of data, working on progression strategies, and guiding course and curriculum developments etc. At the same time they would work with and support the sector consultants and progression champions to ensure that effective linkages were made between employers, partner institutions and other stakeholders. The role of the education consultant was clearly important therefore at the start of the LLN in making linkages and getting various organisations to work together and trust each other. In this sense they linked the context of the LLN to the HE curriculum in a variety of partner organisations.

Following the changes at the end of the first year, each of the education consultants took on a new non-geographical role across the LLN. In addition to their generic roles in advising partners on curriculum and IAG developments, each consultant took on responsibility for one of the following areas:

- The Apprentices Project
- Development of Visaroute
- Working with the Nuclear sector/Digital and Creative sector

In this regard each now utilises their subject specialism to ensure success across the network. However, they have continued to maintain their relationships with the FECs in their original geographical areas to ensure that the LLN support they receive is still appropriate and effective, although to some extent this part of their work has been taken over by the setting up of the LLN Forum. They also work closely with the sector consultants on the development of new curriculum ideas.

The impact of the work of the education consultants has been positive in that they were instrumental in the development of relationships with other partners and stakeholders across their Area Groups in the early part of the LLN. These relationships of trust and acceptance were vital to the effective running and achievement of the aims of the LLN and not only was this secured on an area basis, but this trust and acceptance between the partner institutions has now been transferred
more widely across to the LLN Forum. The ability of the educational consultants to initially bring together the partners and stakeholders in their areas and drive the major agendas of the LLN forward in a focused and determined way has led to the spirit of positive co-operation, consensus and mutual understanding and support which exists across the LLN at the present time.

Latterly the consultants have made major impacts in areas relating to their respective specialism. The Apprentices Project has been highly successful in its delivery of interventions for Level 3 Advanced Apprentices in increasing their awareness and understanding of the opportunities available for HE progression. In addition the Train the Trainers - Preparation for HE module has proved highly successful for those staff participating, raising their awareness about progression opportunities and the identification and removal of barriers for Advanced Apprentices who wish to progress to HE in their own or other institutions.

The Visaroute web-based IAG system has been developed in line with the requirement to provide a comprehensive coverage of IAG and progression agreements across the county of Lancashire. The system is now fully operational and has been re-launched at the recently held CEIAG conference. The system will be maintained by Blackburn College following closure of the Lancashire LLN.

The Nuclear Industries now, in effect, have their own ‘champion’ in the LLN although developments in this sector have not been as positive they could have been. The development of Higher Apprenticeships in this sector have been discussed and considered but at present the nuclear industry and their supply chain companies do not consider this an appropriate way forward preferring instead progression through the Higher National Certificate (HNC) route. Likewise, work in the Digital and Creative industries looking at the development of a Higher Apprenticeship route has not yet been successful. In both of these areas however, the education consultant concerned and the sector consultant for the Digital and Creative Industries have clearly raised the agenda of these developments with the relevant employment sectors. Should funding arise in the future, post-LLN for either of these developments, a platform for discussion is already in existence, courtesy of the work of the LLN education consultant.

Impact of the Progression Champions

As in most LLNs, the role of the progression champion was to act as a two-way communication channel between the LLN itself and the partner institutions. Initially the process was seen as somewhat slow to start, as all champions were clearly new to their role. However the role started to develop as the champions started getting into the wider community of their organisations and feeding through information about LLN initiatives into these FECs and HEIs. Progression champions have been able to work at a variety of levels within their institutions; for example, raising the profiles of apprentices and providing progression information about HE opportunities, circulating LMI information, meeting with relevant decision makers such as Director of HE or Assistant-Principal in FECs and Heads of Schools in HEIs, in order to outline the work of the LLN and the opportunities that various initiatives could provide. Initially, some staff in FECs with little experience of HE were intimidated by the processes operating at HE level even within their own institutions. In such cases the work of the progression champions in relation to, for example CDA and CPD opportunities, has really boosted the confidence of staff and consequently raised awareness of the opportunities available at HE level to a much wider range of students.
‘The progression champion has made a big impact at our college, being very proactive and enthusiastic. The LLN funded post came just at the right time and tied in with our developments in terms of HE development and progression issues.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

As the LLN has progressed the progression champions have increasingly been perceived as fulfilling their role as a two way conduit; their role in the transmission of ideas has been welcomed and seen to be effective. The LLN had a set of well-developed and focused agendas which it was tasked with implementing across Lancashire. Regular Forum meetings attended by progression champions from February 2010 onwards allowed debate and sharing of ideas which could then be transmitted back to the individual institutions. This allowed for the permeating of ideas across the partnership resulting for example in changes to curriculum, changes to approaches in IAG, more staff realising opportunities for CPD and in some cases changes in pedagogy within individual institutions. This devolved model of progression champions acting within and through their own institutions has been widely regarded as successful.

The progression champions although working to a role defined by the LLN, have however operated in a manner distinctive to their own institution. Some have worked more closely with their own marketing departments, some have been involved more closely with curriculum developments, for example, through implementation of CDAs and ASN, others have focused on improving progression for Advanced Apprentices, whilst some have spent time implementing new ideas about IAG and progression to HE issues in general across their institution. The outcome of the work of the progression champions has as a result been many and various, with increased understanding of progression opportunities for a much wider constituency of vocational FE students (and staff), the identification and removal of barriers to progression and improvement in admissions procedures to HE for non-‘A’ Level students. In addition, provision of institutional data in a form appropriate for the development of the Visaroute system to inform progression agreements and progression pathways for learners, are all highly positive outcomes of the work of progression champions that can be evidenced in virtually all of the partner institutions.

‘The progression champions helped the LLN fulfil its objectives by raising awareness in a wide range of areas which will give long term effectiveness.’

(External consultant)

‘HEIs were not generally aware of the other vocational routes into HE, but the work of the progression champions has helped and been very valuable here.’

(Strategic Board member - FEC)

This element of effective communication on the part of the progression champions is one that has been well regarded within the partner institutions and the spreading of ideas has been welcomed along with the realisation that the progression champions ‘have introduced things into our institutions that we would not previously have done, but which have been very beneficial’.

The role of the progression champion where carried out effectively, enabled an increase in awareness of students and staff across the network to learn more about and understand the issues relating to progression to HE. What became apparent quite quickly however was that in some cases the effectiveness of the role was related to the individual’s position within their own organisation. It
was the case that a progression champion with a position at Director level might well have more effect and influence within their own organisation than a member of staff who played a much more junior role within the organisation. Also, in some instances due to internal staffing re-organisations, the role of progression champion was passed on to a different member of staff; in some cases, institutions have had 3 different progression champions during the lifetime of the LLN which has not been considered as particularly helpful either for the LLN or the institution concerned. Equally, it has been noted by some observers that some of the progression champions ‘were more effective than others’ and that in some instances ‘some were probably the wrong choice’, although this was by no means in the majority of cases.

To date, several of the partner institutions have confirmed that they have realised the value of the position of progression champion and their work within their own institution and as such, they will continue to fund a post of this nature after the closure of the Lancashire LLN.

**Working through Area Groups**

Initially as part of the original Business Plan, the LLN intended to ensure provision across the Lancashire region by setting up distinct Area Groups. Recognising factors such as the economic, social and ethnic diversity within Lancashire, variations in areas of relative deprivation across the county, strong local identities and contrasts in socio-economic make-up, three specific area groups were proposed to cover:

- Lancaster and The Fylde
- East Lancashire
- Central Lancashire

As time progressed however, it became clear that this ‘area approach’ was becoming resource and time intensive and somewhat repetitious. As a consequence, in December 2009, this structure was abolished with all matters of discussion and operation transferred to the Lancashire LLN Forum which met for the first time in February 2010.

**The Operational Forum**

In addition to the Area Groups outlined above, it was also originally proposed to convene an annual Operational Forum co-ordinated by the Director of the LLN and the sector and educational consultants. The aim of this forum was to bring together persons with operating responsibilities from each partner institution for agreed areas of interest across the network; examples would include work-based learning, quality assurance, marketing, admission and progression requirements etc. These meetings would act as opportunities for sharing good practice, advising on broad structures for institutional co-operation and opportunities for those operating within each institution to network across the county. However from the inception of the LLN, this group was never to meet, and has never functioned. Its role was ultimately taken over by the Lancashire LLN Forum from February 2010 onwards.

**The Lancashire LLN Forum (The Forum)**

With the demise of the Area Groups in December 2009, the Forum (as it is now known) has become a much more important and regular meeting opportunity than was previously conceived. Comprising the Central Team, progression champions and the AHL representative, the Forum meets regularly (every 6-8 weeks) for purposes of CPD, general networking and dissemination of information, to share elements of good practice, the challenging of myths and any other matters relevant to the
operation of the LLN. The Forum in this way has offered partner institutions a regular opportunity for exchange of views and ideas in relation to the main areas of focus of the LLN. It also provides the Director an opportunity to regularly update the core members of his team.

Impact of the Forum

The impact of the Forum has been profound on those who have been members and those people and organisations across the LLN who they have subsequently worked with. At its regular meetings the Forum has proved an excellent arena for members to meet and discuss relevant issues and has provided an opportunity for networking and seeing what others are doing across the partnership. In addition, it has facilitated the opportunity for presentations from speakers across the network, for example, individual progression champions or other practitioners to present about a particular project, good practice developed or achievements in their institution. Equally the Forum has facilitated opportunity for a wide range of external speakers from organisations such as the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), JISC and STEMNET to talk about achievements, opportunities and good practice.

The Forum sessions have clearly impacted individually on the members in providing them with a continual stream of CPD and ideas which can then be taken back and cascaded in their own institutions. The effects on the institutions in this respect have been noted as being exceptionally positive.

‘It [the Forum] has been excellent for the progression champion from our institution allowing her to support us in our knowledge and understanding of the LLN.’

(Executive Board member - HEI)

‘It has provided an excellent CPD opportunity for all of the progression champions.’

(Executive Board member - FEC)

Virtually all of the information from the Forum has been shared beneficially with other practitioners in the partnership and has often been cascaded down to relevant students and in some cases to employers.

‘She [the progression champion] has had a huge amount of CPD which has now been cascaded into our college. She will be sharing some of this knowledge when she takes part in the forthcoming CEIAG conference.’

(Executive Board member - FEC)

One senior staff member in an FEC has commented that as a result of their progression champion attending the Forum meetings and cascading ideas back into college, ‘......we are now much smarter and wiser that we were 3 years ago in terms of FE progression into vocational HE’. The CPD that originated with the Lancashire LLN Forum clearly fitted well with the college philosophy of providing high quality CPD for all staff. As a result, the college has adopted the Forum model and now has a programme of Continuing Lecturer Education modules embedded at Levels 3, 4 and 5 available to all staff. The modules have specific emphasis on progression across and through the college and are making staff much more aware of issues such as opportunities for progression, data interpretation, and barriers to progression. These ideas have been derived from those of the Forum with the progression champion involved in the development of the CPD modules in her own college.
It should be noted here that the Forum was not specifically designed to be a vehicle solely for CPD, indeed it has proved to be much more that. It has been a major networking opportunity, a place for collaborative conversation and exchange of good practice and a place to discover what impacts regional and national agendas mean for the future of the LLN and the partner institutions. It also clearly demonstrates that local institutions can work together in order to successfully achieve common goals rather than taking a protectionist stance.

‘The input of the Forum has been excellent. The information gathered [from there] has been really useful for helping us with informing and developing our institutional Business Plan. The LLN is developing well through the use of the Forum.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

Equally though, there are some areas where the Forum has not been as successful as it would have liked. There could have been greater overall engagement with admissions tutors and comment has also been made that perhaps some of the LLN’s achievements were more appropriate to FECs than HEIs. This may be the case, but the many profound and clear impacts that the Forum has made on individuals and institutions across the Lancashire LLN partnership cannot be ignored.

The Working Groups

Running alongside the Forum and often feeding into its work have been the Working Groups. These were set up to provide a focus for work on various issues that were considered of prime importance for the LLN. Membership of the working groups comprises progression champions, sector consultants and education consultants although each group can call on professional expertise from across the network or elsewhere as they so require. Various groups were originally set up, each with a specific remit and individuals were asked to join those of interest to them.

The Working Groups have been widely considered across the partnership as some of the best groups set up in allowing input from the LLN Central Team and partner institutions to be discussed openly.

The working groups comprised:

- The Higher Apprentices Working Group
- Part-time HE and Distance Learning Working Group
- The CEIAG Group
- The Bite-Sized Working Group
- The Professional Practice Working Group
- The STEM Working Group

The aim of the groups was to look at areas of common interest and to spread good practice across the LLN partners. From the perspective of those participating, these groups proved to be some of the most useful within the LLN in that they offered the opportunity for individuals to pursue areas of particular personal interest, at the same time as allowing them to influence practice and policy of benefit to the partner institutions. The outcomes achieved have varied depending on a variety of factors such as composition of the group, changing external factors and acceptance of ideas expressed by the wider LLN; also some groups took a longer time to get going than others and so have not been able to achieve as much in outcome terms. The Bite-Sized Working Group met for only a brief period and was eventually disbanded as the need for ‘bite-sized’ curriculum was not considered appropriate across the LLN.
The Higher Apprentices Working Group

This group has to some extent been regarded as a ‘talking shop’ for relevant issues. This is partly because of the lack of guidance that has been available from NAS as to the operation of Higher Apprenticeships across industry and in the HE provider sector. Information about funding and regulatory frameworks for example, has only been forthcoming from the NAS since mid-2011 with funding available only from September 2011. Nevertheless, the working group have continued to debate the issues surrounding Higher Apprenticeships, in terms of the shape and form they might take, target sectors, funding and timescales and how individual institutions across the LLN might be able to take advantage of funding once it comes on stream. In particular, the LLN Director had a good working knowledge in this area as he was closely involved with the development of the Higher Apprenticeship in Construction, developed jointly by the LLN National Forum, the Lancashire LLN, 2 other LLNs, Construction Skills SSC and the University Vocational Awards Council, (UVAC).

The group have worked with Cogent SSC in considering the development of Higher Apprenticeships in the Construction, Nuclear and Digital and Creative Industry sectors. The group has also considered the recently published Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) which defines the requirements for Higher Apprenticeships within England and arrangements for the use of FDs and other related qualifications within them. This information has now been shared across the partnership and will be valuable for partners developing Higher Apprenticeship programmes post-LLN.

The overall effect of the group therefore, has been to raise awareness of what is happening in terms of Higher Apprenticeships so that institutions can take advantage of any future developments or funding once they come on stream, either individually or collaboratively.

The Part-time HE and Distance-Learning Working Group

This group has discussed and acted upon a variety of issues during its tenure. This has included areas such as curriculum developments for part-time mode of delivery, responding flexibly to the needs of business, e-learning developments, blended learning developments and part-time developments related to changes in funding. The group has considered the changing needs of the pedagogy in these areas and cascaded the information through progression champions back into the partner institutions.

The discussions that have taken place recently within this working group have related very much as to how HE providers locally might need to respond to the Browne Review (2010) and other recent government policy proposals relating to changes in HE. This has involved many of the curriculum and pedagogical areas mentioned above, with particular emphasis as to how the partner institutions can prepare themselves for the major changes in teaching, learning and mode and location of delivery that will inevitably be taking place in HE over the next few years. These messages about the need for institutions to review their strategic aims for HE in terms of developing off-campus and adult and work-based learning provision have been effectively cascaded from this group and in some cases have resonated strongly with the partners.

Major topic areas for discussion by this group have included new approaches to on-line learning at national and strategic level, developments through JISC/MEG, providing information on new
EDEXCEL developments in this area, teaching and learning approaches in respect of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), developments at the National Design Academy and updates on the HEFCE Online Learning Task Force. The dissemination of this information on these issues across the partnership is clearly aimed at informing the FECs and HEIs about new agendas which will affect them in the future and how they might respond to changes in teaching, learning, delivery and changes in their client cohorts. Changes of this nature are going to be fundamental across all aspects of HE delivery in the future and this working group has clearly signposted the partner institutions to the importance of distance and on-line learning, post-Lancashire LLN.

‘We have valued the input from this group. We have been looking at the pedagogy associated with distance-learning anyway - but we will incorporate any ideas that come to us from the LLN.’

(Senior Manager - FEC)

The CEIAG Working Group

This group has provided an opportunity for sharing good practice in IAG across the LLN. The group has engaged in looking at types and styles of IAG available across the priority sectors and then cascaded ideas for good practice into partner institutions. It has, for example, provided useful advice on the development of the LLN Passports. Some partners have commented that information about Visaroute and IAG opportunities on the LLN website have proved invaluable, although this has not been a consensus view. More recently the group has worked on the organisation of the CEIAG Conference that was held on the 4th October 2011 aimed at Careers and IAG professionals and Admissions Officers in HE delivery organisations. The conference proved highly successful in raising awareness across the FE/HE sector in Lancashire, particularly in respect of removing barriers and the improvement of admissions procedures for vocational and non-traditional learners into HE.

The Professional Practice Working Group

This group originally consisted of 3 progression champions and 2 members of the Central Team - the group later dropping to 4 members, as one of the progression champions changed their role. The purpose of the group was to look at various professional practice models of HE which included Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and WBL in their design to see how these might be integrated into the partner institutions’ HE provision. The group met on four occasions with inputs from UCLan’s Professional Practice unit, Lancaster University’s Post-graduate Diploma in Educational Practice team and the University of Derby’s Work-Based unit. At the last meeting the progression champions felt the group had been a very valuable ‘task and finish’ group and both champions had gained the insight and knowledge they needed to take forward developments within their own institutions.

The STEM Working Group

This group arose from the work of the sector consultant for Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing in consultation with the Director of the LLN. The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Group has focused on developing routes into STEM subjects and encouraging young people to become interested in these subject areas. The group has a wider membership than most of the LLN working groups, encompassing several academics from partner institutions in addition to progression champions and members of the Central Team. The group has had inputs on LMI in STEM subjects from STEMNET ambassadors and has been responsible for supporting the development of the LLN STEM ‘APP’. This APP, which will be available by December 2011 gives information, advice and guidance on careers and courses in STEM subjects and will link to
many other websites including those of relevant SSCs such as Cogent and Construction Skills. The STEM group is also linked with the North-west Universities Association (NWUA) STEM project, via the sector consultant and the LLN Director who both sit on the steering group.

**Impact of the Working Groups**

The Working Groups have allowed members of the LLN to develop expertise in particular areas that they see of value for themselves in terms of CPD and to their respective institutions in terms of a variety of potential developments. The Groups facilitated important and topical issues at national and regional level to be discussed in an open forum with the ideas engendered being transmitted back into the partner institutions to be considered and effected at the local level. The topics covered have included a very wide range of important issues across many areas of the LLN’s work and continually raised awareness and understanding in these areas across the partnership. The outputs from the Working Groups in areas such as curriculum development, IAG, on-line and distance learning, STEM developments, opportunities for professional practice and Higher Apprenticeship developments have all been fed through, directly into the partners by the members of the central team, the progression champions and in some cases by other practitioners who have attended. In this way the partner institutions have been able to keep up-to-date with and utilise the benefits of ideas and information, which is other circumstances might not have been received so directly or in such a focused way.

**Summary**

- The Director has provided effective leadership and direction in pursuit of positive achievement of the aims and objectives of the Lancashire LLN.

- The sector consultants have carried out their role with vigour in ensuring appropriate advice and guidance across the partnership and developing effective links with employers and employers’ organisations.

- The role of the education consultants has been important in their developing positive relationships across the partnership during its initial stages and providing the necessary guidance, advice and leadership. They have since proved highly effective in their specialist roles, developed during the last two years.

- The progression champions have fulfilled a pivotal role in acting as a two-way communication channel between the LLN itself and their own partner institutions. Their work has been instrumental in cascading ideas and facilitating change within their own institutions in areas such as progression, curriculum enhancement and development and approaches to teaching and learning.

- The majority of progression champions have made a major impact in their own institutions.

- The Area Group structure was not seen to be the most beneficial model of working within the partnership. The LLN Forum has proved to be much more appropriate to the effective working of the LLN.
• The areas of work covered by the Working Groups have been wide-ranging and proved useful in developing interest and expertise in areas clearly of benefit to the LLN. The output of these groups in terms of new ideas, knowledge and awareness has been continually cascaded into the partner institutions.

• Some of the Working Groups such as the Bite-Sized, were considered not appropriate and ceased to operate at an early stage.
6. Collaboration across the Partnership

With the inception of LLNs one of the main premises of HEFCE was that each would develop a partnership of organisations in a particular region which would work collaboratively to achieve a series of commonly delivered goals in relation to improving opportunity for vocational students to progress to HE.

This requirement is clearly iterated in the Lancashire LLN Business Plan which aims to... ‘build upon current networks to create even stronger, sustainable partnerships between the Further and HE sectors, work-based learning providers and employers’, and reinforced in the overarching Principles for Governance that: ‘It is clear that activity cannot exist in isolation and the importance of building on current good practice and trust will be paramount to success’. Reference is also made here to ensuring success in that..... ‘Lancashire LLN partners have agreed to a set of principles based on their willingness to communicate openly with all partners and stakeholders and develop and share best practice’.

Clearly, the concept of collaboration between partners was to be of the utmost importance to the effective working of the LLN partnership and fundamental in ensuring that the county-wide range of activities and interventions that would be undertaken would be made available to as wide a range of learners as possible. This was further reinforced in two of the key milestones relating to Governance and Management in requiring the development of, ‘A strong network of institutions cemented by meaningful agreements in support of the progression of vocational learners across Lancashire and which are sustainable into the future’ with ‘Procedures in place to ensure the sharing of good practice and the enhancement of quality in the provision for vocational learners’.

These requirements and commitments were clear from the start - the members of the Lancashire LLN were expected to work collaboratively. The extent to which the Lancashire LLN embraced this concept of collaboration and the impact that it has had on its outcomes is outlined below. Of equal importance is to what extent the LLN became a truly collaboratively partnership and anyway, did this contribute to ensuring that its aims were fulfilled?

The Collaborative Approach

Collaboration across the Lancashire LLN network has developed in various ways. In recent years, the concept of a freer market in FE and HE had led to increased competition between institutions. Not surprisingly the free flow of information between organisations has been somewhat restricted and co-operation somewhat limited as individual educational institutions have competed across the learning market place. The advent of the Lancashire LLN from 2008 onwards has proved particularly successful in bringing institutions into forums where it has been possible for them to see the benefits of collaborative working and realise the collective opportunities that this can bring.

Collaboration and the Lancashire LLN Forum

The original concept of Area Groups during the first year of the LLN led to FECs in areas such as Pennine Lancashire working more closely with other FECs and HEIs that had a geographical proximity or other link. This allowed them to meet and share ideas and generate a feeling of understanding and trust that had not necessarily been there previously. With the formation of the LLN Forum in February 2010, greater and more effective collaboration across the entire partnership became something that was readily established and the advantages clearly seen for all. The effects of this collaboration can be seen in a wide range of areas and activities across the partnership.
The original Area Groups and later the LLN Forum led to the realisation and identification of similar issues and problems in a regional context. The early meetings did not necessarily provide for positive collaboration between institutions or individuals and ‘others’ were viewed with some suspicion. However, the LLN continually challenged this division and encouraged a more ‘working together’ approach. As a consequence the Forum is now viewed as a very useful venue in helping to develop collaboration amongst partners. In this respect the LLN has been instrumental in letting institutions find out how partner organisations work, which has proved very useful in allowing partners to talk together and find commonalities. What has become clear across the Forum is that open and free discussion has been useful and has helped in resolving common issues; it has allowed for the sharing of both good and bad practice which is clearly beneficial across the LLN.

Increasingly, the partnership encouraged FECs to work with HEIs more than previously, for example, to validate new FD curricula and in some cases, to then use specific modules in a stand-alone CPD capacity. In this context, collaboration was clearly effective in bringing about increased communication between institutions and accrued benefits for both learners and FEC staff. In some instances the LLN also facilitated collaborative links with HEIs which simply had not happened before.

‘We had a good relationship with our HEI anyway.... but the LLN certainly provided opportunity to make inroads with other HE providers in the region and other FECs. Basically we improved communications with many other institutions in the region and were able to learn from them. Also the Apprentices Project developed jointly through the LLN and AHL made us more aware in relation to opportunities for Level 3 Apprentices and appropriate HE progression pathways.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

At another level the LLN collaborative approach derived benefit for some institutions in terms of improving collaboration within the individual institutions themselves. Large educational institutions can sometimes have poor internal communications and the LLN helped here particularly where FE and HE are delivered on split sites or on different parts of a large campus. In some cases the FE and HE parts of FECs do not communicate particularly well with each other with each academic area driving its own agenda. In that part of the LLN’s agenda was to bring together FE and HE practitioners in order to engender improved progression, so it was able to bring together disparate parts of individual institutions; in some cases people had never worked together in this way, nor had there been any effective communication lines between the FE and HE areas of the college. In this respect the partner progression champions played a particularly important role and in many instances they were instrumental in bringing people together.

‘The progression champion worked across college on Level 3 to Level 4 Progression issues.... so all staff are now so much more aware of internal progression - the result is internal collaboration which simply had not been there before’.

(Senior manager - FEC)

‘The whole ethos of the LLN has applied here in helping to bring the practitioners in the two parts of the institution together to discuss curriculum and other professional issues.’

(Progression champion - FEC)
In one partner FEC some groups were not really speaking to each other internally; for example, the Creative Department and the Health Department had very little communication with each other. With the advent of new curriculum developments in creative hairdressing, the departments realised areas of mutual interest and now work much more closely together to the benefit of their students. In this case the LLN helped to break down barriers which hadn’t really been recognised.’

(Sector consultant)

The Lancashire LLN as a Support Network

In some cases the LLN has clearly been seen as a support network. Partners have found that collaborative working opportunities provided by the LLN allow for the development of new ideas in a wider framework of thinking. Several have found working with new partners useful, for example, in terms of new FD curriculum development which has helped improve recruitment in novel areas. This type of sharing of ideas (in a previously competitive environment) was simply not happening before; equally, common ideas for IAG development and sustainability of programmes have been beneficial across and between FECs.

A further development of collaborative practice has involved FECs and HEIs working more closely with PTPs in the area of progression opportunities and CPD developments. Beneast Training Ltd of Blackpool has developed close links with Blackpool and The Fylde College in the development of joint CPD provision for staff delivering programmes to Advanced Apprentices. This’ Train the Trainers - Preparation for HE’ programme developed and provided by the LLN has enabled staff from both organisations to engage in CPD that will be beneficial in enhancing progression opportunities for their students. At the same time this development has also allowed for a generic dialogue to be developed between private and public sector providers of apprentices’ training, allowing exchange of ideas and good practice - something that happens rarely between these two sectors.

What becomes particularly apparent here is that many of these support mechanisms and the exchange of ideas would not have happened previously due to safeguarding of ideas by individual institutions. What is also clear is that an atmosphere of trust has developed across the LLN partnership which has allowed for a sharing of ideas to take place in an environment of mutual respect and understanding.

‘People in colleges are always stretched so we can provide lots of collaborative support across the network through the LLN partnership. The LLN has given opportunities for FE/HE interactions that would not have taken place previously and allowed for collaborative talking (for example in the Forum) between FECs and HEIs in a way that has not taken place before; moreover, now there is more sharing of good practice across the board and this is because trust has been established between the partners. This is a direct result of the work of the LLN.’

(Strategic Board member - HEI)

This atmosphere of trust has enabled practitioners from across the academic spectrum in Lancashire to become much more aware about collaboration, what it means as a concept and how it can be beneficial. It has also made people think about how ultimately Communities of Practice might work in relation to sustainability of the Lancashire LLN post-December 2011 and has allowed scholarly research to be carried out collaboratively across the LLN in an unthreatening manner. Likewise, common CPD opportunities have been seen as mutually beneficial across the partnership and opened up avenues for dialogue that would not have taken place previously.
‘This networking has made us aware of what was on offer elsewhere and has allowed us to pass this onto staff and students across the Health and Social Care sector in many other partner institutions.’

(Sector consultant)

‘We have used academic colleagues from other colleges to provide advice and expertise in setting up projects - this would not have happened before [the advent of the LLN]’.

(Executive Group member - FEC)

The networking has taken place at a variety of levels, for example, at strategic, operational management and practitioner level. This has also allowed for a variety of groups from FE and HE to meet regularly and exchange ideas in a non-threatening and co-operative environment. A further benefit of collaboration has been derived from sharing good practice and process and allowing institutions to develop capacity by accessing students from elsewhere, at the same time increasing student opportunities. The following case study illustrates the benefits derived through collaborative working.

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**Case Study in Collaboration**

**Blackpool and The Fylde College**

**Dr. Jim Logan** - HE Development Director

In terms of benefiting from collaboration the progression champion brought back ideas from the LLN to our HE Board and showed how our organisation could better collaborate within itself, for example, in areas such as curriculum development and progression from mainstream FE to HE and also from NVQ to HE. We certainly benefited from this area of good practice.

Equally the LLN helped us to develop a closer and hence better relationship with Lancaster University. As a result we see that University staff have come to commit themselves to vocational HE in its partner institutions and in this sense the collaborative approach of the LLN has led our two institutions to understand each other better.

Lancaster University has, for example, been very helpful to Blackpool and The Fylde College in its employer engagement developments and helped us to ensure that employers have been involved and fully engaged in the validation process.

In all, the LLN has provided good forums for members at a time of great change in the educational world, for the exchange and sharing of ideas.
Impacts of collaboration

The LLN has clearly made new linkages between institutions happen, although in some instances the FECs and HEI partners considered that they had good relationships with others anyway, for example, through the UCLan Partnership or similar. What the LLN has done however is to make connections between partners that would not normally have worked together previously, for example, across FECs and HEIs which would not necessarily have seen such connections as proving beneficial. Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College and Blackburn College, for example, co-operated closely on developing the FD in Sustainable Construction. This meant devising a programme and writing modules in co-operation rather than in competition with each other. Clearly in this case the geographic distance between the two institutions meant that there would be little competition in terms of their local student constituencies; however the dialogue and linkages that developed as a result of this joint curriculum development resulted in both cost and time saving and a sharing of ideas on the part of both institutions. This demonstrates the benefits that can accrue from such a collaborative approach.

Further developments have seen three of the Pennine Lancashire FECs (Burnley, Blackburn and Accrington and Rossendale) co-operate in curriculum development initiatives to ensure that specific courses do not compete with each other and hence make courses unviable. In another development, the LLN encouraged HEIs in the region to enter into a dialogue with each other in respect of nuclear provision. More recently STEM meetings as part of developments in the Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing sector have allowed opportunities for a co-operative approach between partner institutions resulting in the collaborative development of the FD in Advanced Skills for Advance Materials. Equally the development of the Visaroute web-based IAG system would have been virtually impossible had a collaborative approach not been taken, as it has involved all partners across the network in the collation of data which will ultimately be collectively beneficial to all members of the partnership.

Collaboration however, cannot be seen in isolation and was only part of the networking developments that issued forth over time from the LLN and these did not come without a cost. The progression champions were paid for by the LLN and as part of their duties were required to be available each Tuesday for meetings as necessary and this initially helped facilitate collaboration across the partnership. As time progressed with partner institutions receiving ASN and CDA funding and other support from the LLN, so the work of the progression champions became recognised, and as a consequence they gained support, value and respect within their institutions and the partners were able to see evidence of the benefits of working collaboratively. In that progression champions collaborated well together, as a bond of mutual trust was established between them, so this helped overall collaboration between institutions. In addition, the education consultants and sector consultants and the LLN Director have acted as agents for the free flow and exchange of ideas between institutions, allowing for activities to take place in a spirit of collaborative co-operation.

From a negative perspective, comments have been made that prior to the LLN there were some good collaborative partnerships ‘there already anyway’. However, even here it is acknowledged that the LLN has allowed for the enhancement of collaboration and made new links that were not there previously.

‘All progression champions have tried hard to ensure the process of mutual support and collaboration.’

(Sector consultant)
‘The collaborative approach helped us very much in our work with improving apprentices’ progression to HE. The LLN enabled excellent collaborative links between FECs and PTPs, which was not easy previously and also allowed us to improve internal progression opportunities to HE for apprentices at our college. AHL and the LLN themselves collaborated closely on the Apprentices Project which was beneficial for apprentices’ progression across the board.’

(STRATEGIC BOARD MEMBER - FEC)

‘Marketing professionals have met across the network to mutual benefit, sharing lots of views and meeting people who we would not have met and gained from otherwise - that is other people providing each other with new ideas and approaches.’

(MARKETING MANAGER - FEC)

Summary

- The work of the Strategic Board and the Executive Group has engendered a culture of positive collaboration across the LLN.

- Collaboration was developed initially through the Area Groups and has been further enhanced through the operation of the LLN Forum.

- Collaboration has ensured effective cooperation between FECs and HEIs at various levels from strategic to practitioner and as a result partner institutions have realised the benefits that can be accrued by working collaboratively together.

- New relationships have been established between partners and established ones have been enhanced. In some cases better collaboration has been established within partner institutions themselves, for example, between the HE, FE and work-based sections of FECs.

- The partnership has been viewed as a Support Network and partners have learned from and supported each other in a wide variety of areas. Several partners, for example, have worked together in terms of collaborative curriculum development.

- Some Private Training Providers have been involved in LLN developments, but there could have been more engagement in this area.
7. The Progression Strategy

In endeavouring to determine the impacts of the Lancashire LLN one of the prime indicators to be considered was that of the improvement in progression opportunities across the partnership. This objective has been fundamental to the work of the LLN and forms a major part of what it has intended to achieve.

The progression strategy adopted by the LLN included the following:

- The development of progression agreements across the partnership
- The development of Visaroute to signpost progression agreements and progression pathways across the partnership
- The identification and removal of barriers to progression
- Greater awareness, understanding and knowledge of progression issues on the part of learners and staff in FECs, HEIs, and employers.
- Progression materials developed as part of the IAG provision
- Use of ASNs and CDA funding to plug progression gaps in the curriculum
- The development of the role of progression champion
- The Apprentices Project

The strategy has been both comprehensive and complex and has involved a wide range of people across the network working at different levels and in a variety of areas. Various developments have been undertaken consecutively, in order to ensure that greater awareness, knowledge, understanding and opportunities on the part of the relevant constituencies have come to fruition.

Operational Development of the Progression Strategy

The development of progression agreements across Lancashire was determined in shape and form at an early stage by the LLN Directorate. The philosophy and practices in respect of progression adopted by LLNs across England have varied, each reflecting its own local requirements and established relationships. In the Lancashire LLN the decision was taken early on to establish a broad series of progression pathways based around a framework of agreed institutional progression agreements. This broad landscape approach, given the number of partners in the LLN and the large size of some of them in terms of student numbers, meant that the number of progression agreements would potentially be very large. Each institution was asked to provide data in relation to its courses at both FE and HE level and were required to indicate where progression pathways already existed or could be easily developed either internally or externally. All of the progression agreements were to be included on the Visaroute system that was being developed at the same time, which would allow all progression pathways developed to be readily accessed and viewed as required by learners, staff or IAG practitioners. The Visaroute system is now data-populated, functional and in operation across the partnership.

This approach allowed for the recognition of where barriers to progression might be occurring through non-availability of progression agreements and pathways. Where non-availability was recognised this would then create opportunity for new curriculum to be developed to ensure that this gap in provision was plugged, or for a progression route to be found elsewhere across the partnership. It was intended that ASNs and CDAs could be used for this purpose. The ultimate aim was to provide a pan-Lancashire coverage of provision at HE with opportunities for all vocational students to be able to advance onto a relevant and progressive HE course if they so desired.
The impacts of the Progression Strategy

The impacts of the progression strategy across the partnership have in many cases been immediate and profound; other developments have taken longer to impact, but will continue to do so in the future. The overwhelming response from the partner institutions however, is that the work of LLN has clearly helped in improving progression opportunities into HE for vocational learners.

Progression Agreements

- To date the Lancashire LLN has put in place 401 separate progression agreements with pathways that provide entry to 1,132 HE courses and accept a total of 15,566 specific combinations of FE qualifications for entry.
- 63 of these progression agreements accept 'generic' combinations of qualifications such as 'any A-level or National Diploma'.
- These generic agreements capture a further 5,062 qualifications. In totality, this provides for 124,358 distinct progression pathways that are available at HE level in institutions across Lancashire for students with vocational FE qualifications.

Additional Student Numbers

As a result of the ASN award process in 2009 and 2010, 400 more vocational learners funded through the LLN will progress to HE across the county of Lancashire and others will continue to do so in the future as these numbers are now embedded into the institutions concerned. These learners would not have had the same opportunity to progress previously. In the case of one FEC, their FD in Media would not have run without the support of ASNs; the extra numbers have now made the course viable and it is running to capacity. At one HEI, the ASN numbers allowed opportunity for several of its own partner FECs to develop FDs external to the HEI campus. This has allowed for greater progression for local people, although no monitoring of student numbers in terms of increased progression has yet taken place.

Increased awareness and the breaking down of barriers

The role played by the progression champions in raising awareness, knowledge and understanding of progression issues has already been noted and their role in this respect has been regarded as very successful. Progression champions have played a pivotal role within their institutions in helping staff identify barriers to progression for vocational learners and then finding ways to remove them. The precise work of the progression champions has varied from institution to institution, but in most cases they have been involved with, for example, locating and ensuring that correct course and admissions data has been transferred to the LLN, carrying out CPD sessions on progression with relevant staff, advising on development of new curriculum to fill gaps, (often with the aid of CDA funding) and working with staff to provide new and more appropriate approaches to IAG for their learners in respect of progression opportunities.

Evidence indicates that the progression champions have collectively worked hard to raise a wide-ranging profile of progression issues and this has clearly been effective. In particular the role of the progression champions in FECs has mean raising awareness amongst staff dealing with low achievers, those from high deprivation and low aspiration groups and as a consequence, much time has been devoted here to raising awareness about progression issues. The role of the progression champion has been important here in identifying and breaking down barriers, whether real or
perceived and in raising awareness and aspiration among students and staff about opportunities in HE.

Feedback from many partners indicates that awareness and understanding about progression issues have improved dramatically across their institution. In this respect, the advent of the LLN has been perfectly timed for dovetailing FE to HE progression issues with wider developments across institutions and so, ‘came onto the scene’ at exactly the right time. In some cases also, the progression champions have reported that the progression interventions involving adult learners have started to impact onto their children as well; that is, the work involving raising awareness about HE progression opportunities has transcended the generations within some families resulting in changing the aspirations of both adult participants and their children.

‘Now opportunities to progress in Lancashire are available across the county and the passports and Visaroute are being used and progression is on the agenda at all relevant meetings. In my institution the progression champion is regularly feeding back to SMT on the overarching themes of the LLN including progression.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

The two Progression Passports (General FE and Apprentices) each containing excellent case studies have raised awareness for learners and the opportunities available to them. These passports have not been used systematically by all partners across the network although in some institutions their use is now embedded into the curriculum at Level 3. Funding from the LLN has been used for awareness-raising events about HE and progression opportunities available, such as parent and student evenings involving employers which as a consequence have provided a range of learners with much greater understanding about what is available locally and regionally.

‘Certainly the work of the LLN as it has been translated into college activity has made parents and students much more aware of the HE opportunities available to our vocational students.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘The awareness of HE progression has been raised through the LLN funding and activity; a series of progression activities has taken place across the college under the auspices of our progression champion. Indeed, the progression champion has been pro-active in her work, has been very positive and taken the role seriously in transferring information and ideas both ways. The college has decided that this position will be part-funded once the LLN has ceased in December 2011, as progression is considered to be one of the key drivers in the college.’

(Strategic Board member - FEC)

The results of the increased awareness and understanding of HE progression achieved by the LLN are encouraging. The Apprentices Project has seen more apprentices showing an interest in HE and the attitudes of staff in institutions have changed in respect of removing barriers and promoting HE progression across the network. This is clear from the Forum meetings and work carried out by progression champions with individual staff and staff groups within partners. There is much more interest from staff and Level 3 learners, in terms of realising HE opportunities and ‘buy-in’ to FDs and a clear realisation that HE has a good deal to offer the vocational student. FECs and HEIs both report a greater aspiration on the part of vocational learners to progress onto HE either internally or in another institution.
‘In terms of results and impact, progression from Level 3 vocational FE courses to Level 4 vocational HE courses has markedly improved to c. 77% this academic year. It is now essentially the same as for the A-level route. Clearly here, the LLN has provided funding and impetus to help enable us to achieve our goals.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

‘One of the partner FECs has developed new curriculum links with the University and we are developing progression opportunities here for their learners. Progression is now much more widely talked about around that college than previously.’

(Progression champion - HEI)

In some large FECs some groups of vocational students were not aware that HE provision was available to them at their own college. In such cases, the post of progression champion allowed the college to facilitate a joined-up approach between FE and HE across specific departments. As a consequence information is now more clearly signposted about progression to HE opportunities and FE and work-based students can more easily find progression routes and see clearer pathways.

The impact of the sector consultants and education consultants with reference to improving progression opportunities and breaking down barriers has also been evidenced. This access to free consultancy services and advice on a range of issues including progression has proved particularly valuable when considering new developments and ways forward. Feedback from sector consultants about the requirements of employers for their employees has gone directly to the curriculum teams in various FECs and HEIs. Equally, businesses have been made aware of the much more flexible HE provision that is available and how progression is important to them. In this respect new student cohorts have been reached who would not have been able to enter HE. These are clearly new avenues and new progression routes that are only just starting to be tapped.

‘The sector consultant for Leisure and Tourism worked with one of the HEIs to look at APEL routes onto the Professional Practice programme in International Tourism and Sports Coaching and similarly for various of our Hospitality Management programmes. CDA funding provided for these developments and with validation now confirmed for early 2012, this will provide for a series of new progression pathways which would otherwise not have been developed and which will soon be available for students in the Tourism, Sports Coaching and Hospitality sectors at our college’.

(Progression champion - FEC)

Other interventions, for example, by the sector consultant for Health and Social Care, in the light of new requirements by the Care Quality Commission, have meant that employers have seen this ‘HE opportunity’ as a way of achieving the higher-skilled workforce that the sector regulations now require of them.

‘As a consequence there has been a good uptake onto the work-based FD in Health and Social Care by health and social care employees who hold NVQ qualifications and who previously would not have been able to progress to HE probably because their employer would not have supported them. The role of the sector consultant here has been pivotal in ensuring employer engagement towards supporting this new progression route.’

(Progression champion - FEC)
Adding Value

Some institutions view the LLN as adding value to things that they were already attempting to achieve in terms of improving progression opportunities for their vocational learners. However, they acknowledge that the funding received from the LLN allowed for the development of various projects and improvements in staffing levels in specific areas which would not have happened otherwise, or at least would have taken much longer to achieve. Given the nature of the government agendas on work-based learning, upskilling of the workforce to Level 4 and increased progression opportunities, the funding and support from the LLN allowed many of the partners to move forward on these agendas much more quickly than would otherwise have occurred. The result is that many institutions are now much more open about vocational learners and their progression to HE because they understand the process and issues concerned much more clearly.

‘We already have a partnership network anyway, we like to work with other institutions in a collaborative way and the university has a well-developed widening participation agenda. However, the LLN has added value to our strategy and provided us with free consultants and advice in a variety of important areas. We have a lot of students from a vocational background who have progressed here anyway and this will continue after the LLN ceases. There is however, always room for improvement in our practices and even though we have identified and resolved many of the barriers facing vocational students, the LLN did add value to our work and allow things to be done more easily.’

(Progression champion - HEI)

The consensus across the partnership at all levels is that progression is now much more on the educational agenda in Lancashire and vocational and work-based FE learners are much more active and aware about accessing HE.

Problems associated with the Progression Strategy

One of the main problems associated with the Progression Strategy has been to determine absolute numbers of students who have benefited from it. This has proved particularly difficult for a variety of reasons. The LLN itself has stated clearly that it has had a problem of measuring overall progression change as the initial baseline data that could be collated was ‘very poor’ and as a consequence, it has been very difficult to assess any increase in numbers. Various Strategic Board and Executive Group members agreed that progression was now firmly on the agenda across Lancashire, but that it was difficult to measure any numerical impacts due specifically to LLN interventions.

‘There appears to be better progression to HE in some college areas; however, there is no longitudinal study of this and no real measurements are taking place at the moment. Hence it is hard to make a judgement.’

(Strategic Board member - FEC)

‘Certainly barriers to HE have been broken down by talking with each other - but concrete and measurable outcomes are hard to pin down.’

(Strategic Board member - HEI)
‘Statistically it is difficult to say how many more vocational students have progressed as a result of LLN activity and interventions in our college. For this there would need to be a longitudinal study conducted over several years. However the interventions of the LLN in improving progression opportunities can clearly be seen. There are now 4 FDs as a result of LLN activity at our college which is providing for much more internal and external progression. Until the advent of these FDs we had never really had internal progression in these areas before.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

What the LLN has achieved in a major way in terms of its progression strategy has been the raising of awareness and aspiration for HE as a progression route for vocational and work-based learners. It has also gone a long way towards identifying and breaking down barriers that exist in relation to this type of progression, for example, through discussion with individual institutions and through the use of partner data to populate the Visaroute system.

‘Yes, progression has been affected by the work of the LLN and we see more students are progressing to HE this year, particularly adult learners. The progression champion has worked closely with adult learner groups and also raised awareness with practitioners about HE progression issues through use of internal forums and workshops. It is likely that the adult learners would have progressed anyway, but the interventions by the progression champion have certainly made their choices much more informed. Clearly, through a variety of funding and projects the LLN has helped us raise the awareness of more people in the college about HE opportunities.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

‘In terms of specific numbers it is difficult to say exactly what the impact of the LLN has been to progression as recruitment to HE is good here anyway. However, it is true to say that our progression champion and the IAG developments in terms of Visaroute and the progression passports came in at the same time as the setting up of the new HE Centre. In this sense the LLN did provide a focus and a driver for our vocational FE and work-based learners who had not necessarily viewed HE as a natural progression route before’.

(Senior Manager - FEC)

Summary

- Improvements in progression opportunities for vocational and work-based learners have been central to the work of the Lancashire LLN.

- The LLN has successfully developed the Visaroute system which provides a comprehensive coverage of progression routes and pathways available for vocational and work-based learners in Lancashire and can identify where curriculum gaps occur.

- 401 separate progression agreements have been put in place covering over 5000 qualifications and providing for nearly 125,000 distinct progression pathways into and through HE across Lancashire.

- ASNs have ensured that 400 more vocational students have had the opportunity to progress onto HE and these numbers are now embedded within the partner institutions.
• The LLN has been successful in identifying and breaking down barriers to progression across the partnership, although some barriers still exist.

• More Advanced Apprentices are now aware of the HE opportunities that are available to them and more are progressing, although the total number is still small.

• The issue of progression to and through HE for vocational and work-based learners is now clearly on the educational agenda across the partnership. As a result, vocational learners are much more aware of and understand more about the HE opportunities that are available to them.

• It has been very difficult to determine numerically how many more students have progressed in Lancashire as a result of LLN activity. It is realised that this will require an effective longitudinal study.
8. Curriculum Enhancement and Development

Knowledge of where curriculum gaps occur and hence where curriculum enhancement or development could be employed to fill these has been another prime objective of the LLN. The curriculum development strategy that was developed utilised a two-strand approach to ensure that improved curriculum coverage was achieved that would ultimately lead to more vocational students being able to progress to HE. These two strands comprised ASNs and CDA funding, both of which allowed HEIs and FECs the opportunity to either develop entirely new curricula or refresh pre-existing curricular areas. Funding was to be allotted to curriculum developments in the priority sector areas and could be used at a variety of levels. There was the expectation however, that any new or enhanced curriculum must involve relevant employers in its development and that variable delivery modes should be included or considered. As a result most of the ASNs and CDA funding were directed at FD provision, Honours Degree top-up programmes and CPD module development.

Further curriculum developments have taken place, which although not funded directly by the LLN itself, have been supported by it. These developments relate to the HEEL Legacy Fund which was administered by Lancashire LLN and the NWHLSP which funded the development of a FD for the advanced textiles industry. The development of this FD programme was supported by the Lancashire LLN, one of the partner FECs and two of the partner HEIs.

Additional Student Numbers

ASNs are full-time equivalent student funding numbers awarded by HEFCE to allow institutions to build capacity in particular areas of their curriculum. In that all LLNs were required to do this as part of their work, each received a number of ASNs as a part of the national LLN programme. Once awarded, ASNs become embedded within the institution and form part of its establishment provision.

The Lancashire LLN submitted a bid to HEFCE for a total of 400 ASNs and was successful in being awarded the full number. Initially there was concern that this might be too many, given that the new University Centres at Blackburn and Blackpool had been awarded ASNs already, although this concern later proved groundless and all 400 ASNs were used. The final phasing of the ASNs was for 175 FTEs in 2009/10 and 225 FTEs in 2010/11. Once numbers had been allocated to them, the LLN set up a bidding system whereby all partner institutions providing HE were eligible to bid for ASNs with the decision being determined by the Executive Group. In line with the prime objectives of the LLN, all of the ASNs were to be awarded in the priority sectors as determined by the LLN Business Plan.

Figure 2 shows partner institutions that have benefited from the award of ASNs in the period 2009 - 2011.
Figure 2: Award of Additional Student Numbers (ASNs) 2009-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of courses</th>
<th>Number of ASNs awarded in total over two years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accrington and Rossendale College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackpool and The Fylde College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myerscough College</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston College</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runshaw College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southport College</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 23 programmes were supported by the ASN awards. These were mainly FD programmes, although some Honours Degree top-up programmes were included. 18 programmes were funded for 2009-10 and 5 more programmes were added in 2010-11. Some were new programmes although the majority were existing programmes; however, all were within the priority sectors of the LLN as shown below in Figure 3.

Figure 3: ASNs - Curriculum Developments by Sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of Programmes supported</th>
<th>Foundation Degree</th>
<th>Honours Top-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing / Construction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital and Creative Industries</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and Sustainability</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and Tourism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monitoring of the ASNs has taken place over the last two years. Success rates and retention rates are shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5.
Figure 4: ASN Supported Programmes - Success Rates 2009-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2009 -10</th>
<th>Number of Students enrolled on 2 year course</th>
<th>Percentage Success over 2 years (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Engineering and Manufacture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital and Creative Industries</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and Sustainability</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and Tourism</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>179</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: ASN Supported Programmes - Retention Rates 2010-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010 -11</th>
<th>Number of Students enrolled on 2 year course</th>
<th>Number of Students enrolled on 1 year course</th>
<th>Percentage Retention (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Engineering and Manufacture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital and Creative Industries</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment and Sustainability</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and Tourism</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>225</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Success of the ASN Programme

The outcomes from the ASN programme can be regarded as highly successful. Over the period 2009-2011 the full total of ASNs has been allocated and used by the partner institutions to good effect. Clearly the programme has allowed partner institutions to develop a series of new courses in the priority sectors that will be of value to the economy of the North-west and Lancashire in particular. At its simplest, the advent of the ASN Awards ensured that 400 more learners from the vocational FE or work-based sector would progress to HE, than would have otherwise been the case had the
Lancashire LLN not existed. Also, they are in the sectors that have been identified by employers as being where they need highly-qualified people at Level 4 and above to support their businesses.

The figures shown above indicate how successful this curriculum strategy has actually been. The success rates of 77% for 2009-2010 and 92% for 2010-2011 compare exceedingly well with all national indicators of success (HESA, 2011) and must be regarded as highly successful outcomes for the LLN and its partner institutions. As these FD and Honours Degree top-up programmes now become part of the established HE numbers and provision in the institutions concerned they will therefore continue after the cessation of the Lancashire LLN. These new programmes and their associated funding, providing opportunities for vocational learners to progress to HE across Lancashire can be seen as an important and significant part of the Lancashire LLN legacy.

For individual institutions the benefits of being awarded ASNs are equally clear. In some cases institutions have been able to validate new programmes in response to market requirements; in other cases they have been able to increase recruitment onto programmes that would otherwise not have had viable numbers due to limited funding internally. Whichever, viable cohorts have been recruited and all proposed courses have run successfully. In some cases the institutions themselves feel that the benefits provided by the award of ASNs goes further than just being able to run a programme of study. In some of the smaller partner institutions, the advent of new or larger courses has meant increased opportunity for staff to teach at HE level, and in the case of one FEC meant that FE vocational students can actually progress locally for the first time. This has provided a great boost to the learners at that FEC as many more of them now realise that they have a greater opportunity to progress, both locally and to HE level - something that they felt they did not have before.

‘The award of ASNs was great - it allowed us to develop 2 new FD courses at our college with 10 students on each, most of whom have progressed from our FE programmes; 6 students on the Creative FD want to progress onto the Honours top-up year now. We certainly see these courses continuing after the LLN ends.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘We had 15 ASNs mainstreamed to our HEI for FD course development in one of our partner FECs. This new course is now running but this would not have taken place otherwise.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

‘The ASNs allowed us to set up 2 new FD courses which related to where employers had identified gaps in provision. Both courses run in a work-based learning mode and have allowed for major engagement with employers as part of the development process.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

‘The ASNs have been really useful - we used them as quick fix for our curriculum. One of our FDs funded by ASNs now has a progression route with students going onto Middlesex University to do a top-up programme.’

(Progression champion - FEC)
Curriculum Development Awards

The aim of the Curriculum Development Awards, (CDAs) formed the second strand of the Lancashire LLN curriculum development and enhancement strategy. Once the ASN numbers had been awarded in year 2 there was no opportunity for the LLN to obtain any more, hence any further curriculum development funding would need to be derived from the central funds of the Lancashire LLN itself. As a consequence the LLN developed the concept of the CDA funds to facilitate appropriate curriculum development and in particular to continue to encourage engagement between the LLN partners and employers and to use the employer intelligence they had built up to best advantage. There were constraints however that would be attached to any CDA funding awarded. In order to develop curriculum that would run in the future, one or more of the following had to be in place:

- Full cost recovery
- Co-funded numbers
- STEM or SIV subjects

Alternatively, replacement and refreshing of curriculum could take place in terms of:

- Individual modules being replaced in courses already running
- Modules/CPD units/courses being developed to replace courses which were no longer viable or fit for purpose

The amount of funding per CDA was set at a maximum of £3,000 for a full FD with smaller amounts for smaller awards, but with a minimum award of £500. The awards were to be used solely to develop the curriculum in line with the bid and could be used for various development purposes including staff release, development activities, validation costs or any other activities related to the curriculum development. One particularly important aspect of the CDAs was that they were primarily for development; as such, there was no need to show validation at this stage, although the LLN did expect that the partner would be able to demonstrate that the curriculum development would lead to validation being achievable.

The LLN set up a bidding and approvals system and all applications for CDA funding were considered by the Central Team with formal approval given by the Executive Group. In total 27 CDAs were awarded across the partnership in two phases between 2009 and 2011 with total funding amounting to £82,500. Not all awards were given the full amount with some being awarded lesser amounts of £2,000 or £1,500 depending on the size of the project to be undertaken.

The curriculum development projects to which CDAs were made varied in size and scope. Examples include:

- A series of single CPD Units
- Full FD programmes
- Honours top-up programmes
- FE - HE bridging modules
- Blended learning programmes
- Undergraduate Professional Practice programmes
- Industrially linked Masters-level programmes

Across the partnership, 9 institutions took advantage of the CDAs including both FECs and HEIs. Distribution of CDA funds is shown in Figure 6.
Figure 6: Curriculum Development Awards 2009-2011
Number of CDAs Awarded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>No. of CDAs awarded 2009-2010</th>
<th>No. of CDAs awarded 2010-2011 (First Round)</th>
<th>No. of CDAs awarded 2010-2011 (Second Round)</th>
<th>Total CDAs awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accrington &amp; Rossendale College</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackburn</td>
<td></td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackpool and The Fylde College</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnley College</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster and Morecambe College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myerscough College</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston College</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runshaw College</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College</td>
<td></td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCLan</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Cumbria</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>39 (40)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Blackburn College and Skelmersdale and Ormskirk College were awarded one CDA for a joint project.

The two case studies below illustrate the value placed on CDAs by members of the partnership.

**CDA Case Study 1**

MA in Music Industry Management and Promotion
University of Central Lancashire

Tutor: Les Gillon
CDA Award: £3,000

The MA in Music Industry Management and Promotion was developed at UCLan in conjunction with business partners from the music industry. The target group was those people already working in the music industry but who needed a higher level of skill and knowledge in order to advance their career or those graduating with BA/BSc (Honours) degrees in Music or Media and who wished to make a career in the music management industry.
We considered this CDA award of £3,000 as crucial in buying out tutor time for Les Gillon and Colin Morrell in order for them to develop the programme. As our work and ideas developed we realised that the MA programme could be tied in with other developments such as the new Doctor of Arts qualification recently developed here at Level 8 as a qualification for practitioners. A clear synergy was developing between these programme developments and consequently both the MA and the Doctor of Arts qualifications will be jointly validated in early 2012.

In short, the CDA award funding allowed us time to develop a new programme that is required by the industry, and which fits closely to our other departmental curriculum developments. These developments may have happened at some point in the future but would have been much slower in coming had we not received any CDA funding. £3,000 may not seem like a huge amount of money, but it has made a real difference to our ability to undertake these significant curriculum developments.

We expect to recruit 20 people per year onto the MA programme which has a large industry-based work-experience component built into it.

CDA Case Study 2

Foundation Degree in Network Engineering Security and Systems Administration & Foundation Degree in Games Software Engineering
School of Engineering and Computing
Blackpool and The Fylde College

Tutor: Norman Willets
CDA Award: £6,000

The aim here was to re-develop two of our present Foundation Degrees and bring them more into line with present requirements of the industry. In this we had support from Lancaster University as our validating partner and from Microsoft who indicated that they would support us in these developments.

We used the offices of our progression champion to help us put together a bid for CDA funding to the LLN. As part of the process, the Digital and Creative Industries sector consultant from the LLN met with the curriculum team and provided useful advice in relation to IAG and industry requirements within the new courses.
The two refreshed Foundation Degrees have now been revalidated and are in operation. Each has an industrial placement as part of the course, so students are getting real work experience as they learn. Our target audience is essentially local and most of our cohorts are made up of our own students progressing from Level 3 programmes, who probably have also done a Level 2 qualification at Blackpool and The Fylde College anyway. We attract students onto our HE courses for various reasons, but certainly they realise that a higher qualification such as an FD in this subject area immediately stands them in line to command a salary of c. £15,000 p.a. even as a junior programmer in a local company, when average salaries in the Blackpool and Fylde area range between £12,000 - £13,000 p.a. To date, all of the graduates from the FD Network Engineering course have gained employment successfully as network engineers, and we see our updated curriculum and our close links with the computer industry as a way of ensuring this continues. In this respect, many of the apprentices who have progressed onto our FDs and top-up degrees, have subsequently remained with their companies and developed a career there.

Clearly the CDA Awards have been very beneficial in allowing us to develop a model for refreshment and revalidation of our curriculum. As a result we will be utilising this same model to refresh our FD in Interactive Media Development later this year and even though no more CDA funding will be available, we know and understand the process now so feel assured of success.

Many partner institutions and members of the LLN Central Team clearly note the benefits being generated through use of CDA funding.

‘The CDAs were exactly what we required. Without them it has always been difficult to get staff to engage, as developments of the curriculum are so demanding on their time. The CDA funds allowed us to ‘buy out’ time for between 6 and 8 staff in order to create new FDs and allowed us time to think about new ways to deliver levels 4 and 5.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘The CDAs were an excellent idea. They allowed time for staff to engage with each other, with employers and with the requirements of the new curriculum. As a result our college got 2 new FDs out of this.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘We discovered that some of our potential adult learners were being put off the idea of HE because they had never been a part of it. We used the CDA funding to set up an “Introduction to HE Learning” bridging course, running one evening per week to show people they can get back into education at a higher level and that it is not out of their scope. This is working well at the moment and encouraging people to move on into HE.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

‘We obtained CDA funding to develop a series of CPD programmes for our own and other staff which were developed as on-line blended learning resources.’

(Progression champion - FEC)
‘The CDAs were very important in buying out staff time. In total we had £15,000 awarded from the CDA budget and this was very useful to enable quality curriculum development time. The results are clearly manifest and so our SMT has agreed that the process should continue next year, post-LLN and has confirmed that £26,000 will be available across the college for this purpose. So, the college has bought into the strategic values of the LLN, which clearly resonate in the college strategic vision. We have bought into the ethos of the LLN here.’

(Senior Manager - FEC)

Success of the CDA Programme

In a similar way to that of the ASNs, the CDA programme has been regarded as very successful and certainly been considered as ‘value for money’. During the period 2009-2011 the full total of CDA has been allocated and used by the partner institutions to good effect. The funding awarded allowed practitioners in partner institutions to have their time ‘bought out’ in order to concentrate their efforts on developing new or revitalised curriculum. This provided great impetus, across the network resulting in positive outcomes for all of the projects, some large, some small that were funded. General consensus from both the practitioners concerned and their senior managers is that the CDA funds were ‘money well spent’. The result provides for a series of new and modified programmes that are up-to-date technologically and meet the standards and curriculum content required by employers, for those working in their businesses. To date some of the CDAs have led to new programmes being validated or revalidated, whilst other are still in the development stage. In some cases the CDAs have been awarded jointly to more than one partner, allowing for collaborative and positive working between institutions.

Some institutions across the partnership however, did not benefit from the CDA funding either because they chose not to apply, or because their bid was rejected on the grounds that it was not considered suitable. Those that did not apply did so for a variety of reasons; some of the smaller HE providers had recently developed curriculum through other means such as ASNs, or had new curriculum coming on stream anyway and hence saw no benefit to be derived from this further funding.

The benefits derived by institutions who have taken advantage of the CDA awards however, are clear. They have seen that the use of relatively small amounts of money, for example, £3,000 can lead to highly positive outcomes including new and up-to-date curriculum, staff development and employer engagement which are beneficial to all parties concerned including employers, academic staff, students and the institution itself. To this end, some partner institutions have already committed themselves to allotting funds for curriculum development activities of this nature post-LLN as they consider it will be a worthwhile investment.

HEEL Legacy Funding

The HEEL Project was a HEFCE funded project devised in 2006 aimed at the development of increased HE opportunity in the Pennine Lancashire area, as at the time, this area of the UK was regarded as having relatively poor HE provision for the size of its population. In addition, it was considered that the economy of this part of Lancashire was underperforming and that improved provision in HE would be a regional driver providing economic growth. The main outcomes of the HEEL project were the major developments of the University Centres at Blackburn College and Burnley College and HE enhancement at Accrington and Rossendale College, Nelson and Colne College and St. Mary’s College, Blackburn.
At the time the Lancashire LLN started, the major developments of the HEEL Project had been completed; however, there was a remainder of £22,367 which was inherited by the LLN as the HEEL Legacy Fund to distribute to HE providers in Pennine Lancashire.

The LLN instituted a bidding process in February 2010 with 14 proposals being submitted. Figure 7 shows how the funding was distributed.

**Figure 7: HEEL Legacy Funding Awards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Nature of Project</th>
<th>Amount Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burnley College</td>
<td>Flexible delivery pattern developments for HE</td>
<td>£12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Mary’s College, Blackburn</td>
<td>a) Fast Track to HE</td>
<td>£3,367 in total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Mentoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson and Colne College</td>
<td>Student Support for vocational learners</td>
<td>£2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCLan</td>
<td>Journalism programmes</td>
<td>£5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>£22,367</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To date the funds have been spent by the institutions concerned to the benefit of learners within these institutions and the following outcomes have been reported:

**Burnley College**

The HEEL funded courses are reported as being successful with the money being used for development of flexible learning materials and purchase of laptop computers for use with PebblePad software, a Personal Learning Space and e-portfolio system. This is for students to use on distance learning programmes developed in a flexible learning context, with the particular aim to utilise this learning environment for Higher Apprenticeship courses. It is worthy of note that although this HEEL funding was not primarily provided by the Lancashire LLN, the college acknowledges that LLN developments helped inform the reasoning for this project.

**St Mary’s College Blackburn**

The Preparation for HE course developed with this funding has been aimed at adult learners who have never engaged with HE. This programme has now run on a 1 evening per week basis and is regarded as successful in that it has raised awareness and aspiration for the cohort of students who attended with some now actively considering progression to HE. The college intends to run the programme again in the future.

**NWHLSP Award of Funds**

In April 2009, the external consultant with responsibility for the Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing sector developed a bid for submission to the NWHLSP. This was to provide funding for the development of an industry-led development of a regional FD in Advanced Skills for Advance Materials (ASAM). The proposal which was strongly supported by the high technology textiles industry across the region was submitted requesting core funding from NWHLSP of £47,850. The
The proposal was led by the University Centre, Blackburn College in partnership with NWtexnet (Advanced Flexible Materials), Lancashire LLN, Lancaster University and the University of Central Lancashire.

The proposal was approved and awarded in full with the FD in Advanced Skills for Advance Materials subsequently being developed and validated by Lancaster University. To date however, the programme has not recruited and has not been run at any of the partner institutions.

Summary

- The Lancashire LLN has developed an effective strategy in relation to the development and enhancement of the vocational HE curriculum across the partnership. The strategy has covered all of the priority sectors, with employer engagement and participation being an integral part of any curriculum developments.

- The ASNs and CDA funds have had a profound effect on the majority of the recipient partners. They have allowed for new programmes to run, involved capacity building of existing programmes and gone a long way to ensuring that these will continue into the future. Not all of the partners however, have benefited from either ASNs or CDA funding, for a variety of reasons.

- ASN numbers have been utilised by 7 of the partner FECs, with validation undertaken by the associated HEIs. 21 FDs and 2 Honours degree top-up programmes have been supported by these awards covering all of the priority sectors. Success rates and retention rates to date are high and are comparable with those in other programmes across the HE sector.

- CDAs have been highly effective in allowing partners to improve and enhance their curriculum. They have been valued for ‘buying out’ practitioners from their regular duties and allowing them time to fully engage with the work of the relevant curriculum enhancements and developments.

- A total of 39 CDAs have been awarded to 11 partner institutions including FECs and HEIs and cover all of the priority sectors. Developments have been varied in form and include individual CPD modules, FDs, Honours Degree top-ups and Masters Level programmes. The case studies indicate the success of the CDA strategy.

- The CDAs have demonstrated what a relatively small amount of money can achieve in allowing colleagues to develop new, or refresh old curricula in line with the requirements of the relevant priority sector industries. In addition, the process involved has shown beneficial results with many partners indicating that this process and in some cases funding, will continue post-LLN.

- The HEEL Legacy Funding has been successfully distributed and where reported, has achieved effective results.

- The NWHLSP funding provided for a new FD development supported by the relevant industry. The FD has been validated but as yet has neither recruited nor run.
9. Information, Advice and Guidance

In terms of IAG provision the LLN intended to improve the accessibility into and through HE by provision of better IAG for vocational learners, staff in FECs and HEIs, other IAG advisers and employers. In order to achieve these aims the LLN commissioned a series of events, activities and projects across the partnership. These varied in scale, some being longer term than others and some being more strategic whilst other activities were more operational.

The main features of the IAG strategy involved:

- Development of the Visaroute web-based system
- The development of an Apprentices’ Passport
- The development of a mainstream FE students’ Passport
- Generic advice and guidance to learners, produced by IAG professionals and placed within the student section of the LLN main website
- A proposed CEIAG conference for admissions tutors, careers advisors and other IAG professionals

Development of the IAG Strategy

The development of the Visaroute web-based system developed in tandem with the progression strategy. It was realised that if there were to be thousands of progression agreements and pathways developed on a pan-Lancashire scale, a database system would be necessary to record all of the relevant information. In order to make the output data user-friendly, the Visaroute system was developed for use as an IAG tool and indeed has formed a major part of the IAG provision of the LLN.

It has been variously described as a ‘progression pathway tool’, a ‘progression agreements database’ and as ‘an IAG tool’. Depending on the person using it, Visaroute can fairly be described as all of these things. The system contains a comprehensive listing of all courses in the LLN priority sectors (plus others) and is relatively simple to use. It allows for an individual to find progression pathways from their present course and see where their present qualifications will be acceptable as entry qualifications onto an HE programme of study.

The response to Visaroute as to its impact on both IAG and progression has been variable. It has, for example, been described as ‘fantastic’ by some yet considered by others to be ‘too broad in its outputs’. To exemplify; with regards to courses at Level 3 the potential pathways available can equate to a huge number of options - on occasions an individual learner or tutor can be quite overwhelmed by the sheer number of courses that a learner could progress onto.

Questions also have arisen as to, ‘what is Visaroute and what is its prime purpose?’ Is it an IAG tool or a progression tool, or both, or simply an information reference database of courses........ or is Visaroute something else? Some however, consider the system to be a great tool that works technically, provided that it is fully populated with all of the relevant data available and that it can be kept up to date.

‘Visaroute is too big and you struggle to get what you want! And it does need constantly updating.’

(Progression champion - HEI)
‘Visaroute is a great tool, but it does need continually updating as data is sometimes not correct or is missing’.

(Progression champion - FEC)

From the point of view of the Central Team, Visaroute clearly provided a range of achievements. The willingness of all the partner institutions to share their data was seen as an achievement of collaboration itself and considered as an important step forward for both the partners and the LLN. As such, the development of Visaroute and its data population meant that it was possible for the first time to collate and make publically available a series of progression routes involving all local HEIs and FECs. This agreement led to the offering of a vast range of progression routes into and through HE in Lancashire, many of which had never before been articulated. In listing all progression pathways in Lancashire in the form of progression agreements it was considered that Visaroute would help individuals make better decisions about their own progression pathway. To date, over 400 progression agreements have been listed on the Visaroute system providing for nearly 125,000 progression pathways.

However, to what extent and how Visaroute has been used is difficult to determine and it is clearly difficult to tell whether this IAG tool has changed people’s attitudes and values, or determined or re-focused attitudes in respect of progression to HE. Comment has been made that Visaroute has not been particularly well used yet, partly because of early technical problems with the system and also because not enough people know about it.

‘Visaroute is a good concept and technically very clever, but it did not really work very well initially and so we have not really used it.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

To this extent it needs to be it ‘rolled out’ more and introduced more clearly to IAG practitioners, tutors and other professional who may have opportunity to use it with learners who are looking to progress onto HE.

‘The product idea of Visaroute is strong - it is fast, both backwards and forwards and it could be a great benefit to students, but the rollout has been poor. It is used in my college but how often - only once or twice per student so far? It certainly has a lot of potential though.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘Visaroute does get a usage but it could have been launched better. It has a number of hits regularly, but this averages only c. 218 per month and it has been a big expensive system to set up.’

(External consultant)

Visaroute has been used effectively by staff, mainly in FECs, who see the viability of it in the IAG and progression context. It has also been used effectively by IAG professionals working with individual learners who are then available to guide those individuals in its use.

‘Our IAG staff love it and it is just starting to be used by our students - they can see possibilities across Lancashire and consider it really useful. It certainly does give students ideas about progression to HE ......when it works properly.’

(Progression champion - FEC)
Visaroute is seen by some in the partnership as a ‘brilliant tool’ although ‘not enough people know that it exists’. If used properly and in the correct context it can be seen as an excellent tool for vocational learners wishing to progress onto or through HE.

**Perceived problems of Visaroute**

Visaroute is clearly acknowledged from various parts of the partnership as being a useful IAG tool in respect of providing progression pathways for vocational learners in the specified sectors. It is regarded as technically advanced and as an easy tool to operate, although teething problems have been noted and acknowledged. To date it has been used by some of the partner institutions, but the coverage of usage has been patchy, despite the resource and effort that has been involved in its development.

Various comments have been made by its detractors. There is concern that it needs to be kept continually updated, and that if it is not, it will soon lose its currency and value. The hit rate on the website, although rising is still relatively small and there have been various discussions and suggestions as to how its usage could be improved and how it can be moved more into the public domain. Comment though, has also been made that it is a system that should be delivered through either tutors or careers advisors rather than just used in the public domain; this is because sometimes the output data can be large in volume and needs some refining or explaining. In this case the user (a learner or parent, for example) might need some professional help to aid in the subsequent decision-making process.

Concern has also been expressed about the cost of maintaining the system post-LLN when responsibility for its continuation may need to be taken on by one of the partners themselves. Negotiations at present seem to indicate that this will be the case, but the other partners are still concerned about whether or not it will continue to be effectively updated thereafter. Clearly a long term strategy is required by many of the partner institutions in order for them to have faith in the Visaroute system if they are to advocate its use now and in the future.

A question that also arises is to what extent Visaroute has actually increased the number of students progressing from FE to HE as a result, or even in a large way improved individuals’ awareness of the HE opportunities and pathways that are available to them in the Lancashire area. At present data of this type is not available, and so in some senses the Visaroute system itself can be difficult to justify.

‘It has been hard to sell Visaroute in my college due to its shelf-life. Even if one of the partner institutions takes it over [after the end of the LLN], it is unlikely that they will publicise it to others - so is it worth it? It does have a technical viability but financially it may simply not be sustainable.’

*(Progression champion - FEC)*

‘Visaroute could be a white elephant due to its limited usage rate and the costs associated with needing to keep it updated. There is lots of good stuff on it but we have other products that can be used instead - but as long as it continues to be updated we can see its value.’

*(Executive Group member - HEI)*
‘It has not really been used at our college as it needs continually updating and this means lots of investment in time and money. Some of the information is out of date already anyway - in terms of sustainability, perhaps it was a bridge too far.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

The Progression Passports

In line with other LLNs the Lancashire LLN developed two Progression Passports, one aimed at mainstream FE learners, the other aimed specifically towards Advanced Apprentices completing their courses. The passports provide information in relation to reasons for progression to HE, opportunities available locally, types of qualifications that are appropriate and career development opportunities. The information provided is specific to the core sectors targeted by the Lancashire LLN and includes case studies of students from across the region.

The two passports have been generally well accepted across the partnership; their value has been recognised and they have proved a useful tool for discussion. They have each featured case studies which have been viewed very favourably by many learners and tutors. Both passports have been updated during the course of the LLN and they have been used in a variety of ways across the partnership. For example, some FECs distributed the passports to all Level 3 learners; alternatively they have been placed in student starter packs at the beginning of new courses. Other FECs use them as part of the tutorial system and in some cases marketing teams have used them for recruitment and community events.

Feedback in respect of the passports has mainly been positive. Of particular note was that the passports were clearly written in the language of the learner, that is, written for those wishing to or considering progressing to HE. Further, the passports contained case studies of ‘real people’ from local FECs and training providers that in some cases were known to the reader and certainly from the learner perspective were, ‘people like me’.

‘Training tutors use the passports in their starter packs etc. and their feedback has been positive.’

(Progression champion - Training Provider)

‘We have used our own style ‘passports’ for years and they have been really successful with encouraging students to move on to HE. So, now we have moved to using the LLN ones which are equally good as well.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

It is the case however, that although the passports have been used in some way in all of the FECs, they have only been used in one HEI across the partnership. In the case of those HEIs not using them, the passport is firmly seen as ‘part of the FEC and training provider domain’.

‘The Passport is good - our recruitment teams like it – they use it for community recruitment events’

(Progression champion - HEI)

‘The passports are now given out to all relevant students and are integrated into our IAG work at college. Equally, the Apprentices Project material and passports are now integrated into College IAG too. All of these materials have added to our IAG arsenal.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)
There were however, some concerns expressed about the use of the passports and the fact that they would need updating in the future to remain relevant. Equally, there was concern expressed that in some cases the passports had not really added anything new to the already existing amount of materials that some FECs use for IAG purposes. Other institutions commented that although clearly the passports were a useful tool and have been used in both a marketing and IAG context with learners and potential learners, it was difficult to quantify how effective the passports had actually been in improving the number of FE and work-based learners progressing to HE as a result. There was general consensus across the partnership however, that the passports had ‘in some way been a useful addition to the IAG arsenal’.

‘The passports have been used as another tool in the IAG progression arsenal, but they are not a panacea.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘Now you need some IAG Applications that people can download, not hardcopy for youngsters..... [digital] APPS are what they use now’.  

(Central Team member)

‘At our college the passports have not really been used at all.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

Generic Advice and Guidance

The Lancashire LLN commissioned CXL-VIA to develop a series of generic IAG materials that were to be placed on the main Lancashire LLN website. These comprised:

Success stories:

- A series of success stories from 13 students from a wide range of backgrounds and courses who had successfully completed vocational HE courses in the Lancashire area.

Careers Advice in the form of:

- Course choice
- Seeking information and guidance
- Things to consider about types of HE institutions
- Finance
- Disabled Students Allowance
- The application process
- Employed and apprenticeship routes to HE
- Additional needs
- Graduate employment prospects

Brochure downloads in the form of:

- Passport to Degree Level study
- Passport to HE - Degree Level study for apprentices
Usage of generic IAG materials

The extent to which these materials have proved useful is debatable given that the LLN website does not get huge usage. Consequently, it may have been better to place them on the Visaroute website for easier access by learners.

CXL-VIA themselves did test some of the IAG materials with groups of learners in various FECs, prior to their launch on the LLN website with positive results. The aim of the IAG included here is to direct the user on to another, updated website such as UCAS or PROSPECT. CXL-VIA would have liked to have ‘tested out’ the materials with focus groups of first year undergraduates to see if this type of IAG information was relevant to them, although this did not take place.

The CEIAG Conference

The Lancashire LLN CEIAG Conference took place in October 2011 at the Westleigh Conference Centre, Preston. It was aimed at IAG staff in schools, colleges, private training providers, admissions officers and tutors, careers advisors and other CEIAG professionals who practice in Lancashire. The conference focused on the CEIAG opportunities that the LLN has provided for them and which will remain as part of the LLN legacy. It provided speakers on a range of related subjects such as CEIAG in the future, useful resources and materials for CEIAG professionals, the apprentice experience and the role of the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).

The conference attracted over 100 participants with a series of keynote presentations and workshops aimed at ensuring as comprehensive a coverage as possible. Feedback from the conference indicates that the delegates considered it to have been informative and successful. The majority of activities were well received with comments such as, ‘insightful’, ‘motivating’, ‘exceptional apprentices’ and ‘made me think’, being representative of those made. Some workshops attracted minor criticisms, but the general tenor of feeling was that the conference has provided valuable and useful experience about the future for CEIAG for those participating.

Clearly, the conference made its mark on the delegates in raising awareness and understanding of the major issues in respect of IAG at the present time. It helped fulfil the aim of the LLN in ensuring that appropriate IAG for learners is provided for vocational learners in respect of HE and appropriate progression opportunities in Lancashire.

Impacts of the IAG Strategy

The IAG strategy of the LLN is one that has achieved success but this has been limited in some areas across the partnership. The materials developed in the form of the FE Progression Passport and the Apprentices Passport have been successfully used by some FECs and PTPs and are considered useful and effective. Some FECs and private providers have embedded these materials into their IAG provision; others see them as ‘just another tool’ in their IAG arsenal, whilst some partners have not really embraced their use.

Likewise the Visaroute system has its admirers and detractors. The common view across the partnership is that the system ‘is a great concept’ and ‘has good technical functionality’ and that in a technical sense it can provide excellent information to the user. In some cases, individuals in partner institutions have found Visaroute very useful and indicate that it has been of great value for their learners in showing them the progression pathways that are available to them locally and increasing their awareness of opportunity to progress to HE. In a number of other partner institutions however, people at various levels have questioned the overall value of Visaroute particularly in terms of its
ability to provide information that is up-to-date, (which is seen as an absolutely vital part of the system’s IAG role) and the ease with which individuals can use it effectively by themselves. Particular concern has been expressed by various partners about the cost of maintaining and hence sustaining the system post-Lancashire LLN and in fact whether it really is ‘value for money’. Initially too, there were technical problems with Visaroute when it was first launched and this clearly put people off using the system early on in the life of the LLN. This has had a knock-on effect; even though most of the technical problems have now been dealt with and the operation of the system has been refined and populated with accurate and up-to-date data, there still appears to be a reluctance on the part of many [partner institutions and individuals within them] to actively use the Visaroute system with their learners.

The generic IAG materials are freely available to all who require them on the Lancashire LLN website. They were tested with learners prior to use, but no evaluation has taken place since. The Lancashire LLN website does not get huge usage and it is difficult to ascertain how much the IAG materials are used and how much they therefore impact on learners in the Lancashire area.

The recent CEIAG conference held at the Westleigh Centre was very successful in its outcomes and feedback from delegates attending indicated with minor exceptions, that they had gained a greater awareness and understanding about present and future IAG for the vocational learner wanting to progress to HE.

The discussion so far would indicate that evaluating the overall impact of the LLN IAG strategy has been difficult; certainly the impacts have not been consistent. Some individuals and institutions have found parts of the IAG provision particularly useful for their learners, adopting parts of it and embedding it within their curriculum; others have found no use for some of the materials and systems at all. Some partners actively use Visaroute within their programmes, whilst others dismiss it as of little value. The only IAG intervention that has been almost universally valued has been the CEIAG conference.

The view taken by the Central Team in regard to the success of the IAG strategy has been realistic. They recognise that Visaroute has taken a long time to produce and get working properly and that it will require a lot of updating and maintenance if it is to be sustained post-LLN. There is the view that perhaps it was too large a project to be taken on by just one developer and a small LLN and that ultimately in the long term it may not be sustainable. Equally, the passports if not updated will become out-of-date and will simply be left on the shelf.

What ultimately emerges across the Lancashire LLN from a myriad of sources including progression champions, consultants, Central Team members, Executive Group members, Strategic Board members, and senior and middle management members in FECs, PTPs and HEIs, are two clear and distinct messages. Firstly, that the concept of progression for vocational and work-based learners to HE is firmly on the agenda across the educational landscape of Lancashire. Secondly, that the need for high-quality and up-to-date IAG for young people and others involved, is paramount to ensuring that the progression to HE and the higher-level learning process is successful. These two agendas are now clearly embedded into the work of all of the Lancashire LLN’s partner institutions and the work of the LLN in driving these forward is clearly acknowledged as having had a profound influence across the partnership.
Summary

- The need for high quality IAG in order for successful and improved progression to take place is recognised across the partnership.

- The Progression Passports and other AHL and LLN IAG materials have been valued and in some cases embedded within the IAG processes and practices of the partners.

- Visaroute has been acknowledged as an innovative and technically excellent tool in providing IAG information in relation to progression pathways for vocational learners in Lancashire.

- The value of Visaroute has been questioned with respect to its cost, overall usage, ease of operation by individuals and the ability to keep it up-to-date, particularly post-LLN. The use of Visaroute across the partnership is not consistent.

- Generic IAG information and materials have been professionally produced and are available on the main Lancashire LLN website. To date there is no data available as to their usage.

- The CEIAG Conference has been recognised across the partnership and by others as being highly successful in its aim of engaging with IAG professionals and those involved with admissions policies and practices in FECs and HEIs.

- The outcomes of the IAG strategy developed by the Lancashire LLN have been variable and the impact of this strategy does not show a consistent picture across the partnership.
10. Employer Engagement

In terms of its curriculum development strategy the LLN aimed to ensure improved employer engagement across the partnership and it clearly saw the need to enhance the supply and relevance of HE provision for employers and individuals through improved institutional processes and procedures. In this sense improved employer engagement was to be a major part of the LLN agenda.

In order to meet these commitments the strategy developed included:

- The appointment of sector consultants to the Central Team of the LLN
- The requirements for all ASN initiatives to include engagement with employers
- The requirements for CDA funded developments to have support from employers
- Encouraging partner institutions through the use of LLN services to find more effective ways to engage with employers
- Engagement with Sector Skills Councils in order to inform the LLN about employer issues and requirements
- Engagement with employers and employers’ organisations as part of any curriculum developments

Some of the partners have indicated that employer engagement with regard to curriculum development has been difficult to progress whilst others report success in this area. The strategy developed by the LLN was aimed at securing a more consistent and positive engagement across the partnership.

Development of the Employer Engagement Strategy

The sector consultants have played a vital and effective role in employer engagement across the network. These consultants have worked across the priority sectors to help partner institutions meet with and engage with employers and employers’ organisations in an HE context. In some cases this has meant helping partners develop strategies almost from the beginning, in others enabling partners to refine their employer engagement strategy and practices so as to engage with employers more effectively.

‘The Faculty of Health engages with employers intimately anyway, but the sector consultants have been useful in helping us in other areas of the curriculum.’

*(Progression champion - HEI)*

Some of the partner institutions have had close links historically with employers and call on their expertise as and when required. Some have also noted the willingness of public sector employers to engage more readily with them rather than those from the private sector, particularly the small and medium-sized enterprises.

‘We do some work with NHS Primary Care Trusts anyway so maybe the LLN has not been so important here. However the CDA developments did require engagement with employers and the input from the sector consultants was more meaningful here.’

*(Progression champion - FEC)*

‘Some of our employers do value what is happening with respect to progression and do see the flexibility in what HEIs can offer in upskilling their workforce - but many of these employers are from the public sector. It is the private SMEs that are difficult to engage with.’

*(Executive Group member - FEC)*
The sector consultants have also developed an external facing view, developing employer and employer organisation links and engaging with the SSCs relevant to the priority sectors. They have worked with these employers and employers’ organisations to provide them with information and ideas about the opportunities that HE holds for them and their employees and the benefits that engaging with HE providers (both FECs and HEIs) might provide. The consensus view across the LLN partner institutions however, has been that employer engagement is not easy and indeed is one of the most difficult areas of work in which to achieve. That notwithstanding, the partners do realise the key importance of employer engagement in terms of making present and future curriculum more appropriate and responsive to the needs of employers. As a result there have been many positive aspects on the part of the LLN in terms of employer engagement and the work of the sector consultants in this has been widely acknowledged.

‘The sector consultants have been really useful; they have accessed employers for us and are better at it than most. Those employers who have been brought in have soon changed their views on HE and what it can do for them - but it has been hard to get employers on board. We find employer engagement the most difficult aim to achieve.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

Partners have commented on their value and work, particularly when working on curriculum development issues (funded through CDAs or ASNs etc) and the consultants have enabled them to engage with appropriate employers to provide a work-focused and business perspective. Not only has this work resulted in changes to the curriculum content but it has also provided more appropriate advice and guidance within these programmes. It has also provided employers with an opportunity to see that not only has HE got something to offer them and their employees, but also that the contribution from the employers is highly valued by the FECs and HEIs concerned.

‘The sector consultants have had an important effect here. They have pointed our college in the right direction and given a critical view for new curriculum. And they have pointed the way for us meeting with other new employers with regards to our curriculum developments. The consultants have helped the facilitation of better employer engagement all round.’

(Senior Manager - FEC)

As part of its overall strategy in engaging with employers in the Lancashire area, the original LLN Business Plan had envisaged the development of:

- An Employer’s Forum
- An Employer CPD programme
- Close liaison with the SSCs relevant to the Priority Sectors

Once the LLN was in operation however, discussion centred upon the validity and benefits of both the Employers Forum and the Employer CPD offer. After much debate across the LLN particularly involving those who had previous experience in this area, it was decided that these two developments would not go ahead and the outward facing part of the employer engagement strategy would concentrate on working through the relevant SSCs and direct engagement with employers or employers’ groups as time and situation dictated.
As a consequence, useful links have been developed with the following SSCs:

- Cogent
- SEMTA
- Summit Skills
- Proskills
- Go Travel
- People First
- Skills for Health
- Skills for Care

In addition, good links were also made with:

- The Blackpool and Fylde Tourist Board
- The Nuclear Skills Academy
- The Environmental Technologies Skills Academy

Links with all of these organisations have been valuable and representatives have attended meetings of the LLN and engaged with members from partner institutions sometimes making presentations at Forum and Executive Board meetings. In addition to them working with the sector consultants, they have on some occasions been used as mentors to partner groups and have been utilised to provide expert advice and guidance in relation to new curriculum development initiatives and validations. Not all of the SSCs have engaged as well as others, although in some cases exceptionally useful and positive relationships have developed.

From the perspective of the SSCs, working with the LLN provided some excellent opportunities to engage with both HE providers and employers in order to maximise opportunities in terms of both progression strategy and upskilling of the workforce to Level 4 and above.

Cogent (the Sector Skills Council for Chemicals, Nuclear, Oil and Gas, Petroleum and Polymers), worked with the LLN for over two years looking at employer engagement opportunities in the FE/HE sector, in the area of chemicals manufacturing in the north-west in general and in particular, in the nuclear/nuclear decommissioning industry. The links developed with the LLN were positive in relation to the development of progression routes for apprentices and opportunities for FD development. Cogent was able to make use of the Visaroute facility with employer groups as a tool for looking at progression opportunities; in this way linking with the LLN helped break down barriers to progression on the part of employers and the functionality of Visaroute was embedded with groups of employers. The only problem encountered here was that Visaroute covers only the Lancashire area as opposed to the north-west region as a whole and consequently covers only part of the geographic area covered by Cogent. Cogent gained from the LLN, in that, it developed useful links with STEMNET projects in the LLN which could then be targeted directly into specific employers or manufacturing sectors. Conversely, the LLN gained from Cogent by having an expert in this scientific sector able to advise and guide linkages and developments directly to FECs and HEIs from the relevant industries. These linkages have helped Cogent in driving its employer engagement agenda in the north-west at the same time as fulfilling the LLN’s own similar agenda.

A further part of the work of the sector consultants has been engaging directly with sector specific employers, employer groupings, and professional organisations. They have also worked on providing LMI data to the partner institutions to inform them of changes, movements and emerging trends in labour market requirements in the Lancashire area which are highly relevant to the development of new curriculum.
‘The LLN has been a useful conduit for information about employment issues on a national and regional scale. The LMI reports have been very useful to the colleges and HEIs although sometimes their quality is variable.’

(Strategic Board member - FEC)

In total, the sector consultants have actively engaged with over 300 sector specific employers during the tenure of the LLN covering all of the priority sectors: Health and Social Care, Leisure and Tourism, Construction, Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, Digital and Creative Industries and Environment and Sustainability. In all sectors, engagement has included working with both large scale employers and small and medium-sized enterprises. Each of the sector consultants admits to having had varying degrees of success; however they are all clear that the employers have in some way or another contributed towards the shaping of curriculum in these sectors across the region and in some cases also contributed to improvements in the IAG that is available in their sector. The consultants confirm that in each of their sectors employers are now in regular contact with curriculum teams, have contributed to the updating and development of the HE curriculum and maintain a dialogue as a result of the employer engagement strategy of the LLN.

In some cases however, employer engagement activities are still not achieving what some institutions had hoped. Comment continues to be made by the partner institutions about the difficulties of achieving good employer engagement and that the LLN strategies employed may not always have helped in achieving this goal.

‘Our college has its own employer engagement specialist - but it is still very difficult.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘Sector consultants may be doing a good job meeting with employers and working on skills gaps and curriculum developments, but there is as yet no evidence of increased progression.’

(Progression champion - Private Providers)

‘Employer engagement is always very difficult and we are not sure the LLN strategy has really helped us at all.’

(Strategic Board member - FEC)

‘LLN funding has been useful to try and make employer engagement work, but the process needs to be longstanding and the LLN is only here for a short time! So really, we do not feel a great benefit.’

(Progression champion - HEI)

‘It is important for employers to know about and understand the HE offer and what it can mean or do for them. It does not actually matter that employers don’t know who or what the LLN actually is. The sector consultants have talked to employers a lot in last 18 months through cluster groups and SSCs.’

(Central Team member)
Impact of the Employer Engagement Strategy

Provision of effective employer engagement has been one of the central aims of the Lancashire LLN, and this area is seen as particularly important for future developments in the HE sector. The LLN was not successful in the creation of an Employers Forum, nor was a programme of CPD for employers developed. Decisions not to proceed with these were taken after due consideration by the Central Team and the Executive Board with the resulting saving of resources being put into the work of the sector consultants and made available for other employer projects that subsequently might arise.

The work of the sector consultants has clearly, in a major part, been seen as successful. Engagement with the SSCs and similar bodies has, for the most part, been good and the information derived from them in terms of LMI and higher-level skills requirement has been effectively transmitted back to the partner institutions. In a similar manner the sector consultants have engaged directly with employers, employers groups and other professional bodies and worked with them in a two-way capacity both providing and receiving information. In the first instance they have worked with employers to dispel any myths as to what HE is all about and how it might benefit both their workforce and their businesses financially. They have outlined the concept of FDs and explained the various modes of delivery such as part-time, full-time, on-line and blended learning, how they work and how they might be beneficial to them. In this respect, employers have come to understand much more about what HE can actually offer them. The consultants have also outlined what is meant by higher-level skills and why they are important to employers, needs.

At the same time, the sector consultants have fed the intelligence and LMI derived from the employers back into the partner institutions. This has fed into the development of new curriculum which is up-to-date, technically relevant and fit for the purpose of business and industry. In generating this two way process the sector consultants have also linked employers with the partner institutions directly, getting them involved with curriculum development in terms of advice on content, IAG requirements, appropriate modes of delivery and validation. This two-way process is now in place, is seen to work and be beneficial to both parties and is likely to continue in the future, post-LLN.

‘Our aim was to help the HEI with engaging employers through awareness-raising events and meetings. This was successful, so now both managers and employees from the sector are on FDs as a result. Many links like this have been brokered and now many more institutions are undertaking employer engagement than previously. One of the partner FECs has appointed their own employer engagement officer now.’

(Sector consultant)

The LLN employer engagement strategy has involved engagement with over 300 businesses or employer organisations and has allowed for the development of a dialogue between businesses and the partner institutions, enabling a clearer understanding of the requirements of both parties to be understood by the other. The outcomes have been the development of a more appropriate curriculum in the priority sectors, whilst some of those businesses have taken advantage of the new higher-level up-skilling opportunities that are now available to their workforce.
Summary

- The process of engaging with employers and associated employers’ organisations is seen as an important area of work by all of the partner institutions.

- The sector consultants have played a major part in the employer engagement strategy of the LLN in engaging with a wide number of employers, professional bodies, employers’ organisations and SSCs.

- The sector consultants have succeeded in bringing employers and representatives of these other organisations into the process of curriculum and associated IAG development. Many partners intend that these practices will continue in the future.

- The sector consultants have produced LMI data that has been highly useful to partner institutions in informing their business plans.

- No Employers Forum or Employers CPD Programme has been developed by the LLN as originally intended, the major thrust of this work being taken over by the sector consultants.

- The process of employer engagement although improved as a result of the work of the LLN is still regarded as being a difficult area of work by most of the partners.
11. The Apprentices Project Update

This section provides an update on the work of the Apprentices Project which was commissioned jointly by AHL and the Lancashire LLN in February 2010. Both organisations had as priority parts of their remit the aim to increase the number of apprentices in the Lancashire area progressing to Level 4 and above. As both AHL and the LLN were planning, or already had underway, interventions to develop this agenda, an agreement was made that the project would be jointly commissioned so as to avoid replication. This approach also fell into line with the LLN Business Plan which advocated cooperation with AHL wherever possible in order to avoid duplication of work and to ensure effective use of finance and resources.

The Apprentices Project involved working with both private and public training providers across Lancashire and comprised a series of activities and interventions which were aimed at Level 3 Advanced Apprentices and trainers/tutors and managers in these organisations. The project drew on work already taking place or planned in both organisations such as the AHL Partner Provider Project and the Lancashire LLN Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE programme. The Project also included work provided by the LWBLEF who acted as an agent of AHL in the delivery of the Partner Provider Project and various other interventions.

The nature of the Apprentices Project

The types of activities and interventions taking place as part of the Apprentices Project included:

- Delivery of the Partner Provider Toolkit comprising learning, marketing and IAG materials in both paper and digital form aimed specifically at Advanced Apprentices
- Development and distribution of an Apprentices Progression to HE Passport
- Development and delivery of enrichment activities for apprentices by the training provider organisations involved
- Coaching and mentoring activities developed for trainers and assessors by the LWBLEF
- Delivery of a Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE module to trainers, assessors and managers with a later rollout of an adapted version for apprentices
- Development and Implementation of a Mathematics for Engineers module to be used by apprentices progressing onto HE programmes
- Utilisation of Visaroute to ensure information about progression pathways HE courses for Level 3 apprentices across Lancashire
- A series of other CPD opportunities for public and private training provider and HEI staff
- Enrichment Funding

The Apprentices Project was approved in March 2010 with a combined budget of £165,000 to deliver these joint objectives and was planned to run until December 2011. With the closure of AHL due in July 2011, a Phase 1 evaluation report was commissioned in June 2010 and reported its findings with a series of recommendations and conclusions in March 2011. The remit of the Apprentices Project continues with the LLN until December 2011. This Phase 2 evaluation update covers the period April-October 2011.

Since publication of the Phase 1 report further data and information has been collated providing evidence of developments and activities that have taken place in respect of the Apprentices Project during this period. This information has been provided by the training providers, both public and private, AHL, LWBLEF and the Lancashire LLN.
The update has looked in particular at:

- What developments have taken place in terms of activities and interventions since the last report?
- What actions have been undertaken by AHL and LLN in response to the recommendations made in that report regarding sustainability of ideas and activity?

Further developments of activities and interventions

Reports from the partner providers indicate that many of the activities have been completed or are continuing. Many also report positive outcomes in these areas of activity.

The Partner Provider Toolkit materials (including the Apprentices Progression Passport)

These materials have continued to be used in many of the partner organisations and in some cases have been embedded into the learning programme, in some cases being embedded also at Level 2 so that the process of progression is clearly signalled when learners actually start the apprenticeship process. In some instances partners have continued to use the materials but have started to modify and adapt them so that they are more appropriate for their learners. In addition, some partners have used the materials with groups other than those for which they were originally intended so that they are now reaching a wider audience than previously. All of the partner providers contacted indicated that the Toolkit materials (literature, activities and learning materials) would continue to be used as part of the general IAG delivered to their Advanced Apprentices.

‘Yes, we will continue with the presentation and the use of the equipment that we have purchased through the Aimhigher funding for taster Level 4 sessions.’

(Training manager - PTP)

‘We will continue to use the Toolkit materials alongside our own resources, and will continue to develop them according to the sector opportunities and services on offer. The Toolkit resources were found to be useful for the staff providing the information, for the learners in informing them about progression pathways and for their parents.’

(Training manager - PTP)

Enrichment Activities

At the time of the previous report some enrichment activities had taken place, whilst other partners had received funding only recently and hence had not carried out any activity.

To date, all partners indicate that they have utilised their enrichment funding effectively; several have provided master-classes for their learners, sometimes tied in with a visit to an HE provider or to a relevant industrial enterprise. In most cases the apprentices have had opportunity to talk with past apprentices who have benefited from an HE opportunity. Tutors report that visits to HE providers have been ‘highly beneficial’ in showing students that there are opportunities to progress to HE locally and that ‘people like them’ can be involved. They indicate that visits of this nature will definitely continue in the future. Other providers used the enrichment funding for open evening events for their apprentices and parents to attend in order to find out more about the opportunities
for HE progression. These again have proved very successful and will be embedded into apprentices’ programmes in the future.

Several of the partners indicate that they have found their enrichment activities useful as a learning experience for their staff too and that the experience has been beneficial. Following the initial activities, one FEC realised that better results could probably be achieved if a more effective monitoring system was put in place to follow students as they progressed through the levels of learning to see what percentage of apprentices do actually progress to HE. This is not an AHL or LLN funded activity, but it has come about because of the enrichment activities that preceded it. The same provider was also very positive about the value of using outside speakers from industry who had previously been apprentices themselves; this is an activity which will continue as a direct result of the enrichment funding. Consequently, having completed the enrichment activities partners have realised their value and are now organising similar activities for the future, albeit sometimes in modified form.

‘The Level 3 Motor students took a visit to the Motor Engineering department at Blackpool and The Fylde College. This was a very beneficial activity as the college provides direct progression routes that relate to the learners’ current studies. The learners took a great deal of encouragement from this as they were able to see the content and requirements of the work carried out at Level 4. The realisation was that they were all capable of progression and not as intimidated of HE as they were at the outset of the project.’

(Training assessor - FEC)

What becomes clear from this feedback is that the partner providers realise how these interventions and enrichment activities have helped their Advanced Apprentices in improving awareness of HE and increasing their aspirations, self-confidence, self-belief and attitudes towards progression.

The Coaching and Mentoring programme

The Coaching and Mentoring programme was developed through the LWBLEF, and proved very popular amongst the partner providers. Staff who had attended on the programme have commented very positively and as a result many people continued with the later Phase 2 and Phase 3 parts of the training. The benefits accrued from the course, particularly in being able to enhance the support that tutors/trainers can give to their learners as a result have been widely welcomed. They clearly see the outcomes of their training as being of benefit to their learners in terms of their progression journey. Several of the partners have indicated that would like more of their staff to take part in coaching and mentoring activities like this in the future.

The Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE Programme

This programme has taken place again for staff since March and has been received favourably by the participants. It has not yet run with a cohort of Advanced Apprentices although this is intended for the near future.

Staff taking the course have reported that it has raised their own awareness and understanding of the progression to HE process and that they now feel better qualified, more confident and better informed to advise their apprentices about what HE has to offer. The course has also made the participants much more aware of the barriers that apprentices face in terms of progression to HE and the strategies that can be adopted to overcome these. They consider that what they have learned on the course will clearly benefit their apprentices and that this may well apply to other
Level 3 cohorts that they deal with in their organisations generally. It has made them very aware of the value of higher-level study skills as part of both Level 2 and Level 3 work for apprentices and made them think about ways to integrate these skills into their learning programmes. In addition, they have realised the value for their learners of visits to HE providers and the benefits these derive in terms of awareness and understanding of what HE opportunities are available.

‘The course has raised our awareness about progression to HE and also given us the ability to provide our apprentices with the opportunity to make a much more informed choice.’

(Training assessor - FEC)

Impacts across the Partnership

The effects of the Apprentices’ Project across the wider partnership have provided a series of positive outcomes. In various FECs the profile of apprentices and apprenticeships has been raised through the project and increasingly, apprentices are seen as a valuable source of people who can progress to HE. Part of this change has been in recognising and removing those barriers to progression which are traditionally recognised across the sector. In some cases, this has involved the development of better monitoring procedure for apprentices, changes to their curriculum to include effective IAG, and/or changes to the support mechanisms that apprentices can access in terms of finding out and understanding more about progression to HE and what it truly means. There are usually costs associated with these developments, but the enrichment funding, the Coaching and Mentoring and Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE programmes have pump-primed some of these changes, and SMTs are coming to understand more clearly the need for greater investment in progression opportunities for their apprentices and providing funds appropriately. Certainly, some providers talk about ‘changes in strategic direction’ with regards to their apprentices’ provision.

Training providers have also seen further changes as a result of the Apprentices Project. The effect on their staff in terms of much improved awareness and understanding themselves of HE progression issues and barriers, has led to the recognition that changes need to be made to staff training and responsibilities. The Phase 2 and 3 (and repeat of Phase 1 training) of the Coaching and Mentoring programme and the repeat of the Train the Trainers - Preparation for HE programme are evidence of this. The organisations are now aware that it is important that their own trainers and assessors are aware and knowledgeable about HE progression issues, as much as the apprentices themselves.

‘I am relatively clear on the strategic direction my organisation needs to follow as a result of my contact with the [Apprentices] project and will now pursue this.’

(Training Manager - PTP)

Impact on Employers

The effect on employers continues to be variable, although there are some positive areas. Some providers note that the enrichment activities, for example visits and master-classes have been fully supported by apprentices’ employers and also that their employers appear to support apprentices in their aspiration to progress to HE. However there are also comments that in some cases, employers see the opportunity of HE as a ‘threat to their business’ in that they may lose their employee as a result. This would suggest that there is still room for better engagement with employers and that whilst some are ‘on-board’, this is still an area for development.
‘The response from the employers (of those who have progressed) has been really positive. The general opinion has been that the learner will have a higher-skill level and this will benefit the workplace too.’

(Training assessor - FEC)

‘There has been some anecdotal resistance from employers to promoting HE to apprentices..... they have concerns with regard to losing their apprentices etc.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

Impact on the Apprentices

The full extent to which apprentices have benefited from the Apprentices Project is difficult to assess, but the feedback provided since the Phase 1 report indicates progress on a variety of fronts. Most partners indicate a much greater awareness and understanding on the part of the targeted cohorts about the opportunities provided by progressing to HE. In some cases apprentices are actively progressing to Level 4 Studies, in other cases, aspirations have been raised and those concerned may well progress to HE at a later date. Conversely, some providers evidence the fact that the awareness raising has led some apprentices to realise that HE is not a route that they wish to follow, or certainly ‘not at the moment. This may appear to be a negative outcome, but in reality may well be a positive outcome for the learner as they are now making a more well-informed and reasoned choice about their future.

Comment has also been made by some providers that although they feel that their learners have benefited greatly from the project in terms of greater awareness and aspiration-raising, in some sectors there is still a lack of HE courses available locally onto which their apprentices can progress. This has certainly led to disappointment in some cases; however in one case this has spurred the training provider to work with the NAS and the relevant SSC to develop a FD appropriate to his apprentices.

Case Studies from Training Providers

Many of these points are well illustrated in the 5 case studies included below.

**Apprentices Project Update - Case Study 1**

**Beneast Training Ltd, Blackpool**

**Leanne Docherty - Training Manager**

The AHL Toolkit has been used with Advanced Apprentices across all occupational areas to provide them with information and guidance about HE progression opportunities. The provider has also collated its own information around their specific sector areas and the various progression opportunities that they offer. The Toolkit materials continue to be used alongside these new resources and Beneast aims to continue developing them according to the sector opportunities and services on offer. The Toolkit resources have proved useful, both to staff themselves and in providing information to learners and parents to give them guidance about progression opportunities.
A variety of information events, open evenings and external visits for learners to gain experience and knowledge about the HE sector have taken place including a visit to Edge Hill University.

Enrichment funding of £1,500 from AHL has been used for a Progression to HE open evening for potential learners, employers and parents in addition to creating additional resources which will be provided to the audience.

A cohort of 6 staff including sector managers, trainer-assessors and advisors, has participated in the Train the Trainers - Preparation for HE programme alongside staff from Blackpool and The Fylde College. The staff members that were involved now form part of an internal task group developing learning materials for apprentices and are currently looking into establishing the module within Beneast’s provision. This adapted Preparation for HE module will be launched on 30th September 2011 with one of its own staff who completed the LLN programme leading the presentation.

The Apprentices Project has had a significant impact at all levels within the organisation due to many of its employees being involved at some point and it has clearly provided awareness and knowledge about the routes and pathways into HE available to young people. Beneast staff are now more confident in providing this information to their learners and signposting where and how HE can be accessed. Many Advanced Apprentices are now much more aware of HE opportunities and what these can offer them.

As a result of the Apprentices Project, Beneast is now working in partnership with the University of Chester in developing a series of Level 4 modules and a Foundation Degree in Childcare. Module descriptors and schemes of work have been produced, with validation due to take place in November 2011. The company hope to recruit 15 students initially, having obtained funding through the Blackpool Early Years scheme. Beneast considers the realisation of this project to be a great achievement for their organisation as it will provide their learners with ample opportunities for progression locally.

Beneast believes that the Apprentices Project has been highly beneficial for their apprentices and that behaviour and attitudes of both learners and staff will continue to be very positive towards progression into HE as it serves a purpose and service to both the learner and employer. It is their intention that they will continue with activities such as the adapted Preparation for HE programme and their work with the University of Chester for the foreseeable future.
Apprentices Project Update - Case Study 2

Accrington and Rossendale College

Dan Pinder - Training Support Officer

The Partner Provider Toolkit

The Partner Provider Toolkit materials formed part of the initial Level 3 induction, enabling staff to further the topic of progression and allowing learners to participate in the subject. The College intends to continue use of these materials for the foreseeable future as they help in presenting what they consider a hugely important issue.

Enrichment activities

In terms of enrichment activities the Level 3 Motor Vehicle Advanced Apprentices made a visit to the Motor Engineering department at Blackpool and The Fylde College. This was considered a very beneficial activity as the college provides direct progression routes that relate to the learners’ current studies. The learners took a great deal of encouragement from this as they were able to see the content and requirements of the work carried out at Level 4. The realisation was that they were all capable of progression and not as intimidated by HE as they were at the outset of the project.

Accrington and Rossendale College has also taken delivery of new diagnostic equipment purchased using the enrichment funding from AHL. This again has provided the learners with a sample of ‘Level 4 life’ and it is intended that these resources will be used with future Level 3 groups to raise their skill levels and their progression awareness in the process.

Coaching and Mentoring

Two staff from Accrington and Rossendale College (a course tutor and a training support officer) have taken part in this project organised by the LWBLEF. Both have attended the workshops ‘Coaching and Mentoring Stage 1’ and ‘Coaching and Mentoring Stages 2 & 3’.

The benefits have been that although both these staff have always coached and mentored students as part of their daily role, they now have a far better understanding of the processes involved which can only be of benefit to the learner.

The effects of the Apprentices Project

The staff involved have taken a great deal from the project as they feel that they have been ‘educated’ in the subject of progression - something that they felt they did not know enough about previously.
This greater knowledge and understanding can now be conveyed to present and future learners much more confidently, which will be of great benefit to everyone.

The effect on the Advanced Apprentices themselves has been great. The staff considered that a maximum of one learner might have progressed beyond Level 3 prior to the activities and interventions of the project. To date however 4 learners have enrolled to progress to a Level 4 qualification at Accrington and Rossendale College and those Advanced Apprentices who have not done so, now have a far greater awareness of the options available when they do consider the next step of their careers.

Clearly, the College as a whole has benefited from the project as staff have become more aware and knowledgeable about progression and the topic has now been integrated into the Advanced Apprentices qualification framework. The college has also benefitted as 4 of the apprentices in the group have enrolled to take the Level 4/5 HNC in Automotive Engineering at the College. This has never really happened before; the core of the HNC course has historically been made up of former full-time learners, but the trend has changed this year and staff involved firmly believe that this was due to the impetus that the Apprentices Project gave everyone. It is the case that whether they progressed or not, each learner on the project was fully engaged with the ideas and activities that were taking place. As a result they came to understand and consider options that they might previously not have done.

The response from the employers (of those Advanced Apprentices who have progressed) has been very positive. The general opinion has been that ultimately the learner will have a higher skill level and this will benefit the workplace too. Another very positive response was that for the visits to Lancaster University and Blackpool and The Fylde College, every single employer gave their backing to the learner attending and thought the general idea of the Apprentices Project to be an excellent development.

The staff involved at Accrington and Rossendale College, clearly see changes both for the short term and the long term as a result of the Apprentices Project. The issue of progression will now be introduced to Apprentices at Level 2 and be a continual part of the learning process up to and through Level 3. Staff commented that it had been really interesting to see the ‘mind-set’ of this first group change during the course of the Apprentices Project and this is something the staff will be striving to continue.

‘The issue of HE and progression beyond Level 3 was previously not really seen as our business and was scoffed at but we feel we have broken down some real barriers by addressing the issue in the manner we have.’

(Course tutor)

In the long term, the college will continue to use the diagnostic equipment purchased with the AHL funds and will produce enhanced learning aims for future learners in order to raise their awareness and aspirations in relation to progression to HE.
At the same time the staff dealing with Level 3 learners feel that as a result of the interventions of the Apprentices Project they are in a far more knowledgeable position to assist and advise their learners. They are clear that the legacy of the Project will continue at the College and are certain that this will benefit many more learners in the future.

A message to the Apprentices Project Team:

‘The staff and learners at Accrington and Rossendale College would like to thank the AHL and Lancashire LLN for allowing us to participate. Everyone has benefited both personally and professionally and there has been very positive feedback throughout.’

### Apprentices Project Update - Case Study 3

**Training 2000, Blackburn**

**Steve Walker - Training Manager**

Training 2000 is very positive about the benefits it has derived by taking part in the Apprentices Project.

**Enrichment funding**

Having been provided with the Partner Provider Project materials, it has used them to good effect and will continue with their use in the future. Equipment that has been purchased through the enrichment funding will continue to be used with Advanced Apprentices for Level 4 taster sessions. The organisation has also used the enrichment funding for the delivery of a master-class.

Feedback from the 20 students who used the Partner Provider Project materials and attended the master-class showed that:

- 100% of the learners benefited from the IAG sessions and the materials used
- 70% of learners had not previously considered entering HE
- 65% of learners have changed their views and would be positive about entering HE
- 90% of learners stated that they or their employer would be willing to pay something towards HE fees

Because of the benefits derived from the Apprentices Project, Training 2000 intends to continue running the IAG sessions and deliver the Level 4 taster sessions in-house, post-Lancashire LLN
Staff CPD opportunities

A member of the Training 2000 staff attended the Coaching and Mentoring programme and benefited greatly from this. The knowledge gained has now been disseminated to the team and the ideas are used with all of their apprentices.

Problems encountered

The provider is still of the opinion that there are no appropriate routes for their Automotive Engineering apprentices to progress onto at HE level in the Lancashire area. They feel that the project has enabled them to promote the idea of higher-level learning and inspire and motivate their apprentices; hence, it would make for a much more positive outcome if such a course, for example, a FD was available.

Positive outcomes for the organisation

The Apprentices Project has enabled staff at Training 2000 to develop a much broader knowledge and understanding about HE opportunities, allowing them to be able to signpost their learners in a much better way in respect of progression.

The management now have a much clearer view of the strategic direction that the organisation needs to follow as a result of involvement with the project and will pursue the development of a FD with the NAS and the relevant SSC.

Apprentices Project Update - Case Study 4

Blackpool and The Fylde College

Michelle Riley - Commercial Income Manager

The section of the College has not carried out any other enrichment activities since March 2011 but does have another event due to take place in November 2011. The March event was very successful and the outcomes were very positive. However due to this event being the first of this type they had run, on reflection the team involved realised that they had missed a number of opportunities and felt with hindsight they could have done things better.

It was agreed that problems were due to the fact that a very small team (only 2 people) had worked on this project both of whom already had high current workloads. As a result and due to a recent restructure, it was agreed that this year the college could secure a bigger team to work on the project and develop it further. The team plans to build in a more robust monitoring system to track the Advanced Apprentices once they have completed Level 3 to see what percentage do progress to HE and also to record their experiences for future use.
It was considered that one of the most effective activities from the March event was having an ex-apprentice from industry to speak about the benefits they had experienced as a result of continuing their education to higher levels after their apprenticeship. This had clearly made the biggest impact on the Advanced Apprentices attending the event as it had greater credibility hearing from ‘one of their own’. It was decided to adopt this model for any future events.

The team commented that the enrichment funding had really offered them the opportunity to try out new activities with their Advanced Apprentices and that this has proved exceptionally useful as a learning process and for the future.

**Coaching and Mentoring**

The Commercial Income Manager at the College considered that the Coaching and Mentoring programme provided by the LWBLEF was one of the most beneficial activities for staff involved with apprentices and clearly feels that this should be extended further to involve all lead assessors from each vocational area. The manager and several training advisors completed the Coaching and Mentoring programme in order to be in a better position to support their apprentices more effectively and are now recommending that all of their assessors complete the same course to enable a continuous level of guidance and support to be provided. A recommendation, that all assessors complete a bespoke training programme as to what is available at HE level for apprentices, what costs are involved, what funding is available and how to access extra support and master-classes, is now being considered for proposal to the College management.

**Train the Trainers - Preparation for HE**

The college did take part in this project but on reflection felt that although it did have value to what they are trying to achieve, it would ultimately be better for the college to use the tutors that they already employ to deliver the outcomes of this programme to the apprentices. The college has a number of ‘bridging courses’ that are almost identical to that of the Train the Trainer - Preparation to HE module, but currently these are only offered to full-time students or new students preparing to enter HE courses. In the spirit of ‘not reinventing the wheel’ the college is discussing how to roll out one of these programmes to apprentices. As an FE/HE institution however, with a mix of tutors and assessors, they clearly see the role of assessor now being more developed towards coaching and mentoring the learner’s transition into HE, with the role of the tutors being to deliver the actual Preparation to HE course. The college considers that this is the most appropriate way forward to enhance the HE awareness of their apprentices in this instance.

**Overall effects of the Apprentices Project across the college.**

This project has had a positive effect across the college as it highlighted the need for more support for their apprentices. Completing the Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE module has also provided staff with a real understanding of the apprentices’ experience in the transition to HE and how this can be improved.
Staff have realised that they can now speak to their learners with much more confidence and authority about progression to HE as a result of taking the programme.

One result of the Apprentices Project has been that the college has decided to continue work of this nature with apprentices and after the next Apprentices into HE event in November will be developing a business case to present to the SMT with the intention of securing an annual budget to continue this work year-on-year. The WBL team is currently undergoing a restructure of roles and responsibilities and as a result, progression to HE has been embedded into certain job specifications.

Following the last Apprentices into HE enrichment event in March 2011, the college were able to highlight a number of weaknesses that became apparent, for example, how little their NVQ assessors knew about the application and funding processes for HE. As a result the college has put extra training in place for their assessors to rectify the situation. It has also provided a platform to further promote progression within some of the other events that the college already hosts, for example, at the Annual Apprenticeship Awards and within initial advice and guidance sessions to school-leavers and their parents. The opportunity for Advanced Apprentices to progress to HE is now an integral part of the process.

**Apprentices Project Update - Case Study 5**

*Runshaw College*

*Colin Stanfield - Head of Studies (Higher Education)*

The Partner Provider Toolkit materials continue to be used with Advanced Apprentices at Runshaw and this will be the case for the foreseeable future.

Further enrichment activities have continued to take place in respect of:

- Speakers from HE providers have carried out visits to provide presentations relating to studying in HE
- Visits have been arranged to an HEI and other FECs for campus tours with the opportunity to meet with present students on courses such as FDs and to view social and academic facilities
- Visits have also taken place to industrial and business enterprises where employment opportunities and the value of progression to HE study are outlined and discussed
- The enrichment activities have continued to raise awareness, aspiration, self-confidence, self-belief, and improved attitudes in Advanced Apprentices in relation to progression to HE
The College has gained from the Apprentices Project in the following areas:

It has helped to engage assessors in careful consideration of HE as a progression opportunity for apprentices - something which they had not done to a great extent beforehand. It has also increased the awareness of HE as a progression opportunity but at this point, for the majority, the effect of this may simply have been to reinforce their decision not to take the HE route.

In the long term the College considers that as a consequence of NVQ assessors being exposed to HE experiences, this will impact on the behaviour and attitudes of apprentices in respect of progression in the future. As a result of the Apprentices Project the college will continue to promote HE as a progression opportunity to their Advanced Apprentices to the greater extent that this project has engendered.

Update on actions taken by the Project Team in respect of the recommendations for sustainability made in the Phase 1 report

The Phase 1 report of the Apprentices Project included a series of recommendations for AHL and the Lancashire LLN regarding sustainability of activity and ideas once the project had formally completed. The 12 Key recommendations for a sustainable future are listed below and in each case, comment is made as to what extent these have been achieved or are advancing.

1. Development of a short Good Practice Guide in respect of Advanced Apprentices Progression to HE. This should outline case studies and good practice developed to date.

   No new materials have been developed in this respect. The team considered that the requirements are covered in already published information such as the Apprentices Passport and other Partner Provider Project materials.

2. Organisation of an End of Apprentices Project Dissemination event. This event will showcase the good practice and activities that have been developed in the Lancashire area as a result of the Project.

   The team considered that there was not enough time or resource to develop an event such as this and instead would concentrate their efforts on developing the sustainability strategy.

3. Continuation and enhancement of the current CPD Programme. The highly successful CPD activities to date such as the Coaching and Mentoring programme and the Train the Trainers - Preparation for HE module should be rolled out until the end of the Project to allow as many staff as possible across the partnership to benefit from them.

   The Coaching and Mentoring programme has been delivered again and Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the training have also been delivered across Lancashire. The Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE programme is being considered for validation by a local HEI. It has been delivered again at Blackburn College for a cohort of staff and it is intended to run two more courses again, one for staff and one for apprentices in the autumn.

   Staff are also considering developing a Community of Practice in this area post-LLN.
4. Make provision for the Partner Provider Toolkit to be available and accessible after the end of the Project. The quality and value of the Toolkit materials and activities have been widely acknowledged and their continued availability can only be beneficial for future Advanced Apprentices.

The LWBLEF has agreed to act as a repository for all of the AHL and LLN learning materials related to the Apprentices Project and will make them available as required.

5. Ensure wider distribution of the Partner Provider Toolkit materials. The Toolkit has only been used by those training providers who have elected to take part in the Apprentices Project. Now that its value and effectiveness has been established, the Toolkit should be made available for use by all training providers in the Lancashire area.

The management team have ensured that all private and public work-based learning providers in Lancashire have now received the Partner Provider Toolkit and other learning materials.

6. Re-launch of the Visaroute web-based progression tool. Visaroute is a powerful and sophisticated tool for helping students learn more about progression to HE opportunities in the Lancashire area. It would be more widely and effectively used if more staff in partnership organisations were aware of its availability and potential.

The Visaroute system has continued to be updated and populated with relevant data. There is now much more data available in the form of pathways and agreements in relation to apprentices progressing. In addition many more progression gaps have been identified and filled so that there is a more comprehensive coverage of progression opportunities for apprentices. The front pages of the Visaroute website have been improved to allow easier access to the system and make it more user-friendly. In addition, a Visaroute [digital] APP is under development which will be distributed to all students across the LLN network (including Advanced Apprentices) and will provide information about admissions to local HEIs.

7. Organisation of a Management of Change/Changing HE Environment event for all partners. This event will outline the recent political and economic developments at governmental level that have resulted in a series of funding measures which will start to affect the whole HE landscape from September 2011. This is particularly pertinent at the present time given the government’s intention to dramatically increase the number of apprentices by 2020 with a high proportion of them intended to progress to HE.

The team considered that this would not be a practical option in terms of time and resourcing. Instead these ideas and activities were subsumed into the Lancashire LLN CEIAG Conference which was held in October 2011.

8. Continued development of new HE programmes across the partnership. This should concentrate particularly on FD development in order to fill curriculum gaps for progressing apprentices.

This has been difficult to achieve given that there are no further ASNs available linked to new course development. However, partner organisations are still using CDA funding to update and refresh their curricula. In these cases many partner institutions are providing value-added capacity for their students.
9. Pursue local validation and ownership of the *Train the Trainers - Preparation for HE Module*. This module is at present validated by an HEI external to Lancashire; local ownership would make its delivery more responsive to local need and development.

   This is work in progress. Two of the local HEIs are now giving consideration to validating the *Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE* module as part of their CPD programme.

10. Development of **Communities of Practice**. This would comprise staff who have benefited from the various CPD programmes that have taken place to date. Such communities allow for the discussion of ideas and experiences, dissemination of good practice and potential development of further CPD in the future.

   The development of Communities of Practice as a discussion forum/repository for practitioners’ and legacy materials continues as work in progress. JISC NW Regional Support Group support the idea and have offered to provide a platform for such communities. A paper on the opportunities and benefits of such Communities of Practice has been circulated and the issue has been discussed at the Lancashire LLN Forum.

11. Organisation of a CPD event for Careers Advisors who work in schools. A specific CPD event would highlight the opportunities available at HE level for apprentices in the Lancashire Region and the requirements for improved IAG to ensure progression.

   The management team did not consider that a separate event was viable and so this was subsumed into the CEIAG Conference which took place in October 2011.

12. Development of a series of *Good Practice Seminars*. A series of seminars providing public and private training providers who have benefited from the Apprentices Project with the opportunity to cascade this good practice to others.

   The management team did not consider that seminars of this nature were viable, given the time constraints and the fact that the CEIAG conference would cover many of these issues. However, they did note that the partner training providers, both public and private are now much more involved with progression activities to HE for apprentices than they ever have been in the past.

**Other developments to date**

Various other developments have taken place to date since last April in relation to apprentices and the Apprentices Project including:

- Funding from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) has been awarded to the LWBLEF for the development of a teacher and parent awareness-raising project about apprenticeships and the learning opportunities they offer right through to HE level. This project is now in operation.

- The Lancashire LLN has been liaising with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and NAS to support the development of Higher Apprenticeships across Lancashire. The Lancashire LLN has been advising various partner organisations about the benefits of Higher Apprenticeships and how to develop them.
Summary

- The materials developed and activities and interventions that have taken place have continued to have an effect since the submission of the previous (Phase 1) report.

- A variety of enrichment activities have continued to take place and in many cases are having a positive effect on both the apprentices concerned and their tutors, trainers and assessors. In some instances learners are progressing to HE programmes as a result of the interventions.

- Evaluation of previous activities shows positive outcomes such as increased awareness and enthusiasm developed about HE on the part of apprentices who have taken part in visits to HE providers and/or attended master-classes. Equipment purchased and learning materials developed during the project continue to be used to good effect by the partner providers concerned.

- CPD for staff has continued throughout this period and the benefits to both apprentices and staff have been clearly articulated, with indications made that the benefits derived will continue into the future, post-Lancashire LLN.

- Some partners have signalled that the Apprentices Project has prompted strategic changes in relation to provision in their organisation; as a result more apprentices are likely to progress to HE in the future and staff are more knowledgeable and confident in their ability to provide better advice and guidance.

- Some employers have reacted positively to the Apprentices Project and are supportive of their apprentices progressing to HE. The picture remains variable however and there is still work to be done in the area of employer engagement in terms of convincing employers of the value of HE to their employees and their businesses.

- The Apprentices Project has gone a long way to identifying and removing barriers to HE progression for apprentices in Lancashire. Other barriers still remain and the education process in this area will need to continue beyond the life of the Lancashire LLN.
12. Areas of Achievement and Success

The Lancashire LLN aimed to:

“......encourage and promote the FE and HE providers in Lancashire to work together, in liaison with employers and related organisations, to develop guaranteed progression opportunities for learners in key priority sectors of vocational learning both into and through HE.”

(Lancashire LLN Business Plan, 2008)

As a consequence, the Lancashire LLN put in place a funded strategy that would enable a series of interventions, activities and processes with the intention of achieving this aim. The extent to which these interventions and processes have impacted on the institutions and learners as was envisaged has focused the discussion so far. This section considers what the LLN has actually achieved, what its legacy will be and how its achievements can be sustained once the organisation closes.

Areas of Achievement and Success

All of the partners have acknowledged that the LLN made things happen that would not have happened if it had never existed, or accept that things might have actually happened at some point but the process of getting there would have been much slower. Partners have confirmed that the funding made available through the various strands of the LLN has had a marked effect on the subsequent development of their work. Of particular note and something clearly recognised across the partnership, was that the funding available through the LLN was specifically aimed at improving vocational progression into and through HE; it was not just focusing on HE in general. Given the main work of the FEC partners and the widening participation and work-based agenda of several of the HEIs this was considered of particular importance.

The 400 ASNs distributed over 2 years immediately directed a sum of c. £2.8m into the local HE economy. Likewise the CDA funding provided a further £82,500 directly into colleges and HEIs for immediate use. The funding of 17 progression champions across the partnership for 3 years totalled to c. £510,000; this in addition to the establishment funding for the Central Team including the Director, the sector consultants and the educational consultants. This funding and the services derived from it thereafter clearly had a marked effect on what the LLN was able to achieve. Evidence shows that the advent of the LLN allowed for the development of a strategic regional synergy, and acted as a catalyst for and accelerated change in this respect. By focusing on the fundamentals of HE provision and progression for vocational learners from FE and the world of work, the project embraced ideas and aims that were not evident on this scale elsewhere in the region.

In addition, something that the LLN achieved that has been welcomed by all of the partners without exception has been the opportunity to ‘buy out time’. Funding of projects, particularly through CDAs and the money provided to each institution for the ‘bought out’ element of progression champions’ time has clearly been highly beneficial for all partners. Further to this, the provision of the sector and education consultants as part of the Central Team each with their individual specialism has provided the partners with a group of people who have continually worked ‘behind the scenes’ on their behalf and provided a free consultancy and advice service across the partnership for 3 years. In this way the LLN provided ‘the cream on the cake that we could not get elsewhere... and provided for a lot of things that would never have happened otherwise’ and for many institutions ultimately became a ‘true external reflective agency and an honest broker’.
The extent to which the LLN has been successful is a reflection of the commitment on the part of the partner institutions concerned and it is likely that those institutions that have shown most commitment have received the most out of it. In this respect, the achievements of the LLN can be considered to be in line with its original objectives.

**Curriculum achievements**

The ASN's have provided the opportunity for 400 more individual learners to achieve progression in the specified priority sectors and as these numbers are now embedded within their respective institutions they will continue year-on-year for the foreseeable future. In certain cases this has allowed for capacity building so that many courses are now truly viable for the first time. Likewise, the CDA funding has been awarded and used in partner institutions across the region. Both of these initiatives have engendered developments in new and refreshed areas of curriculum to suit local need and have enabled novel approaches to delivery of curriculum to be developed or tried out.

The overall result has been two-fold. Firstly, a new and re-focused curriculum in several specified priority areas has been developed and has proved highly beneficial both for the institutions and their learners. Secondly and equally important, is that this process of curriculum development has required a new style of engagement with employers. It has necessitated working with them in order to determine curriculum content, IAG requirements and relevant methods of teaching, learning and modes of delivery; clearly this process will clearly continue post-LLN.

‘The curriculum development process has been developed and much more clearly outlined. We envisage the continued development of new products following the same process.’

*(Progression champion - FEC)*

‘The ideas and thoughts will continue on after the LLN ceases - courses developed through ASNs and CDAs will continue to attract vocational students.’

*(Strategic Board member - HEI)*

**IAG Achievements**

This is equally an area where the work of the LLN has made a significant difference for the partners. The provision of IAG materials through the Apprentices Project has been highly valued and in some cases embedded into the curriculum. The development of the Visaroute web-based IAG system has been somewhat controversial, but is clearly viewed as a highly useful tool for showing students the relevant progression routes and pathways that are available to them in the specified vocational HE sectors across Lancashire. In addition, the process of data collection and population for the Visaroute system has forced all of the partner institutions to clearly define both their relevant curriculum in terms of its accuracy and at the same time, ensure that they provided information about progression routes into and out of their curriculum offer. This process has led onto the identification of gaps in the curriculum which the LLN activities have gone a long way to filling. Not only has this process provided a pan-Lancashire view of provision, but has also enabled individual partners to engage in the process of reviewing their own provision to ensure it is fit for purpose.

The CEIAG Conference impacted positively on those who attended, as feedback evidences the value placed upon what they learned there. This influence on IAG and careers professionals and in particular HE Admissions Officers and managers from HEIs and FECs, is a clear contribution to
identifying and removing barriers to vocational HE progression and raising awareness of the issues concerned.

‘The ideas of the Lancashire LLN and its work have become ingrained in many of the institutions - but this has taken time. In many areas much better advice and guidance about HE is now being rolled out.’

(Progression champion - FEC)

‘Good practices have been developed and these will continue. For example, our HE development groups work much more closely with the IAG people now.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

**Employer Engagement Achievements**

The LLN has managed to put employer engagement firmly on the agenda across the partnership and pointed to the crucial value of FECs and HEIs working with employers and employers groups in all aspects of provision and delivery development. General consensus from the partners (with minor exception) has been that employer engagement is not an easy area of work. However, the LLN has improved employer engagement practice and opportunity through use of its sector and external consultants in bringing the two parties together. From the employers’ perspective too, there has been an increase in awareness of the part they can play in the development of HE and how both the process and the resulting curriculum can be of value to them, their employees and ultimately, their business.

‘The sector consultants have made a very positive impact with their knowledge and understanding of their sector, which without the LLN we simply would not have had.’

(Executive Group member - FEC)

‘We now have a stronger, more coherent HE curriculum aligned to the needs of our employers. We are actively engaging with employers to develop Higher Apprenticeships to include an FD. Equally we are now much more responsive to our employers and respond much more quickly to their curriculum need’

(Senior manager - FEC)

**Progression Achievements**

The identification and removal of barriers, improved opportunities and greater awareness and aspiration to progress into and through HE have been central to the mission of the Lancashire LLN and this is an area in which it has achieved great success. Its strategy of employing progression champions in the heart of each partner institution has meant that information about new developments and initiatives has been cascaded directly into those organisations. The emphasis on the identification and removal of barriers within individual institutions and the utilisation of Visaroute in collating information about relevant progression pathways in order to ensure the development of progression agreements has engendered a greater awareness of how progression can and should work in each institution. The use of the progression champions to draw together the various strands of the LLN’s work with input from the consultants as necessary has meant that far greater understanding of progression issues, opportunities and awareness is now present across the partnership. The use of the LLN Forum in promoting CPD in relation to progression and associated
issues along with other CPD opportunities such as the Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE module has ensured that the issue of progression to and through HE for vocational FE and work-based learners is now firmly embedded within the fabric of many of the partner institutions.

**Collaborative working achievement**

This has been one of the major areas of achievement of the Lancashire LLN. The aim of the LLN was to operate across Lancashire in a partnership context, bringing together FECs, HEIs and others to operate at regional level with a common sense of purpose. In their approach to the LLN, the partners have certainly made collaboration work and this has been one of its great strengths. At all levels of the LLN, Strategic Board, Executive Group, LLN Forum and at operational management level, it is clearly evident that a positive atmosphere of trust, understanding and respect has been engendered amongst all partners. This was not necessarily the case at the very beginning. Reference has been made that in early meetings, there was sometimes an air of ‘suspicion or mistrust’ on the part of the partners. Sometimes partners felt that ‘they did not wish to share their ideas’ as this ‘might be of benefit to others’. This situation however did not last long and all partners soon became aware that working together meant that they could learn from each other in terms of both mistakes and good practice and that a collaborative, interactive and sharing approach in areas such as project funding, marketing, IAG, CPD, employer engagement and curriculum development was a major benefit to all partners.

This allowed the opportunity for practitioners from FECs, HEIs, PTPs and other stakeholders, to work together at all levels from the strategic, to the day-to-day operational, under the guiding hand of the LLN Directorate and Central Team on a variety of wide-ranging projects and developments. Evidence has continued to surface throughout the evaluation in terms of ‘the LLN made things happen that simply would never have happened otherwise’ and ‘we have worked with people across the partnership who we simply would never have otherwise met and this has been incredibly beneficial’. In some cases this has included people from different parts of the same institution who have learned the benefits of closer working within an FEC or HEI. In terms of breaking down barriers both across and within the partnership, the LLN has had some remarkable successes and it is possible that this collaborative approach will remain post-LLN.

‘We now have a bigger range of FDs than we would have had and much better internal collaboration between FE and HE departments. Collaboration quite simply has helped improve local progression.’

*(Progression champion - FEC)*

‘The ethos of sharing ideas and good practices and communicating across the partnership will continue; the links are there now.’

*(Progression champion - FEC)*

**Areas where the LLN was not successful**

The nature of LLNs meant that they were endeavouring to address issues at a local or regional level and although all LLNs followed the same generic model, each operated separately and developed its own processes and structures. The Lancashire LLN in being the last to come into operation benefited in some respects from the successes and mistakes of the others; however not everything it tried was a success and there have been some areas where failure has occurred or change has been necessary.

In terms of the original structure envisaged in the Business Plan, the Area Groups were not considered successful and were disbanded at the end of the first year of operation to be replaced by
the much more successful LLN Forum. In a similar way the Operational Forum never met and the link to the Lancashire Skills Board was abandoned when the Board was effectively abolished shortly after the LLN came into operation.

In curriculum terms, various projects have not been successful. The Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy FD although developed to a large extent, was never validated as there was concern about its skills-based content and the integrity of its academic level. As a consequence, none of the HEIs in the partnership felt able to validate the programme. In a similar vein, the Bite-Sized Project aimed at providing a stepped approach to curriculum achievement foundered and did not continue beyond the first year of the LLN. Another area of the curriculum which has not been successful is the FD in Advanced Skills in Advance Materials delivered through the NWHLSP funding. This programme was strongly supported by the advanced textile industry across the county and was successfully validated; to date however, it has neither recruited nor run. Likewise, Mathematics for Engineers as a bridging module for Advanced Apprentices wanting to progress to HE has made no progress. Questions have also arisen as to why there was not more emphasis placed on novel types of curriculum and delivery development including more sharing of modules or programme developments across the partnership. This is partly answered by the fact that ASN distribution had in the first phase, to be awarded in a very short time scale and consequently several partners felt that they could not develop programmes or gain validation within the confines of the deadline. This was perhaps inevitable given the temporal nature of the work of the LLN; however, it has resulted in the outcome that only 9 out of a total of 17 of the partners have been awarded ASNs.

In terms of employer engagement some singular successes have been noted across the partnership, but this is still widely regarded as an area of difficulty by many. Suggestion has been made that a more strategic approach could have been adopted towards working with employers, including workshops on employer engagement, and wider meetings with employers to learn more about what their needs really are and how they can learn to engage more directly with educational institutions. The original proposal for the development of an Employers Advisory Group as envisaged by the original Business Plan was subsequently not carried forward; however nothing took its place which had it done so, would probably have proved beneficial in this area of the LLN’s work.

IAG is another area of work where the LLN has achieved some very positive outcomes, but here too evidence suggests that further success could have been achieved. Initially it had been planned to develop a CPD programme in IAG for delivery and advisory staff in FECs, HEIs and PTPs, concentrating particularly on IAG and progression issues relating to vocational learners. The LLN considered that the programme would complement the work being done by the progression champions and be beneficial for the staff involved. However, discussions with IAG professionals at CXL-VIA and Lancashire County Council at that time indicated that in reality, only the relevant NVQ Level 3 qualification in Advice and Guidance would be of any significant benefit. As a result, the originally intended IAG CPD programme made no further progress. Equally, it is acknowledged by the LLN itself that it failed in a strategic way to embrace with Admissions Officers in FECs and HEIs in order to bring pressure to bear in terms of the identification and removal of barriers for vocational and work-based learners. It is equally acknowledged that this would have been a very positive step. The recent CEIAG conference may have gone some way to mitigating this issue, but it certainly remains that there appeared a lack of strategic direction in these areas of IAG.

The view has also been expressed during the course of the evaluation as to whether or not the LLN marketed itself effectively. Certainly the original DVD produced very early on in the life of the LLN was regarded as a failure in that it concentrated too much on what the LLN was, rather than what it would do. However in this context, discussion has also centred around whether or not the LLN should actually have been marketing itself or its messages anyway. It is the case that this issue was
resolved early on in the life of the LLN. In July 2009 the Strategic Board expressed the view that the LLN should not spend too much effort on marketing, particularly not on brand marketing as this would be inappropriate for an organisation that would potentially be in existence for only three years. It was also agreed that any marketing activities should focus solely on progression routes, the Progression Passport to HE and the Visaroute IAG system. As a consequence of adopting this approach, the position of Marketing Manager on a full-time basis was never considered; instead a small advisory group was set up utilising the expertise of the marketing staff from partner institutions to advise on marketing matters as necessary.

Another issue that has evidenced itself in this area concerns the most effective ways of communicating with a digital-age audience. Practitioners have commented that the LLN website could have been more interactive for the user and could have been developed more quickly. Similarly, there could have been a Facebook and/or Twitter arm of the website with a series of digital APPS developed much earlier on to inform learners what was available and how the work of the LLN (through its collaborative partners) was of benefit to them in progressing onto or through HE. These types of developments are utilised on a large scale by most of the partner institutions themselves as part of their own marketing strategies. In the light of the decision about marketing taken early on by the Strategic Board however, it is unlikely that major developments in these areas would have been adopted by the LLN itself.

**Summary**

- The Lancashire LLN has proved successful in substantially achieving most of its aims and objectives. It has succeeded in bringing together a group of partners across Lancashire to work in collaboration with each other, with the intention of improving progression to HE opportunities for a wide range of their learners.

- In completing its work the LLN can reflect that it has made major positive impacts in many areas, both on organisations and people. It certainly got people and organisations working together who probably would not have done so otherwise and in doing so, created a synergy that led to the realisation that collaborative working can be of benefit to all who take part. The resulting developments in areas such as, progression agreements and pathways, IAG, curriculum development and employer engagement, have allowed for the development of processes, practices and relationships, some of which can and will be carried forward into the future, post-LLN.

- In that the LLN did not achieve in some areas of its work, in parts of the employer engagement strategy for example, non-completion of some curriculum developments such as HBT and Bite-Sized, or the need to replace the Area Group structure at the end of the first year of operation, this should not be construed as failure. The LLN set to work following a pre-determined business plan, very much in uncharted waters and it was inevitable that some of its objectives might not be achieved. Certainly, it needed to be flexible in approach and the change of structure in December 2009, with the abolition of the Area Groups and the formation of the LLN Forum, is testament to this.

- The LLN chose to adopt a low-key approach to marketing which did not involve branding as the organisation was inevitably short term in nature. It did not employ any marketing staff itself and instead used marketing professionals from the partner institutions to advise and guide as necessary.
• The overall achievement has been that the issue of improving progression opportunities to HE for vocational learners has been brought to the top of the agenda in a major way in the FECs, HEIs and other LLN partners across Lancashire and is here to stay. Clearly, the issue of HE progression will remain a matter of priority in the educational landscape for a long time after the closure of the Lancashire LLN. The partner institutions and their vocational learners are now much more aware of HE opportunities and how to identify and remove barriers that get in the way. Without the advent of the LLN, the major achievements made to date in this important area of education across the Lancashire region simply would not have occurred.
13. Where does the Future lie?

The changing educational landscape - opportunities for the LLN and its partners?

The duration of the LLN from August 2008 - December 2011, coincided with an unprecedented period of economic and political change and uncertainty. The advent of the banking crisis in 2008-2009 and the change of government in May 2010 with the realisation of an £800 billion economic deficit, means that the LLN finds itself now in entirely different economic and political circumstances than when it was conceived and formed. To some extent the LLN has been cushioned from these changes in that its budget has continued unimpeded and will do so until closure; however the LLN has not been immune from the changes around it. The abolition of government organisations such as the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) including the North West RDA has resulted in the removal of many structures that can provide a regional approach to economic development. Their replacement by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) is underway, but these have not yet been fully established and how they will function is as yet undecided. They are to be business led and business focused; however the LEPs have been awarded no central government funding and at the present time their ultimate role is uncertain and unclear.

The government strategy document ‘Skills for Sustainable Growth’ (BIS, 2010) included a variety of measures that will clearly impact in the area that LLNs have been working. The intention for collaborative working between FE, HE and business is very clearly stated in that:

‘We will also encourage higher and FE institutions to work together collaboratively, through self-organised networks, so that they can engage with their local enterprise partnership to ensure alignment between the economic development priorities and the skills provision available locally. This will include colleges consulting local enterprise partnerships, as well as other employer-led boards, local authorities and Jobcentre Plus, on their business plans and how public funding can be aligned so that it contributes to local economic and community demand. FE colleges and providers will play a major part in reaching out to a wider range of learners, supporting higher-level skills, qualifications, and better progression from FE to HE and employment’.

(BIS, 2010)

In addition, BIS indicates the intention to increase the number of apprenticeships by 75,000, giving a total of some 200,000 apprentices starting each year by 2014-2015. It also intends that many more of these apprentices will progress to Level 4 and beyond and stresses the need for employers to work closely with FE and HE particularly in the area of progression:

‘An Apprenticeship will also provide the foundation for further learning at higher levels including, but not exclusively, Level 4 Apprenticeships. Given the growing evidence that entry points for many careers are shifting upwards, we will ask Sector Skills Councils to ensure that Apprenticeship frameworks reflect these changing demands. They will need to work closely with employers, FE colleges, other providers, universities and professional associations to ensure that there are clear ladders of progression so employers and apprentices can more easily understand and access higher-level skills opportunities. This is likely to mean colleges, providers and universities offering more flexible provision to meet the needs of these learners.’

(BIS, 2010)
The independent review for government, ‘Securing a Sustainable Future for HE’, (The Browne Review), published in October 2010 recommends changes that will also impact on the work and legacy of the LLN. The fundamental changes to the funding of HEIs and FECs providing HE, in addition to changes in the way that students will be funded in future, means that HE provision will be much more customer driven and that providers will need to become much more responsive with respect to the type of curriculum they offer and the way in which it is delivered.

In consideration of the measures implied above, some of which are starting to come into effect at the present time, it is clear that the impacts achieved by the Lancashire LLN fall in line with many of the agenda requirements of the government. In building the partnership, the LLN has worked to ensure that FE and HE work collaboratively, both together and with business to ensure that curriculum provision is up-to-date and fit for purpose. Further, this has required changes ensuring a much more flexible approach to the way that the curriculum is delivered. Ensuring progression routes at local level for a wide range of vocational learners and apprentices also puts the achievements of the LLN clearly in line with the requirements of government.

In terms of these external factors which are impinging on the work of the LLN, various outcomes have come about. Certainly, individual partner institutions are having to respond to the changes in policy requirements, which may result in changes in their business plans. Government funding cuts which have already been applied across virtually all sectors of the UK economy are also starting to have an effect on the structure of some of the partners who are now evaluating their priorities.

In terms of the effects on the LLN itself, the outcomes have been varied. As noted, the LLN budget has not been affected and its funding streams have continued. Perhaps the major effect has been that the partners are uncertain in the present economic climate as to whether they can provide any future funding for the LLN resulting in the clear decision for its closure. Whether or not any aspects of the LLN framework can be continued even in a limited form is still a subject of debate, but it does mean that the LLN can make no further plans for the future.

Evidence collated during the course of the evaluation however, does indicate that the Lancashire LLN through its collaborative framework approach has strongly positioned its partner members to be able to respond to and address the requirements of the government’s present FE and HE strategy. The LLN’s work in developing collaborative working between FE and HE, IAG provision, curriculum development and flexible delivery of HE, engagement with employers and progression agreements and pathways in a vocational and work-based context including apprenticeships, clearly resonates with the government’s present requirements for the FE and HE sectors.

A sustainable future?

Part of the evaluation requirement has been to determine what might be sustained in relation to the work of the Lancashire LLN and how this might be achieved. The evidence collated shows that whilst endeavouring to achieve its original aims and objectives, the LLN although not having fully achieved all which it set out to do, does leave a considerable legacy which will carry forward when it closes in December 2011. The main features of this legacy are listed below.
The Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network Legacy

- Increased awareness of progression and aspiration-raising issues across the network amongst learners and key influencers.

- Identification of gaps in the curriculum and filling of them with (flexibly delivered) HE programmes, that employers want and that students can progress onto.

- The bringing together of practitioners who would not have met previously, allowing conversations to take place that simply would not have done so otherwise.

- Greatly increased networking amongst individuals across the partnership and the benefits accrued from this.

- Collaboration and co-operation between institutions. This has involved partners working together that would otherwise never have done so and in the realisation that they can work beneficially together rather than in competition.

- The understanding of the role that the Lancashire LLN has played as an ‘external reflective agency’ and an ‘honest and impartial broker’ in Lancashire. Equally the realisation that this role now needs to be provided by ‘someone else’.

- The recognition and removal of many progression barriers. The Lancashire LLN has enabled the partners to identify what and where the barriers are and helped them address those barriers in order to make progression routes more accessible, clear and transparent.

- The development of a comprehensive series of progression agreements and associated pathways covering all of the qualifications in vocational sectors across Lancashire that are now embedded within the Visaroute web-based IAG system.

- A greater understanding and awareness by students and staff in partner institutions of what HE has to offer vocational learners and how they can access it.

- A wide range of newly developed and refreshed curricula that provide for more flexible modes of learning, are fit for purpose and are responsive to the needs of employers.

- 400 ASNs now embedded in HE provider institutions across Lancashire which will continue for the foreseeable future.

- The sharing of good (and bad) practices across partner institutions in all areas of the LLNs work.

- Improvement in employer engagement practices and opportunities.

Will the legacy be sustained?

As part of the evaluation process, members of the LLN at all levels from practitioner through to Strategic Board member were asked what they would like to see remain after the LLN closure, that is, ‘what would they like the legacy of the LLN to be?’
The responses focused around the areas listed above, with this wide series of benefits derived from the LLN during its tenure clearly seen by the partnership members as something they would wish to retain. The attendant problem here however, is that once the LLN ceases so does the associated HEFCE funding and any further developments in relation to this legacy thereafter will have to be funded through some other source.

Whether or not this legacy can, or will be sustained after the closure of the LLN in December 2011, will depend entirely on the partner organisations themselves. They have clearly benefitted during the last 3 years from the central HEFCE funding sources that have been provided to them via the Lancashire LLN and they will continue to benefit from the outcomes of that legacy.

The Strategic Board at its meeting in June 2011 indicated clearly that the LLN would be closed at the end of December 2011 in line with the date agreed with HEFCE and that it saw little opportunity for funding from either the partner institutions or elsewhere. The Board however, did discuss various ways in which the ideas, relationships and good practices achieved by the LLN could be carried forward into the future. This included the possibility of passing responsibility for parts of the LLN framework on to other organisations, continuing with networks via use of the internet with the support of the JISC NW Regional Support Group, the development of communities of practice, or the setting up of a charitable trust to maintain the legacy of the LLN. This last suggestion, the setting up a charitable trust has some merit but would nevertheless still require some financial input from the partner institutions who wish to maintain such a trust. The alternative is that post-LLN the partners continue to use other existing partnership groupings of which they are a part, such as, the UCLan Partnership to keep the spirit of the LLN alive. This may or may not be possible as the LLN was set up with a specific set of aims and objectives in mind which may not concur with the aims and intentions of other partnership groupings. Also, many of the present partner organisations may not be part of the UCLAN Partnership; other HEIs in particular have their own partnership arrangements and fragmentation may well arise as a result.

Recommendations for a sustainable future for the achievements and impacts of the Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network

The Lancashire LLN has achieved considerable success during its tenure and leaves behind it a highly positive legacy of ideas, practices, processes, engagement and enthusiasm, which if continued, will be highly beneficial to the partner institutions and their learners. In consideration of this legacy and how the present outcomes and achievements of the Lancashire LLN can be sustainably carried forward, the following recommendations are proposed.

It is recommended that:

1. The LWBLEF Board be asked to act as a repository for all of the Apprentices Project materials and promote them as necessary to interested parties, including both public and private training organisations.

2. The Apprentices Project materials continue to be used by work-based learning students through the network of FECs who are members of the Lancashire LLN Partnership and any PTPs who wish to take advantage of them.
3. The partner institutions **consolidate** the post of progression champion within their institution and make it an **established** appointment on either a full-time or part-time basis, to allow for meaningful interaction both within their institution and across the former LLN partners.

4. The Visaroute system continues as a viable web-based IAG tool, initially in the trust of Blackburn College.

   This is dependent on:

   - **CPD being cascaded prior to the ending of the LLN for progression champions, admissions tutors and IAG specialists who will use it.**
   - **Ensuring that Visaroute defines provision of a linked progression route for all Level 3 courses listed.**

5. A series of free digital applications (‘APPS’) are developed prior to the end of the Lancashire LLN for students to easily access Visaroute and its related IAG, plus other progression websites such as STEMNET, UCAS and Lancashire Interactive.

6. Each partner sets up a Curriculum Development Award type fund, to provide proper ‘buy out’ time and opportunity for tutors to develop new or refreshed HE curriculum.

7. A Lancashire **STRATEGIC BOARD of HEIs** be established comprising the 4 HEIs in Lancashire. This group, to build on the benefits of collaboration that have clearly developed during the tenure of the Lancashire LLN and to provide a pathfinder lead in support of the economic generation of the region:

   ‘To provide a Grand Regional Vision for HE in Lancashire’.

   a. **NOTE 1:** It might be that this Strategic Board would also include the very large, directly HEFCE Funded FECs.

   b. **NOTE 2:** The Strategic Board would draw its membership from the Senior Management Teams of each institution.

8. On-line Communities of Practice are established using the Services of JISC NW Regional Support Centre in the areas of, for example:

   - Progression champions
   - Employer engagement champions
   - Preparation for HE tutors
   - Others groups as required
9. The establishment of a post-Lancashire LLN ‘rump’ organisation with Charitable Trust/Social Enterprise status be considered, that would act as a conduit and repository for all of the Lancashire LLN documentation and its remaining work. This ‘rump’ could be funded by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) with the aim of leveraging funding to support its members in their work on vocational progression across the region and their contribution to the provision of the future higher-level skills requirements of the Lancashire economy. It would also continue to function as a ‘professional reflective friend’ and an ‘honest broker’.

The rump organisation could take one of three suggested forms:

a. **Version 1**: A non-employing Trust acting only as a repository for Lancashire LLN materials and hosting, for example, any on-line Communities of Practice. This would require limited input from a nominated partner e.g. UCLAN who would maintain the Trust as a functioning web repository.

b. **Version 2**: An employing Trust which would act as a repository for all Lancashire LLN materials, host on-line Communities of Practice, be an honest broker and a knowledge exchange, providing these services to those partner organisations who subscribe to it. It would be concerned particularly with progression, employer engagement and responsive curriculum engagement, for example, advising on and developing bespoke HE programmes in partnership with employers/employer organisations. It would also employ a small number of specialists such as:

   - A progression consultant - working to assure improved progression across the partnership
   - An employer engagement consultant - working to assure improved employer engagement across the partnership
   - An LMI specialist - to work with partners in improving programme development strategies across the partnership based on real-time LMI
   - A specialist fund-raising consultant

   (In this model the most important priorities are identified with these specific areas of work being focused upon. This is similar to the post-West Yorkshire LLN model).

c. **Version 3**: A re-purposed rump. The Trust could follow the post-Higher York LLN model, building on the collaborative benefits developed during the tenure of the LLN. This model requires the work of the rump organisation to be completely re-purposed and made relevant to the changing requirements of the participating partners. However, the organisation builds on and utilises the existing partnership relationships, trust and common purpose that exist as a result of the work of the present LLN.

10. The *Train the Trainer - Preparation for HE* module to be validated by a local HEI so as to provide local ownership of the programme and making it more readily available across the present partnership to those partners who wish to deliver it.

11. All progression champions undertake training on the updated Visaroute system and cascade its use to relevant staff in their organisations prior to the end of the Lancashire LLN.
12. The sector consultants develop and deliver a range of employer engagement CPD workshops/master-classes outlining good practice for partner institutions prior to the end of the LLN. These to include input from employers themselves.

13. The Senior Management Teams in the partner Institutions consider what commitments they will make in terms of practices and activities as a result of the outcomes of the Commitment to Sustainability Event held by the LLN Forum in October 2011.

**Summary**

The political and economic environment in which the Lancashire LLN finds itself as the organisation draws to a close, is very different to that in which it was conceived. The LLN leaves behind it however, a legacy which provides for the partner institutions to be in a very strong position to take advantage of the new educational landscape in which they find themselves. This section has outlined the main features of that legacy and indicated by use of a series of recommendations for a sustainable future, how these positive aspects might be carried forward following closure of the LLN. If the recommendations are acted upon, substantial benefits will accrue, both to the organisations involved and their vocational learners.
14. Conclusion - Winning Hearts and Minds

The Lancashire LLN set out to make changes within the FE and HE sectors across the region in relation to progression for vocational learners. In doing so, it would have in its arsenal, funding streams and ASN numbers that it could use as considered appropriate by the relevant committees and practitioner groups to provide services across the partnership. The funding mechanisms from HEFCE allowed for a flexible approach; within limits LLNs were able to change and respond as priorities and activities changed or progressed. The outcomes however, were never guaranteed and it was necessary for the LLN to bring both institutions and individuals ‘on board’ in order to ensure that its aims and objectives were fulfilled. In this respect then, it might well need to change peoples’ hearts and minds in order to ensure success, rather than just take a mechanistic approach to achievement. Clearly, to what extent the Lancashire LLN did actually ‘win over hearts and minds’ has been dependent on the leadership and direction provided by the Central Team and the progression champions and the commitment accorded by the partner institutions.

The evidence collated shows that the LLN went a long way towards achieving this ‘hearts and minds’ goal. Certainly it encompassed a very wide range of people across Lancashire, influencing their thinking about the central issue of progression to HE for vocational learners and brought about the realisation that there was opportunity here for development. It is the case that many of the LLN’s agendas were already being considered in some way by the partner institutions as changing government policy drivers were starting to make them think about these issues. As has been noted however, the LLN through its funding and support mechanisms was able to provide the impetus and direction to drive through many of the positive changes that have been made. In doing so the LLN clearly influenced the thinking of both management and practitioners in the partner institutions resulting in their bringing about the changes to the way they thought about their provision and its delivery. Certainly the LLN could never break down barriers to HE progression by itself, but by drawing together the strands of IAG, progression agreements and pathways, employer engagement and new approaches to a re-focused curriculum in a planned, strategic and funded way, it clearly challenged the partner organisations to think about the issues from a different perspective, both within their own structures and in relation to the other partners.

As has been noted, the early days of the LLN saw a period of uncertainty on the part of many of the partners in working closely with each other, but these fears were quickly dispelled as they realised the benefits that could accrue from a collaborative approach and one which would ultimately benefit their learners. This major shift in the collaborative thinking of the partner organisations has clearly engendered a major cultural change across the educational landscape of Lancashire.

The evaluation has evidenced that the thinking of the learners has changed too. The interventions put in place across the network have allowed far more learners to become aware of and understand the HE opportunities that are available to them as vocational learners and made them aspire to progress onto HE. Many of them have grasped the opportunities provided through the ASNs and CDA developments and will continue to do so in the future. This is in no small measure attributed to the staff within the partner institutions who have truly understood and embraced the changes brought about by the Lancashire LLN that are clearly of benefit to their learners.
References


Appendices
### APPENDIX A

**Terms and Acronyms used in the Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHL</td>
<td>Aimhigher Lancashire</td>
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<tr>
<td>APEL</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning</td>
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<td>ASN</td>
<td>Additional Student Number</td>
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<td>CDA</td>
<td>Curriculum Development Award</td>
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<td>CEIAG</td>
<td>Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuing Professional Development</td>
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<td>FD</td>
<td>Foundation Degree</td>
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<td>FEC</td>
<td>FE College</td>
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<td>FTE</td>
<td>Full-Time Equivalent</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEEL</td>
<td>Higher Education in East Lancashire</td>
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<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council for England</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<td>HNC</td>
<td>Higher National Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAG</td>
<td>Information, Advice and Guidance</td>
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<td>JISC</td>
<td>Joint Information Systems Committee</td>
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<td>JISC/MEG</td>
<td>JISC Mixed Economy Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lancashire LLN</td>
<td>Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network</td>
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<td>LEP</td>
<td>Local Enterprise Partnership</td>
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<td>LLN</td>
<td>Lifelong Learning Network</td>
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<td>LMI</td>
<td>Labour Market Information</td>
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<td>LSIS</td>
<td>Learning and Skills Improvement Service</td>
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<td>LWBLEF</td>
<td>Lancashire Work-Based Learning Executive Forum</td>
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<td>NAS</td>
<td>National Apprenticeship Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
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<td>NWHLSP</td>
<td>North West Higher Level Skills Partnership</td>
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<td>NWUA</td>
<td>North West Universities Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTP</td>
<td>Private Training Provider</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDA</td>
<td>Regional Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFA</td>
<td>Skills Funding Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIV</td>
<td>Strategically Important or Vulnerable Subjects</td>
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<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Small or Medium-sized Enterprise</td>
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<td>SMT</td>
<td>Senior Management Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSC</td>
<td>Sector Skills Council</td>
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<td>STEM</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCLan</td>
<td>University of Central Lancashire</td>
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<tr>
<td>UVAC</td>
<td>University Vocational Awards Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBL</td>
<td>Work-Based Learning</td>
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<td>VLE</td>
<td>Virtual Learning Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accountable Body</strong></td>
<td>The legal entity nominated to act on behalf of the partnership in taking responsibility for the receipt and use of a HEFCE grant.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advanced Apprentice</strong></td>
<td>An apprentice on a programme of training leading towards work-based learning qualifications at NVQ Level 3, Key Skills and, in most cases, a relevant knowledge-based certificate such as a BTEC (NAS 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher Level Learning</strong></td>
<td>Learning and qualifications at Level 4 and above of the HE Qualifications Framework as defined by QAA, or Level 4 on the QCF. Higher-level learning may be delivered by a variety of recognised learning providers including universities, colleges, professional bodies, employers and private training providers (Carter, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partner Training Provider</strong></td>
<td>Partner organisations of AHL and/or Lancashire LLN who deliver programmes of training to Advanced Apprentices.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Progression</strong></td>
<td>The term progression is used to denote advancement to any programme of accredited higher learning that meets the needs of individuals and/or their employers – to small programmes and short awards as well as ‘full’ HE qualifications or to ‘non-prescribed’ higher learning achievements such as professional qualifications (Carter, 2009).</td>
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</table>
Appendix B

The Lancashire LLN stakeholders

The Lancashire LLN stakeholders include:

Aimhigher Lancashire
Blackburn with Darwen Council
Blackpool Council
Business Link North West
Business Skills North West
Chambers of Commerce
  - North and Western Lancashire
  - East Lancashire
CXL/Connexions covering the three Unitary Authorities (Now VIA)
Cogent SSC
Construction Skills SSC
Foundation Degree Forward
NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder
Lancashire County Council
Lancashire Economic Partnership
Learning and Skills Council, Lancashire and North West
Lancashire Work-Based Learning Executive Forum (LWBLEF)
Manufacturing Institute
North West Development Agency
North West Universities Association
Open College of the North West (OCNW)
Sector Skills Councils for the five priority sectors
Appendix C

The Evaluation Process

The evaluation process included face to face interviews or small focus group interviews with the following:

8 members of the LLN Central Team comprising

- The Director
- Three Education Consultants
- Three Employer Consultants
- The PA to the Director and Team Administrator

24 Members of the LLN Executive Group including:

17 Progression Champions comprising:

- 12 representing FE Colleges
- 4 representing HEIs
- 1 representing the LWBLEF

7 ‘other’ members of the Executive group including the Chair

- 7 Members of the LLN Strategic Board including the Chair
- 2 Members of the LLN Marketing Group
- 4 External Consultants (including 2 from CXL, now Via)

12 other individual practitioners or external stakeholders were interviewed by telephone.

In addition as part of the Apprentices Project Update a further 16 interviews were conducted using a mixture of face-to-face interviews, telephone interview and/or email questionnaire involving the following organisations:

6 FECs
3 HEIs
4 Private Training Providers
Aim Higher Lancashire
Lancashire LLN
LWBLEF
JISC

In addition, interviews were also conducted with one CPD tutor and a group of 7 students undertaking the CPD programme.
Meetings with staff and students

In total some 70 individuals were included in the evaluation of the Lancashire LLN from 23 partner or stakeholder organisations. A written submission was provided by the Open University which had originally been a partner but is no longer involved directly with the LLN and consequently no-one was available for interview.

It is considered that this number of in-depth interviews, small focus groups, telephone interviews and email questionnaires from these main organisations involved has provided sufficient evidence from which to draw judgements and conclusions and make recommendations in respect of this evaluation.

Feedback sessions and submission

An interim feedback session to the Lancashire LLN Executive Committee was delivered in late September in order to test interim findings and receive initial feedback. This was followed by a workshop on ideas related to sustainability one week later to the LLN Forum. The final report document was submitted to the Lancashire LLN Director on 17th November, 2011.

Documentation and materials

The evaluator worked closely with the Lancashire LLN Directorate to identify and assimilate documents pertinent to the operation and impact of a range of activities and interventions.

Document analysis was used to gain general background information about the approach taken by the Lancashire LLN, to understand the context and ways in which the partners were working and co-operating, and to gauge the impact of LLN strategies across the partnership particularly in respect of future sustainability. This analysis was also used to inform the development of questionnaires, interview styles and interview schedules.

Interviews were all recorded in note form by the evaluator, usually digitally recorded and later transcribed, although some interviews were recorded in note form only due to the wishes of the interviewees. These transcriptions and notes were used to generate a framework of emerging themes, with various new themes emerging over the lifetime of the evaluation. The resulting themes were cross-checked against the original document analysis. Where quotations are used in this report to illustrate or justify key findings, they have been carefully selected to reflect a dominant or clearly emerging view. This may either be about perceptions or a clearly defined understanding of specific facts or issues. Individual respondents have not been identified in this report (except in relation to the case studies); instead only respondent types are noted in order to protect individual or cohort identities. All interview and other material submitted has undergone analysis in line with the process outlined below and the results of this have fed into the broader analysis of interviews and other assimilated material and into the report’s recommendations.

A series of questionnaires was developed in order to gain insights into particular LLN activities for staff or students that have occurred.

This interview and questionnaire evidence was analysed with respect to each of the emerging themes, within a framework of the wider contextual knowledge by the evaluator of the Lancashire LLN, the national LLN framework and the English HE sector in general. This analysis was linked back to the key questions posed in the initial Project Proposal of Work for Evaluation, in order to provide appropriate answers and solutions.
Finally, a set of recommendations has been proposed as a result of the analysis, in order to support the Lancashire LLN in developing strategies that will allow for the sustainable continuation of a range of supportive activities that will benefit and encourage those who wish to follow a progression route onto HE at Level 4 and/or above.

**Choice of interviewees/meeting cohorts**

The choice of individuals and groups to be interviewed was dependent on a variety of factors but was primarily determined in conjunction with the LLN Directorate. Interviews took a variety of forms including group meetings in formal settings, focus groups, individual interviews and group interviews. All meetings were carried out by the evaluator to promote consistency, conducted face-to-face and based on a semi-structured interview schedule informed by the evaluation project’s requirements and the consultant’s previous experience. Use of face-to-face interviews was the preferred method of eliciting information as these allow for the development of a positive relationship between the parties and the use of visual and non-verbal cues as an important part of the interview process.
Appendix D

Individual Roles and Responsibilities

Director of the LLN

Duties and Areas of Responsibility

- Overall leadership and management of the LLN
  Directing the work of the employer and educational consultants
- Ensuring that the work of the area groups is effectively co-ordinated and that all progression agreements are articulated at both the area and pan-Lancashire levels; this will involve meeting with and acting as a broker between other sub-regional LLNs and institutions and leading the discussions to ensure they reach clear agreements
- Supervision of other staff, and associated appraisal and staff development
- Production of reports to the Strategic Board
- Financial management of the project
- Quality assurance and reputation building
- Liaison with other LLN Directors, regionally and nationally
- Respond to requests for information from HEFCE
- Co-ordination and training of progression champions

PA to the Director and Team Administrator

Duties and Areas of Responsibility

- Overall responsibility for the setting up, maintenance and running of the LLN administrative procedures
- Overall responsibility for the setting up, maintenance and running of the LLN financial procedures
- Undertake PA duties to the Director
- Support duties to the members of the Central Team
- Liaison and contact for all partners including the progression champions, financial departments and other contacts
- Dealing with enquiries when the Director and/or consultants are not in the office
- Preparation of reports as requested for the Director
- Producing minutes of LLN meetings
**Sector Consultants**

**Duties and Areas of Responsibility**

- Liaise with the relevant Sector Skills Council and other relevant regional, county and local sector and employment bodies
- Work with the existing employer links of the partner FECs and HEIs and foster new links
- Identify and articulate the needs of employers to the partners and translate the needs into course and curriculum requirements - working with the educational consultants
- Help to encourage employers to engage in work-based learning, support learning and assessment on Foundation Degrees, and to promote the progression of vocational learners
- Help to explore new ways of delivering HE to those at work in the relevant sector and how they can progress into and through HE
- To support the work of the Area Groups, in liaison with the educational consultants
- To produce reports and documentation as required
- Such other related duties as identified by the Director of the LLN.

**Education Consultants**

**Duties and Areas of Responsibility**

- Chair and lead one of the Area Groups
- Provide detailed support to the Area Groups for the collection and dissemination of data and information, and especially the mapping and progression opportunities.
- Guide the development of courses and curriculum – working with the sector consultants
- Guide and support the work of the progression champions in the FECs and HEIs linked to the relevant Area Group
- Work with the other educational consultants to ensure consistency of provision across the LLN and especially the county-wide development of progression agreements
- Consult and involve the wider stakeholders of the LLN
- Liaise with other LLNs to identify good practice relevant to the needs of the Lancashire LLN
- Produce reports and documentation as required
- Represent and act for the Director of the LLN when required
- Such other related duties as identified by the Director of the LLN.

**Progression Champions**

**Duties and Areas of Responsibility**

- To provide effective two-way communication, information and support between the LLN and their home FEC or HEI
- To lead and engage in course developments, preparation of documents and agreements, and other educational matters relating to the needs of the LLN at their home FEC or HEI
- To be the main representatives of their institutions on the Area Groups and to seek collaborative solutions to challenges, prioritising the needs of the learners
- To work under the guidance of the Director of the Lancashire LLN and to co-operate with the work of the employer and educational consultants
- To produce reports, as and when required by the Strategy and Executive Group
- Work actively, and in a supportive way, with all the external stakeholders of the LLN