

Higher Education for Active Leisure Sector Professionals

A guide to developing work-based progression routes to higher education for Advanced Apprentices and other experienced Active Leisure sector staff and managers

Produced by the University Vocational Awards Council
Written by Adrian Anderson and David Hemsworth

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Contents

Foreword	3	6. Delivering HE programmes to work-based learners	16
Summary	4	Delivery modes	16
1. Introduction	5	• Duration, attendance and timetabling	16
Tapping new potential	5	• Work-based learning	16
Background	5	• Distance learning	16
Progression compacts	6	Learning agreements	16
About the guide	6	Learner support	17
About UVAC	6	• The needs of work-based learners	17
Acknowledgements	6	• Providing study support	17
Scope and limitations	6	• Tutorial support	17
		• The role of mentors	18
2. The sector case for work-based progression to HE	7	• Supporting distance learning	18
		Assessment	18
3. Target learners	8	• Enabling work-based learners to achieve	18
Advanced Apprenticeship	8	• Assessment arrangements	19
• Job roles	8	• NOS and NVQs	19
• Technical certificates and NVQs	9	• AP(E)L	19
Other work-based learners	9	7. Funding HE programmes aimed at work-based learners	20
4. Developing HE programmes for work-based learners	10	8. Case studies	21
Progression models	10	1. Foundation Degree in Health-related Exercise and Fitness, Leeds Metropolitan University	21
Curriculum design and content	10	2. Foundation Degree in Sport and Leisure Management, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College	25
• Technical and management skills	10	3. A professional association perspective – Professional Golfers' Association	27
• Structure	10	Information sources	29
• Incorporating National Occupational Standards	11	Bibliography	30
• Bridging/study skills	11	UVAC Publications	31
• Progression to Honours and continuing professional development	11		
Meeting the needs of employment	12		
• Understanding sector skills	12		
• Understanding the regional and local employment market	12		
• Engaging employers in development	13		
5. Recruiting work-based learners onto HE programmes	14		
Marketing	14		
• A dual market	14		
• Promoting to Apprentices and other employees	14		
• Promotion to employers	14		
• Key promotional messages	15		
Application and admission procedures	15		

Foreword

This is one of a series of guides we are publishing simultaneously on Apprenticeship progression to higher education, sponsored by the Learning and Skills Council. There are two other sector-specific guides for those involved in provision for the IT and Hairdressing and Beauty industries, complemented by an overarching generic guide applicable to all disciplines.

The fact that we have been able to develop a guide specifically relating to progression in Active Leisure is an indication of the existence of a body of very good practice in the sector. This guide is based largely on the achievements of the LSC-sponsored progression 'compacts' relating to Active Leisure. The institutions, employers, the Sector Skills Council SkillsActive and other partners involved are to be congratulated on their innovation, enthusiasm and hard work to develop the work-based route to HE.

Opening up higher education to Apprentices is important. Enabling such progression will provide new learning and career opportunities for vocational learners at level 3. It will help to deliver the higher level knowledge and vocational skills employers increasingly require in our advanced, post-industrial economy. It will enrich and expand significantly the market for higher education in Britain. Indeed, it will be very difficult to achieve the 50 per cent participation target and attendant objectives to make higher education accessible to all who can benefit from it if we fail to unblock the work-based route. Apprentices and other work-based learners are an important and growing group of potential HE learners.

For some time the government and its advisors have been advocating progression from Advanced Apprenticeship to higher education, particularly via Foundation Degrees. UVAC, as a higher education representative body championing vocational learning through its membership of over 100 higher education institutions, further education colleges and corporate bodies, fully supports this policy.

To date, however, numbers of Apprentices enrolling on HE programmes appear to have been tiny. Our own newly-published research – a companion volume to the guides, detailed below – calls for better progression data and highlights the barriers that are blocking the work-based route to HE.

Excellent examples of good practice nevertheless exist. Detailed case studies from the IT progression compacts form the backbone of this guide, which is aimed at all those involved in the development and delivery of HE programmes for Apprentices and other work-based learners – institutions, employers and other bodies supporting work-based learning. Dissemination of this experience will ease the way for others in this challenging but critically important area of work.

We are very grateful to the Learning and Skills Council for funding this and related projects on Apprenticeship progression carried out by UVAC in 2005. All the guides are available as downloads on our website, www.uvac.ac.uk, with the generic and this Active Leisure guide also available in print – the latter available from SkillsActive, who have kindly funded the printing of the guide. In addition, as mentioned, we are publishing in both hard and soft copy *An Analysis of the Progression of Advanced Apprentices to Higher Education in England*. Together we believe these publications will make an important contribution to the work-based progression agenda, to the benefit of individuals, institutions, employers and the wider national interest.



Professor Simon Roodhouse
Chief Executive
University Vocational Awards Council

Summary

Introduction

This section sets the guide in context by explaining the rationale and policy background, and introduces the progression hubs on which the guide is largely based. It explains the role of UVAC, who produced the guide, acknowledges the sources and defines the guide's scope.

The sector case for work-based progression to HE

This section explains how partnerships can articulate the case for work-based progression to HE by:

- consulting the skills research and analysis published by the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive
- drawing on other evidence, including the case studies in this guide.

Target learners

This section explains the range of training, qualifications and experience the target group brings to higher education. It provides a guide to:

- Advanced Apprenticeship frameworks in the sector
- technical certificates within Advanced Apprenticeships
- NVQs, particularly at level 3
- the job roles of target learners.

Developing HE programmes for work-based learners

This section provides detailed information and guidance on programme development based on experience in the sector to date. It provides:

- models of work-based progression to higher education
- guidance on curriculum design and content, including structure, the use of National Occupational Standards and the provision of bridging support
- guidance on how ensure provision is fit for purpose, including how to engage employers in the process.

Recruiting work-based learners onto HE programmes

This section:

- identifies the target audiences for the marketing and promotion of progression programmes
- examines admissions procedures
- provides examples of marketing and promotional methods
- sets out key messages to underpin publicity, tailored to each audience.

Delivering HE programmes to work-based learners

This section highlights the central role of the workplace in delivering and assessing progression programmes. It provides guidance on:

- programme duration and attendance modes
- learning agreements
- the support work-based learners are likely to need, including study skills support, tutorial support and workplace mentors
- methods of assessment, including the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)
- application and admission procedures.

Funding HE programmes aimed at work-based learners

This section provides guidance on the plurality of funding available to support Apprenticeship. In addition to HEFCE, potential funding sources include the LSC, the European Social Fund and, not least, employers.

Case studies

This section contains detailed examples of progression programmes. There are three detailed case studies:

- Progression to Foundation Degree in Health-related Exercise and Fitness, Leeds Metropolitan University
- Progression to Foundation Degree in Sport and Leisure Management, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College
- A professional association perspective from the Professional Golfers' Association.

1. Introduction

Tapping new potential

This guide has been produced by the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It aims to enable higher education institutions (HEIs), further education colleges (FECs), training providers, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), employers, industry bodies, public agencies and partnerships to learn from the experience of others in opening up work-based progression routes to higher education (HE).

The guide's focus is on the progression of Advanced Apprentices and other employees with level 3 vocational qualifications and experience. As the demand for higher level skills relentlessly grows, these employees, whose numbers are increasing year on year through the drive to increase the volume and quality of Apprenticeships, represent a new market for HE.

Currently the market is largely untapped. Yet the potential benefits of opening up progression routes to HE for these work-based learners are considerable:

- **Employers** can gain – and, crucially, retain a lot better – the high level skills they need to survive and grow, at relatively low cost and with minimum disruption to the business. Because of the focus on flexible, work-based learning, projects carried out during the course are designed with close employer involvement so that they directly benefit the organisation.
- **Apprentices and other employees** can realise their potential by 'learning and earning' their way to career progression and personal development through higher education that been inaccessible to them in the past.
- **For universities and other HE providers** these new work-based progression routes not only provide doorways to widening HE participation to non-traditional HE learners; they also provide ways of engaging employers in higher education, enabling HE to tap into the potentially huge – and again largely untapped – market for workforce development currently dominated by private training courses.

Drawing on a range of good practice examples, this guide aims to show how these benefits can be realised.

Background

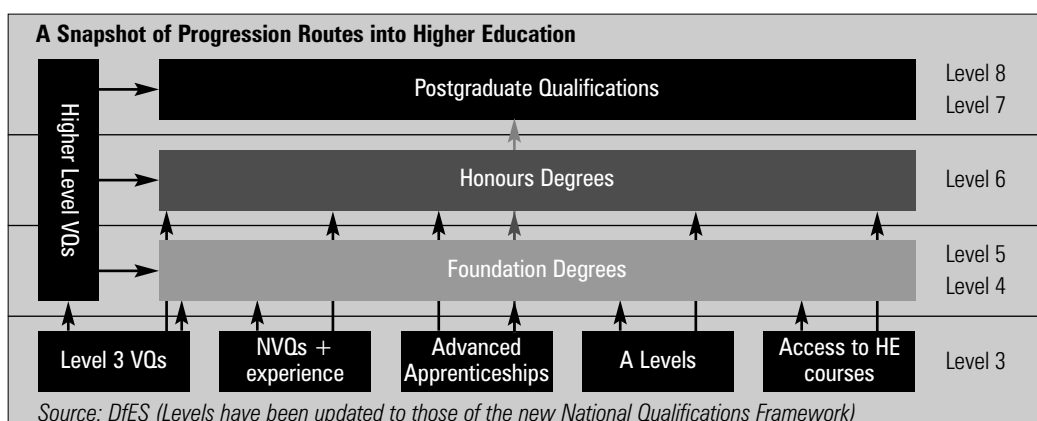
In the late 1990s the National Skills Task Force highlighted the growing need for intermediate technician and associate professional skills, fuelled by the 'knowledge economy'. The new millennium saw the launch of flexible, vocational Foundation Degrees (FDs) to meet this need, provide a ladder to further learning, including Honours Degrees, and make higher education more accessible to under-represented groups. In its Foundation Degree Prospectus the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) identified Advanced Apprentices as a key target group for the new qualification.

The potential of apprentice progression to higher education (HE), was reinforced in *The Way to Work*, the report of the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee chaired by Sir John Cassels in 2001. The report's recommendations included the incorporation of level 3 technical certificates in all Advanced Apprenticeship frameworks – a measure subsequently implemented as a mandatory component of Apprenticeships from 2004.

"Technical certificates offer the prospect both of significantly upgrading apprenticeships and of forming a basis for able apprentices to progress to higher education."

The Way to Work. Report of the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, DfES 2004

Increasingly linked national agendas for skills and higher education emerging from reviews and government White Papers in recent years further support the case for Apprenticeship progression. The Higher Education White Paper of 2003, *The Future of Higher Education*, was an important milestone in taking forward policies for increasing and widening participation in HE. The of 50 per cent participation target of 18 to 30-year-olds by 2010 would be achieved mainly through the expansion of Foundation Degrees. Working with employers and Sector Skills Councils, links between further and higher education would be strengthened, creating better pathways for progression and a sharper focus on employability skills. The White Paper also encouraged the development of more flexible HE provision to meet the needs of a more diverse student body, with more support for those doing part-time degrees.



The Skills Strategy White Papers of 2003 and 2005¹, meanwhile, put forward a national skills strategy to address the deficit of vocational skills by putting employer needs centre-stage. Apprenticeships would be significantly expanded and developed. Sector skills agreements developed by the new employer-led Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) would have powerful leverage over the funding of learning through Regional Skills Partnerships which would include HE providers. Equally importantly, HE would be partners in a new network of sector-based Skills Academies which would lead the drive to improve vocational education and training. Inextricably linked to these developments is the 14 to 19 agenda. The 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper of 2005 announced the establishment of new specialist Diplomas in 14 vocational areas to enhance the standing of vocational learning and qualifications. Crucially, Apprenticeships would be brought into the Diploma framework. This would be aided by the unitised national Framework for Achievement being developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to support credit accumulation and progression through to HE.

Progression compacts

In taking forward the drive on Apprenticeships the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is working with a range of partners including HEFCE, SSCs, Aimhigher and the new Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs)² to promote vocational progression to HE. With Sector Skills Councils and other sector bodies the LSC established a range of sector-based compacts or 'hubs' in 2003 to develop Apprenticeship progression routes. One hub is focusing on sport, recreation, health and fitness within the 'Active Leisure' sector, led by the SSC, SkillsActive. The other sectors are Administration, Automotive, Early Years, Engineering, Hairdressing and Beauty, and Information Technology.

"Active Leisure" in this guide refers to the sport, recreation, health and fitness industries within the Active Leisure sector.

This sector guide and three companion guides (two sector-based – Information Technology and Hairdressing and Beauty – the other a generic guide for all sectors) are based largely on the experience of the progression hubs.

About the guide

The case studies in this guide are drawn from the Active Leisure sector progression hubs funded by the LSC and led by the SSC, SkillsActive. Publications and correspondence with other bodies, particularly Aimhigher and Action for Access³, have also informed the development of the guidance offered.

The examples cited show ways that Apprentices and other employees with level 3 vocational qualifications and experience can progress and achieve through higher education, particularly Foundation Degrees. The binding theme of all the progression programmes is the application of learning to the workplace. The programmes are thus tools for workforce development, with employers as key partners, as they are with Apprenticeships.

Herein lies the opportunity – and challenge – for higher education, which has traditionally been a contract between learner and institution. Significant parts of this guide focus on the engagement of employers as partners in the development and delivery of these programmes, and on the key messages and methods that have effective in 'selling' the concept to employers. As one course leader put it: "We are a business, selling a product. To lock ourselves away in our institutions and expect people to come to us just doesn't work. We need to go out and be part of the commercial world."

About UVAC

The University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) was established in 1999 to champion and influence the development of higher vocational learning. The Council is a membership organisation made up largely of HEIs and FECs. Its objectives and work are supported by corporate members who include the LSC, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), UCAS, employers and Sector Skills Councils. It also works closely with strategic awarding body partners.

UVAC's mission is to champion vocational learning. It does this by advocating, lobbying and representing the interests of its members and by providing practical support through products and services. These services include conferences, good practice guides, a research programme on topics such as the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) and vocational progression; and a range of accreditation services covering Foundation Degrees, professional development programmes and initiatives to support progression from apprenticeship and vocational qualifications to higher education. UVAC publications relevant to this guide (on apprenticeship, APEL and the use of National Occupational Standards in HE – many produced with support from the LSC) are listed in the Bibliography.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the time generously given by people interviewed in gathering material for this guide – the staff of SkillsActive, higher education institutions (HEIs), further education colleges (FECs), training providers, employers and a professional association (the PGA). They not only provided a wealth of information and advice on how progression can work (without shirking the issues), but also kindly commented on the draft material. This guide would not have been possible without their help.

We are also grateful the chief executive and staff of UVAC for their comments and assistance.

Scope and limitations

This booklet provides guidance; it does not provide detailed operating procedures. While every effort has been made to ensure that the information and advice given are based on sound research, good practice and expertise in the fields covered, it is the responsibility of institutions and partnerships developing vocational progression routes to ensure that practice conforms to the relevant regulations, codes of practice, validation requirements and operating procedures. The authors cannot accept responsibility for any inaccuracies, or for any failure of provision related to the content of this guide.

¹ *21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential*, 2003, and *Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work*, 2005.

² Aimhigher is the national campaign supported by DfES and HEFCE to widen participation in HE. LLNs, announced in late 2004, are HEFCE-supported partnerships "to make a step change in vocational progression." See www.aimhigher.ac.uk and www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/ln for details

³ The national co-ordination team appointed by HEFCE and the LSC to support their widening participation strategies for England. For details see www.actiononaccess.org.

2. The sector case for work-based progression to HE

Demand for work-based higher education opportunities in the Active Leisure sector is being fuelled by skills gaps and shortages at management and professional levels, evidenced by labour market research conducted by the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive.

SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the 'Active Leisure' sector, which covers sport and recreation, health and fitness, playwork, the outdoors and the caravan Industries. SSCs – collectively known as Skills for Business – are employer-led bodies licensed by government to tackle the skills and productivity needs of their respective sectors throughout the UK. The role of SkillsActive is described further on page 12.

According to the National Employer Skills Survey analysed for SkillsActive in 2004⁴:

- 26 per cent of Active Leisure sector occupations across England were at professional, associate professional and management levels
- 28 cent of vacancies at these levels were hard to fill
- 45 per cent of hard-to-fill vacancies at these levels were because of a shortage of applicants with the required skills
- 32 per cent of employers reported gaps in the management skills of existing staff.

The main impact of skills gaps on Active Leisure sector organisations was:

- difficulties meeting required quality standards
- difficulties introducing new working practices
- difficulties meeting customer service objectives
- increased operating costs
- delays developing new products or services.

Barriers to staff training and development to fill skills gaps included:

- lack of time
- lack of cover
- lack of funding
- lack of suitable courses in the area.

Across the board the survey found that the Active Leisure sector has more difficulty recruiting people with appropriate qualifications than any other sector. Providing appropriate and accessible higher education opportunities for staff is a priority in raising the quality of the workforce.

"This fast-moving industry, despite increasing professionalism, is still often in 'fire-fighting' mode. We see a huge demand for higher education."

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

Against the background of continued developments in the professional golfing industry, the Professional Golfers' Association was keen to upgrade its diploma for aspiring professionals. The progression hub offered the opportunity to raise the level and status of the qualification from level 3/4 to a recognised level 5 higher education qualification in the form of a Foundation Degree. It also provided the opportunity for the PGA to work with the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive, and others on the development of a new Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence which would meet the entry requirements of the new Foundation Degree.

The wider case for progression through benefits to employers and learners is developed in the section on promoting progression programmes (page 14).

⁴ Available at www.skillsactive.com/abouttheindustry/research

3. Target learners

HE programmes designed as tools to develop the sector's workforce have a potentially large market. Target learners fall into three categories:

- Advanced Apprentices
- National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 achievers (often Advanced Apprentices who did not complete the framework after achieving the NVQ)
- Employees with experience but no level 3 qualifications.

Each of these groups of non-traditional HE learners is examined below.

Advanced Apprenticeship

All Advanced Apprenticeships conform to a framework comprising four components – an NVQ level 3, key skills at specified levels, a technical certificate of underpinning knowledge, and an awareness of employment rights and responsibilities. Apprenticeship frameworks are developed in each sector by the respective Sector Skills Council and, although not time-based, typically take two to three years to complete.

The Advanced Apprenticeships in the sector are Active Leisure and Learning and the new Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence, developed by SkillsActive.

Advanced Apprenticeship, Active Leisure and Learning

The framework comprises:

- **Induction covering workplace employment rights and responsibilities**
- **NVQ level 3 in one of the following:**
 - Outdoor Education, Development Training, Recreation
 - Coaching, Teaching and Instructing (in the context of a sport or activity)
 - Operations and Development
 - Spectator Control
 - Playwork.
- **Key Skills:**
 - Application of Number, level 2
 - Information Technology, level 2
 - Communication, level 2
 - Problem Solving, level 3
 - Working With Others, level 3
 - Improving Own Learning and Performance, level 3.
- **A Technical Certificate in industry and organisational awareness at level 3**
- **Industry Skills:**
 - Three additional employer requirements at Level 3 appropriate to the job role being fulfilled (eg. Coaching Certificates, Advanced Fitness Instruction, Certificate in Sports Studies, Higher Sports Leaders Award).

Advanced Apprenticeship, Sporting Excellence*

The framework comprises:

- **Induction covering workplace employment rights and responsibilities**
- **NVQ level 3, Achieving Excellence in Sports Performance**
- **Key Skills:**
 - Application of Number, level 2
 - Communication, level 2
 - Problem Solving, level 3
 - Working With Others, level 3
 - Improving Own Learning and Performance, level 3.
- **Technical Certificate at level 3 of at least 780 guided learning hours.**

This can be made up from a range of A Levels, AS Levels, GCSEs, vocationally-related qualifications and any other relevant accredited qualifications.

*Only those candidates who have the realistic potential to achieve excellence in their sport and are seeking to perform at the highest level in that sport are able to access this Apprenticeship

Job roles

Job roles of Advanced Apprentices completing the Active Leisure and Learning framework include:

- Duty Manager
- Facilities Manager
- Operational Manager
- Activity Centre Manager
- Senior Activity Leader
- Senior Coach
- Coach Development Officer
- Personal Trainer
- Senior Playworker
- Playscheme Manager
- Senior Steward
- Safety Manager.

The Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence is highly selective in that it is available only to those with potential to be elite sportsmen and women. Apprentices are likely to be one of the following:

- Full-time contracted apprentices at professional sports clubs
- Full-time elite athletes receiving support from the lottery world class programme
- Talented young people in the 'academy environment' not yet offered full-time terms.

Leeds Metropolitan University have developed a Certificate in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness as a bridging qualification for Advanced Apprentices in Sporting Excellence. The Certificate can be credited towards the achievement of the university's acclaimed Foundation Degree in that subject.

Importantly, the Apprenticeship framework recognises the need to provide for second career development. As such the Apprenticeship aims to help bridge the gap between vocational and academic qualifications and play an important part in long term career progression. It therefore allows young people the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge needed to perform at the highest level while providing opportunities for them to broaden expertise into other technical/occupational areas within the active leisure and learning sector.

Examples of employment opportunities include work within the related fields of Coaching, Sport Development, Exercise and Fitness, operational management of sports facilities, sports leadership and the outdoors. There is significant potential for higher education programmes to develop wider career opportunities for this talented group.

Technical certificates and NVQs

Technical certificates, whose size and range vary across Apprenticeship frameworks, are a relatively new component of Apprenticeships and provide an important bridge to higher education. They are designed to provide a broad platform of underpinning knowledge from which the learner can progress to further qualifications such as a degree.

NVQs are based on National Occupational Standards (NOS) developed by Sector Skills Councils. NOS are designed around the skills and knowledge people use in their jobs, defining all-round competence at work. They set out not only what people in particular occupations should know, but also how they need to apply that knowledge to perform their jobs well.

National Occupational Standards form the building blocks of all NVQs, which are accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). NVQs comprise a number of units which set out the national standards that must be reached to demonstrate competent performance in the workplace. Assessment methods can include observation of work being done, examination of finished products and statements from work supervisors, as well as tests of underpinning knowledge.

NVQs are an integral part of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's national framework of qualifications. There are five levels of NVQ, ranging from level 1 covering basic work activities to level 5 for senior management. NVQ level 3, the typical entry level to HE, is defined by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority as: *"Competence which involves the application of knowledge in a broad range of varied work activities, performed in a wide variety of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy, and control or guidance of others is often required."*

NVQ level 3: Achieving Excellence in Sports Performance, awarded by Edexcel

The eight mandatory units are:

- Plan, develop and apply your technical skills
- Plan and develop your physical conditioning
- Plan, develop and apply your tactical skills
- Develop the attitudes and mental skills necessary for excellent performance
- Plan and manage your own lifestyle
- Plan and manage your career
- Communicate and work effectively with others
- Maintain health and safety of yourself and others.

Other work-based learners

"We see a huge demand for higher education from people in employment."

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

Employees with potential to benefit from higher education are a disparate group and include those who may not possess accredited qualifications. The experience of the progression hubs suggests that the recruitment net should be cast widely. This is partly on practical grounds, in that a programme limited to Advanced Apprentices may not attract enough candidates to be viable. Equally important is the potential of other employees to benefit from higher education as part of their career development. Appropriate experience and a high level of motivation are valid entry criteria which may enable requirements for formal qualifications to be waived. Indeed, candidates may be able to claim credit and advanced standing for relevant experience in the industry, as discussed further in a later section.⁵ Attracting such learners also helps institutions to meet their objectives for widening participation.

⁵ APEL, page 19.

4. Developing HE programmes for work-based learners

Progression Models:	Examples:
1. Advanced Apprenticeship → Foundation Degree → Honours top-up	Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College
2. Advanced Apprenticeship → Foundation Degree → Honours top-up → Professional accreditation	University of Birmingham/Professional Golfers' Association
3. Advanced Apprenticeship → University Certificate → Foundation Degree → Honours top-up → Professional accreditation	Leeds Metropolitan University
The three examples are case-studied in this guide	

Progression models

Three models have emerged from the LSC-funded progression 'hubs' led by SkillsActive. All involve progression from completed Advanced Apprenticeship to a work-based learning Foundation Degree, with the opportunity for further progression to an Honours Degree top-up. At least two Foundation Degrees have been accepted as meeting the accreditation requirements of the relevant professional bodies. One also incorporates a four-module bridging certificate, designed specifically for Advanced Apprentices in Sporting Excellence. The certificate is fully integrated into the Foundation Degree through APEL arrangements.

The models are illustrated above.

The progression models share fundamental core features. They provide innovative 'learn and earn' pathways to higher education that are specifically designed for Apprentices and other work-based learners. They build on the considerable skills these learners bring to higher education, while addressing the shortfalls that disadvantage them as non-traditional HE students. They have a sharp focus on the needs of employment in the sector and target areas, being the product of partnership and extensive consultation. Above all, they are models of work-based learning, to enable these new learners to participate and achieve through higher education.

"Young people who might have been persuaded to go to university and then possibly lost to the profession can now become both graduates and golfing professionals in a single 'learn and earn' HE package."
Professional Golfers' Association

There is significant flexibility within the models, reflecting the diversity of the workforce, employer needs, institutional strengths and local circumstances. Completion of the Advanced Apprenticeship framework is not the exclusive entry point. Hubs have widened the net beyond Advanced Apprentices to provide progression opportunities to other employees with the desire and potential to benefit from higher education.⁶

Hubs in sectors such as engineering and IT, where there is a well-established demand for higher education, have successfully developed integrated progression models as well as conventional 'end to end' progression. These integrate Advanced Apprenticeship with a Foundation Degree in a single, condensed programme. While these integrated models may not be appropriate for the Active Leisure sector at the present time, they merit consideration for the future, when the demand HE has grown.

Curriculum design and content

Technical and management skills

Curricula typically provide a mix of technical and management content. Often they draw on existing programmes, extracting those modules which fit the need and adapting or developing new ones as necessary. Some progression hubs highlight this as a significant success factor, enabling them to develop and launch the progression programme within a tight timeframe. They also stress the advantage of having previous experience of developing work-based learning programmes, including Graduate Apprenticeships.⁷

Structure

The progression hubs have shown there is considerable scope within Foundation Degrees for curriculum flexibility and innovation. A Foundation Degree is typically structured around three curriculum areas:

1. vocational competencies – developing the capability, knowledge and understanding
2. professional competency – being able to work at and develop the skills appropriate for a level 4 post or role
3. work-based projects – focusing on procedures and processes which are of benefit to the employer.

The core professional skills are transferable across all employers, whereas the vocational projects will be very different, reflecting the different needs of the organisations. A bigger points weighting may

⁶ Target learners, page 8.

⁷ See Footnote 1, page 6.

be given to the work-based project(s), highlighting the importance of work-based learning and playing to the strengths of work-based learners. Key Skills can be delivered as self-standing modules but are almost invariably now mapped and embedded across the curriculum.

SkillsActive is developing a sectoral framework for Foundation Degrees, following extensive consultation with the sector. Institutions should use this framework as a template for Foundation Degree development and as a benchmark for existing Foundation Degree programmes.

A list containing links to the frameworks developed to date is available on Foundation Degree Forward's website at www.fdf.ac.uk/extrainfo.php?action=sectorskillsframework.

The frameworks are developed to a common structure as follows:

- Business Context
- Design of Foundation Degree/s
- Delivery
- Progression
- Quality Assurance
- Promotion
- Evaluation.

Incorporating National Occupational Standards

The sector is a leading exponent in the use of National Occupational Standards (NOS) in HE programmes. NOS, the building blocks of NVQs and stand-alone standards of workplace competence, are particularly apt in the context of work-based progression. All Advanced Apprentices and many other work-based learners with potential to progress will have achieved an NVQ level 3. Incorporating relevant National Occupational Standards into HE programmes both ensures industry currency and provides a ladder of progression for work-based learners.

The standards selected can be drawn from SkillsActive's suite of NOS for Active Leisure, and also from cross-sector standards such as those for management and IT. They can be readily converted to learning outcomes and mapped to Foundation Degree modules. Assessment does not have to involve NVQ achievement, although some HE programmes have successfully incorporated full NVQ achievement at level 4.⁸

Over 50 National Occupational Standards at levels 3 and 4 are mapped to the modules of Leeds Metropolitan University's Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness. At HE level 2, for example, the Applied Management Studies module incorporates both industry-specific and generic management standards. The standards in the other modules are more biased towards sports science but are integrated in the same way. Leeds Met stresses that the NOS balance, not replace, the academic content of the course.

Bridging/study skills

Despite the focus on work-based learning, higher education programmes can pose daunting challenges for learners entering HE for the first time via the vocational route. The written requirements are often particularly challenging. Later sections cover the crucial role of tutors, mentors and others in supporting non-traditional learners⁹, and provision to aid progression to an Honours top-up (below). Here we point up the role of curriculum developers in smoothing the transition to HE of Apprentices and other work-based learners.

Provision for study skills development can be made as a pre-requisite of entry, as a contextualised 'pre-module' taken before the start of the course. This moves away from the concept of remedial bridging provision, where candidates are identified as having learning shortfalls that must be addressed separately before they are allowed onto the course.

Another approach, which can be complementary to a pre-module, is to build study skills into an introductory module focused on personal and professional development. One progression hub has incorporated them within a special four module certificate aimed specifically at Advanced Apprentices in Sporting Excellence.

Leeds Metropolitan University is developing a four-module Certificate in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness as an initial HE progression route for Advanced Apprentices in Sporting Excellence. The certificate is designed to ease the transition and build the confidence of Apprentices progressing to HE. Crucially the certificate will earn credit towards the Foundation Degree.

Progression to Honours and continuing professional development

A further 'bridge' is that smoothing progression to an Honours Degree. Foundation Degree graduates, awarded an FdA or FdSc, may cease study at this point. However, many choose to continue to an Honours programme. All Foundation Degrees must provide a platform for progression to an Honours Degree or range of Honours Degree options. This most often takes the form of a 'top-up' year to HE level 3, which may be bespoke provision for Foundation Degree graduates or the final year of an existing Honours programme.

The step up from HE level 2 to 3 can be a hurdle for work-based learners, so it is important to make provision for it. Preparation for rigour of HE level 3 can be incorporated into the later stage of a Foundation Degree through the demands of a dissertation, or addressed through additional modules for those wishing to do the top-up.

⁸ For more details, see Assessment, page 18. A guide to the use of National Occupational Standards in HE programmes, *Fit for Purpose*, is available from UVAC and downloadable at www.uvac.ac.uk/publications.html

⁹ Learner support, page 17.

To prepare work-based learners for progression to the additional rigour of Honours, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College builds that rigour into the dissertation of the final Foundation Degree work-based project. The Professional Golfers' Association, meanwhile, requires potential Honours students to complete a bridging course through two additional modules.

Whether or not learners opt for the Honours top-up, their higher education programme will have developed their awareness of their own learning in the context of continuing professional development (CPD). Professional accreditation is increasingly important in the Active Leisure sector. If HE achievement can be linked the requirements of professional accreditation, that not only raises the status of the programme but also sets learners on a path of lifelong learning through CPD.

The PGA-led Foundation Degree is the gateway to professional membership and continuing development as a golfing professional. Graduation in the Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness at Leeds Metropolitan University provides professional status and CPD through the Register of Exercise Professionals.

Meeting the needs of employment

A pre-requisite of HE programmes aimed at Apprentices and other work-based learners is that they meet the needs of employment. Employers supporting their staff on these programmes must be confident that the course has industry credibility and will develop employees who can make a significant contribution to the business. Employees need be satisfied that the programme will provide substantial personal development and career advancement. Programmes therefore have a sharp focus on 'fitness for purpose'.

Understanding sector skills

The Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive, has a central role in ensuring that learning provision meet the needs of employment in the sector. As the government-licensed skills body representing the sector UK-wide, SkillsActive is the voice of employers on skills and productivity. As we have seen SkillsActive has the lead role in articulating the sector's current and future skills needs, and the learning required to meet that demand.¹⁰ Curriculum developers need to consult that and other relevant research and policy documents to gain an overview and initial steer for their development work.

As the official standards-setting body for the sector, SkillsActive is responsible for developing and updating the sector's National Occupational Standards (NOS) and Apprenticeship frameworks. NOS are key tools for curriculum developers seeking to meet the needs of employment. Being integral to the sector's Apprenticeship frameworks through the NVQs/SVQs, they can also provide the 'common currency' of work-based learning at all levels, from Apprenticeship through progression to higher education to continuing professional development.¹¹

Direct contact with the SSC at an early stage is strongly recommended. SkillsActive is committed to supporting HE curriculum development and, building in its experience with the progression hubs, will meet with institutions to discuss, advise and support. Good practice in developing vocational programmes shows that college and university departments that are closely involved with their SSC reap considerable benefits. They not only gain a better understanding of the employer perspective on skills; they are also able to contribute their HE perspective and expertise to a debate where their voice has been little heard.

Leeds Metropolitan University has been closely involved with the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive, and its preceding body, SPRITO, for many years. Staff at the School of Leisure and Sport Management sit on SkillsActive committees and play an active part in developing and updating the sector's National Occupational Standards. The Head of School chairs the sector's progression hubs managed by SkillsActive.

Two SkillsActive projects are highly relevant to those involved in HE progression programmes. One is the Sector Skills Agreement – the national plan the SSC is developing and brokering between government, employers and learning providers to take forward the sector's skills agenda. The other is the Foundation Degree Sector Framework being developed to benchmark good practice in the development and delivery of Foundation Degrees which meet the needs of employment in the sector. Extensive consultations are taking place on these initiatives, providing an opportunity for HE to contribute to their development.

Understanding the regional and local employment market

SkillsActive's research provides some regional data and analysis. More 'drilling down' can be done through other published labour market information and skills surveys. These include the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA) produced by every Regional Development Agency and skills reports produced by the national and local Learning and Skills Councils. Where Active Leisure is a local LSC priority for workforce development, detailed local analysis of the sector may be available. Institutions can complement this with their own research of local employers.

An intimate qualitative understanding of the local market for sector skills is achieved through networking – with employers, primarily, and with colleges, training providers, local LSCs, local authorities and others. Local and regional partnerships, including Foundation Degree consortia, can be effective ways of exchanging information and encouraging collaboration between organisations that might otherwise feel competitively constrained.

¹⁰ Understanding sector skills, page 12.

¹¹ Incorporating National Occupational Standards, page 11.

Engaging employers in development

All the progression hubs have accorded high priority to employer engagement. Clearly it is important to have employer input to programmes which are intended to meet employer needs and which are crucially dependent on employer support. However, there is universal agreement, including among employer bodies such as the SSC, that widespread and effective employer engagement in the skills agenda is very difficult to achieve. The quest to engage SMEs, particularly, has long been the 'holy grail' of the learning and skills community. Happily there is a body of good practice that can help point the way.

Most progression hubs have successfully formed industry groups to help steer the initiatives and provide employer input, particularly to the Foundation Degree curricula. These groups can flourish and be highly effective, especially where they build on existing strong links with employers, such as those forged through Graduate Apprenticeship schemes. It is important to bring in new blood by attracting more than the 'usual suspects', and, as far as possible, to achieve a balance of industry interests and size of employer. An initial impetus might be provided by an awareness-raising event for employers, followed up by invitations to join the group.

Such employer participation can be insightful and stimulating, with very direct influence on provision. However, managing diverse employer interests can be challenging. Institutions must identify common needs and avoid pandering to the special needs of one employer that may have no currency elsewhere.

Employers, particularly SMEs, may be 'turned off' or simply baffled by the jargon of learning and skills. Despite the many links that exist between employers and education institutions, they may still perceive each other as inhabiting different worlds. Institutions whose staff have recent or concurrent industry experience have a clear advantage in bridging that gap.

"Things that look pretty on paper often do not work when applied in the real world. You have to be innovative and creative in how you do it, but that does not mean cutting corners."

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

An experienced senior figure in the role of forum chair can productively draw together different perspectives. But industry forums alone do not necessarily reflect the spectrum of employer views. To achieve that, programme developers also need to 'go to them'. This requires a very proactive approach to employer engagement, which in this and other ways is a hallmark of good practice. It is an approach that institutions are increasingly adopting in promoting their vocational courses.¹² In a demand-led system, it also needs to apply to curriculum development. One hub has successfully revived a struggling partnership in this way. Investing time in individual visits to employers who would not attend a meeting has paid dividends, generating a very positive employer response and input to the programme. Although the approach is time-consuming, it has raised awareness of the programme and ensured as far as possible that it is fit for purpose.

In a contrasting example, the lead taken by a sport professional body to develop progression routes for its professionals has neatly ensured fitness for purpose for both a new Advanced Apprenticeship framework and the Foundation Degree to which Apprentices can progress.

The Professional Golfers' Association not only took the lead in developing a Foundation Degree in Professional Golf as a requirement for golfing professionals; it also played a major role in developing the new Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence for golfers, which provides progression to the Foundation Degree. Three factors have made this a seamless and relatively straightforward process – the close relationship between the association and employers in the industry; using the Foundation Degree to upgrade an existing popular diploma programme; and linking the achievement of the Apprenticeship and Foundation Degree to professional status – in effect providing a licence to practise in the industry.

¹² Promotion to employers, page 14.

5. Recruiting work-based learners onto HE programmes

Marketing

A dual market

Unlike most HE programmes which are aimed solely at individuals, work-based learning HE programmes serve a dual market – individuals and employers. The individuals are usually experienced employees and therefore significantly older than the large mass of traditional full-time HE students. The part-time Foundation Degrees featured in this guide are essentially workforce development products, dependent on the support of employers as much as on the motivation and achievement of employees for their success. Marketing and promotion of these programmes therefore needs to be based on key messages appropriate to each target audience.

Promoting to Apprentices and other employees

HE recruitment is traditionally aimed at school and college leavers, so institutions already have well-developed methods of publicising their provision to young people through UCAS, course prospectuses and their websites. Schools, colleges and information, advice and guidance (IAG) centres are key targets for course information, supported by open days enabling potential students to see for themselves. Local media may be used to advertise vocational courses.

Much of this is applicable to our target learners. Course details should be written with these employees in mind, conveying the key messages (below) appropriate to this audience. It is particularly important to identify Apprentices in the entry requirements. These are obvious points, but many prospectuses fall short on these fundamentals. Too often, work-based learners are presented as an after-thought, relegated to the bottom of a list of entry criteria with “Applicants with relevant vocational experience will be considered on their merits...” or similar uninspiring statement. Apprenticeship is rarely mentioned.

Unless an HE programme is the sole gateway to a ‘licence to practise’ – as a bespoke Foundation Degree is now for golfing professionals – providers need to create demand among this non-traditional group of potential HE learners. This requires a highly proactive, targeted approach. One progression hub has produced a course leaflet aimed specifically at Apprentices. Another, through networking over many years and familiarity with the local industry, approaches individuals it has identified as potential students for its work-based learning degree.

Leeds Metropolitan University have produced a leaflet aimed at Advanced Apprentices to promote their Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness. *Are you a Sport Apprentice...What Next?*, produced with support from SkillsActive and Leeds City Council, one of the employers involved in the programme, sets out the course’s benefits and features and includes an example of an Advanced Apprentice who is already on the course.

Promotion to employers

Employers are the other primary audience for promotion, being at least as much the customer for these HE programmes as the individual. Employers, perceiving a course’s potential benefits to their business, may take the initiative in promoting it to their employees. Conversely, individual employees interested in one of these courses have an important role in ‘selling’ it to their employer. Either way, HE providers are central to the process. Again, a proactive approach is essential in order to create a demand for these new learning ‘products’. Only exceptionally, until demand is stronger, will institutions have the luxury of employers ‘coming to them’.

Some institutions have successfully held employer awareness-raising events with support from SkillsActive and other partners. These need to be vigorously followed up by telephone and through meetings. Institutions that are successfully building client relationships with employers in this way have cited having enthusiastic staff with recent industry experience as an important factor. Those that are building on existing good links with employers and training providers delivering Apprenticeships are at a considerable advantage. Colleges with their own Apprenticeship units and links to managing agents are particularly well placed to raise awareness of progression opportunities among both Apprentices and their employers.

Institutions wishing to tap into the potentially large market for workforce development are increasingly adopting the sales and marketing techniques of business. This raises the issue of resources. Although many institutions have central marketing teams, these will not be able to provide sustained support for a single course or school. The long lead-time from first stimulating an employer’s interest to enrolling their employees on a course can make considerable demands on an institution’s already stretched resources.

Progression hubs have benefited from modest development funding. Looking to the longer term, institutions are developing bids to the European Social Fund and their local Learning and Skills Councils for support for their work with employers.

Others by contrast see marketing to employers as an opportunity to develop provision which is self-financing, rather than a drain on resources. Those that are members of active partnerships are best placed to tap into the market for workforce development. Partnerships which bring together HEIs, FECs employers and the relevant agencies also have an important role in linking employer demand to HE supply. Foundation Degree consortia, local economic partnerships and the new Regional Skills Partnerships being developed by Regional Development Agencies can assist the process.

Key promotional messages

For work-based learners

- Higher education – you can do it
- Continue to learn and earn
- Advanced Apprenticeship (and other vocational experience and qualifications) provides entry to HE
- Work-based higher learning – both practical and academically rigorous
- Tailored to your needs
- Support at college and in the workplace
- Current experience and qualifications may provide credit towards a degree
- Hard work but worth it
- Personal development
- Career development
- Nationally recognised, portable qualification
- Springboard to further achievement, including professional status and Honours.

For employers

- Flexible, tailored to your needs
- Motivated, highly skilled employees
- Better qualified workforce
- Higher staff retention
- Meets skills shortages
- Fuels business growth
- Work-based learning – little time off the job
- Projects directly related to your business
- You are closely involved in delivery
- Mentor and assessment support from the provider
- Extremely good value compared to private sector training
- Direct links to further qualifications and CPD.

The Professional Golfers' Association was closely involved in the development of both the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (contextualised to the needs of golfing professionals) and the new Foundation Degree which is the new route to full professional membership. The association has agreed that the Advanced Apprenticeship provides entry to the Foundation Degree without the normal two-day Admission Review Programme.

Explanation of what the course entails is particularly important with these 'non-traditional' applicants, both to ensure they understand the commitment involved and to provide reassurance that work-based learners can succeed in higher education. Gauging an applicant's desire and motivation to undertake the programme is another vital function of the interview.

Diagnostic tests may be used, often as part of standard admissions procedures. Applicants may be admitted subject to completing a programme of pre-course learning. This may be a course to fill a gap identified through the interview or diagnostic, or a bridging course required of all candidates.

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College interviews every candidate for their Foundation Degree in Sport and Leisure Management to gauge their capability and motivation. The course leader also undertakes a 'career mapping' for them. In one case a candidate enquiring about a short course was referred and identified as a potential Foundation Degree candidate. After several further contacts and attendance at a seminar as a taster, he signed up for the course.

Application and admission procedures

The progression hubs have invariably cast the recruitment net wide to include employees with level 3 vocational qualifications, rather than restrict entry to Apprentices. Entry requirements are flexible enough to accommodate applications from mature employees with experience but not level 3 qualifications. Essential requirements are relevant experience, employed status, and a desire and motivation to complete the course.

Applicants with such potentially diverse backgrounds are usually called for interview. However, the close involvement of employers in the programme, where candidates have been selected, rather than simply putting themselves forward, may obviate the need for this. Equally, as institutions become more familiar with candidates' vocational qualifications and Apprenticeships, they may choose to interview more selectively.

6. Delivering HE programmes to work-based learners

Delivery modes

Duration, attendance and timetabling

Progression hub programmes are usually delivered part-time. A part-time Foundation Degree is typically a three-year course, delivered locally through partner arrangements. Some in the Active Leisure sector are delivered more intensively over two years through a longer academic year, such as three semesters of 15 weeks.

Attendance times vary – typically one day a week or equivalent, such as an afternoon and an evening. Although one hub stipulates attendance of one day every other week, some of the students are released by their employer every week to do private study at the university on the alternate weeks. Others arrange their shifts to do this in their own time.

All attendance modes pose some difficulty for work-based learners and their employers. Employer pressure to minimise time ‘off the job’ is a common issue and the subject of frequent dialogue between institutions and employers. Institutions should be flexible as far as possible.

Work-based learning

In all the progression hubs there is a strong emphasis on delivery through work-based learning. HE modules, especially when mapped to relevant National Occupational Standards, can be closely related to workplace practice. As far as possible HEI and FEC staff involved in delivery should have recent industry experience.

The initial Personal Development module of Leeds Metropolitan University’s Certificate in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness Students requires the students to consider the importance key skills and National Occupational Standards/NVQs in relation to their own career plans. The module accustoms the students to using the language of National Occupational Standards, which they will already be familiar with through their Advanced Apprenticeship, and follows through the use of NOS in the delivery of other modules of both the Certificate and the Foundation Degree.

Employers have an important responsibility to ensure that students are provided with a range of experience to support their studies, and access to the organisation’s activity and information commensurate with their assignments. In return, students’ work-based projects, particularly the extended projects that typically round off the final year, can provide a valuable consultancy service to the employer.

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College relates its Foundation Degree content to each learner’s role in their organisation, so that they do ‘real’ assignments based on own their working environment. The course team are constantly learning and will adjust the programme in future years in the light of experience. One issue has been the pressure of work felt by students regarding the assignments, and the need to pace the work.

Distance learning

Self-study through distance learning is an obvious ingredient of programmes delivered throughout the country and overseas. One hub has built on an existing distance learning programme with learners at home and overseas. Residentials can be very effective in complementing e-learning and other modes of delivery.

The Professional Golfers’ Association’s Foundation Degree for Golfing Professionals is largely a self-study programme delivered through distance learning packages over the three years, supported with a variety of teaching materials. This is complemented by a five day residential course each year held at the PGA’s Training Academy at The Belfry.

Most of the distance learning is scheduled between Oct and the end of March, when golf clubs are less busy. The work-based element is timed for the busy summer season, enabling the trainees to put their learning into practice.

In many institutions e-learning through Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) is playing an increasingly important role in delivery. VLEs are particularly useful in supporting the learning of work-based students. They provide downloadable course materials and can supply course notes for sessions a student may have missed because of work commitments. In addition they are a useful communication channel between institutions and learners.

Learning agreements

The issue highlights the importance of learning agreements, which can underpin a course by setting out the responsibilities of each partner, including the employer’s responsibility for allowing time off for study. A learning agreement can be signed at the outset by the student, employer and course leader. The agreement makes a transparent commitment to the programme’s success from all sides. It is useful in setting the ground rules for the work-based programme, and in raising the profile of the programme in the workplace. A model agreement is offered overleaf.

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

Learning Agreement

1. The student will:

- Take responsibility for ensuring they know and understand what is required for successful completion of the course.
- Make their workplace mentor aware of the particular nature, subjects, and demands of the course.
- Apply them self to their studies and assessment, by attending University at the allocated times and to carry out all other self-directed learning/studying on the allocated Reading/Tasks Days and as required.
- Respect the possible need for confidentiality regarding information gained in the workplace in support of their studies.
- Keep their work place mentor and the course leader informed of any relevant problems while doing the course.
- Take responsibility for their own learning and development.

2. The employer will:

- Be aware of the particular nature of the course which the student is following and communicate this information to all staff who will be associated with the learning of the student during work time.
- Identify and allocate a workplace mentor responsible for the student for the length of the course.
- Ensure that the student is able to attend University or to study on the allocated day as per programme and ensure that any reasonable additional study time is available as required.
- Support the student with his/her work based learning and to allow him/her reasonable access to areas of the organisation's activity or information to fulfil his/her work based learning, studies and assessment commitments.
- Endeavour to provide as wide a range of experience as possible in support of their studies.
- Facilitate the use of a PC if necessary.
- Allow the course leader to visit the student if required to discuss aspects of his/her work-based learning.

3. The Course Leader will:

- Provide the student with guidance and support throughout the length of the course.
- Monitor the progress of the student throughout the course.
- Ensure that the student's work mentor is aware of the course requirements and their responsibilities.
- Liaise with the work mentor regarding aspects of the course and the progress of the student.
- Organise work visits as and when required.
- Organise the induction week liaising with other members of the course team.
- Ensure that all aspects of the course programme are delivered effectively and meet the expectations of the student and employer.

Learner support

The needs of work-based learners

Students entering higher education through the work-based route have support needs that are likely to be different in many respects to those of traditional full-time students. Their work commitments raise issues of work/study balance, and many have family responsibilities that create additional pressures. Their learning backgrounds may well leave shortfalls in study skills; the rigours of academic writing can be particularly challenging for this group, whose confidence at work may not carry over into the unfamiliar world of higher education.

The limited time they are able to spend on campus produces additional pressure and demands for quick access to support when problems arise. Distance learning poses particular challenges concerning access to tutorial support. Dedicated workplace support is also critical to the success of these programmes. It is important therefore to anticipate these needs and make provision for them.

Providing study support

The need for 'academic' support can be addressed at the planning stage and built in to the design of HE programmes aimed at work-based learners. We have seen that bridging provision, including study skills, can be integral to the curriculum of a Foundation Degree through personal and professional development modules.¹³ Access to study support materials and self-study tutorials on the intranet also help to minimise the issues work-based students may experience. A clear, tailored and sympathetic course information pack provided to students at the outset and signposting the services available to them will further help to smooth their transition to higher education.

Tutorial support

Access to personal support is essential. A traditional system of tutorial support designed for full-time students may not be adequate, given the different needs of work-based learners. Colleges with a track record in delivering to FE and HE work-based learners may be better geared to supporting these students than HEIs.

The quality and accessibility of this support are recognised as critical to the successful retention of non-traditional students. The course leader or development manager may choose to take on a very pastoral role with the first cohorts to ensure that issues arising are addressed at an early stage and lessons learned for future development.

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College recognised the need to make learning support as accessible as possible for the work-based progression students on its new Foundation Degree in Sport and Leisure Management. Uniquely in the institution, the course leader role has been retained to provide a figurehead who can advise the students and visit the workplace if there are problems. This complements the support of personal tutors, a skills support tutor and workplace mentors.

"I was worried about being able to cope after not being involved in education for over 30 years, but the tutors have made it a very relaxed, concentrated delivery of the subjects. If you are unsure of anything you only have to ask and the tutors will provide all the help you require."
Nigel Mellor, Youth Development Officer, Buckinghamshire RFU

¹³ Bridging/study skills, page 11.

As work-based learning provision develops, another solution is to provide a dedicated learning support officer to complement the support of personal and course tutors. A support officer can provide, above all, the accessibility that work-based learners need. The role can be wide-ranging, referring students on to appropriate services for non-academic issues, while providing direct support on study issues such as time management, writing and academic referencing. The approach takes some of the tutorial pressure off academic staff and has been shown to be highly valued by work-based students and effective in increasing retention. Cost, however, is a significant factor and the role needs to be underpinned by high quality support materials to which the officer can refer the students or use himself in group and one-to-one sessions.

Leeds Metropolitan University's Foundation Degree Teaching and Learning Support Officer in the Carnegie Faculty is the students' first 'port of call' when they have an issue and do not know how to obtain the right information or advice. For non-academic matters the support officer's role is to refer learners to the increasingly well-developed support services within the university. Study support is provided in several ways, including a 12-week support programme delivered in timetabled tutorial sessions. Academic writing is the biggest area of support needed by work-based learners. Many lack confidence initially with IT, and most have no previous experience of using academic journals and databases. Students are encouraged to use the university's the Skills for Learning portal by distributing it free on a CD ROM. Feedback and retention since the appointment of the support officer have been "phenomenal".

The role of mentors

Workplace mentors also have a critical role in supporting the students' learning at work. They need to ensure that students' learning status is recognised in the organisation and that the learning in the HE modules is effectively applied in the workplace. They help to facilitate and monitor the work-based projects, and ensure they are providing a useful service to the employer. They should also ensure the student is allowed sufficient time to attend college, and liaise with the college on progress and issues.

It is important that institutions provide mentors with appropriate training to perform the role. In the short term, until a programme is established and mentors are identified and trained, the course leader or other designated member of the course team may need to take on a mentoring role. Some institutions have a permanent college-based mentor to support workplace liaison. Where employers have an active role in assessment, assessors will often 'double' as mentors.

Supporting distance learning

Courses delivered largely by distance learning pose particular challenges in supporting learners. However the experience of the Open University, among others, shows that these are not insurmountable. Much rides on the quality of the learning materials and clarity of the tasks and projects. Tutors must be accessible by email and telephone. Online discussions can be facilitated. Residentials provide valuable opportunities for students and tutors to meet and for issues to be discussed face to face.

Remote delivery places a particular responsibility on workplace mentors (who may be called 'facilitators' to reflect their wider role in distance learning programmes). As with other programmes, the course leader or development manager may need to be very active in providing support to both learners and mentors in the early stage of the programme. With a distance learning programme this can only be a temporary measure, pending the establishment of sustainable support arrangements. These might be partnership arrangements with a network of colleges to provide local support for the programme. Another solution used successfully in one progression hub is to develop a nationwide team of trained telephone mentors.

To support the Foundation Degree in Professional Golf, the Professional Golfers' Association has a team telephone mentors to support its widely dispersed students. The mentors contact the students the every six weeks to check on progress, helping them as necessary over the phone, arranging meetings or seminars or referring to other places they can go for help. Most of the telephone mentors have done the programme themselves and all have received mentor training from the PGA.

Assessment

Enabling work-based learners to achieve

An important message in encouraging work-based learners into higher education is that HE does not have to involve a series of gruelling written examinations. Assessment strategies for work-based learning HE programmes should inevitably place emphasis on evidence gathered in the workplace. This should then be assessed in ways which enable work-based learners to achieve.

Progression programmes typically use a variety of assessment methods – reflective exercises, practical exercises, portfolios, report-writing, case studies, role-plays, presentations, written tests. It is this variety and relevance to the workplace, rather than the traditional reliance on examinations, that helps to distinguish these programmes as effective work-based progression routes.¹⁴

Leeds Metropolitan University's assessment strategy for its Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness makes extensive use of self-reflective exercises. At HE level 1, for example, the Management Theory into Practice module is assessed through a series of self-reflective exercises supplemented by five short tests. All the reflective exercises are work-based, so they must be in a workplace to do them.

At level 2, when learners are becoming experienced and autonomous, the reflective exercises are not assessed; assessment at this level is based on larger assignments – in the case of the Applied Management Studies module, for example, this is a 2,500-word case study.

¹⁴ A forthcoming guide examines the recognition and accreditation of work-based learning in detail: Brennan, L. (2005) *Integrating Work-Based Learning into Higher Education*, UVAC/LCCI Commercial Educational Trust

Assessment arrangements

For institutions one of the benefits of Foundation Degrees and other work-based programmes is that delivery is shared among partners – HEIs, FECs and employers. Validating universities often take responsibility for all assessment, both in college and in the workplace, in the first year to monitor the programme closely and make any necessary adjustments. Some may retain sole responsibility for assessment; others phase in the involvement of partner FE colleges over time. This is particularly important with distance learning programmes, where the wide distribution of learners is likely to render assessment by a single centre impractical beyond the development phase.

Assessment can be shared to some extent with employers. Institutions generally undertake all the assessments themselves in the first instance. Employers can be involved gradually over time as designated staff are trained to be assessors.

NOS and NVQs

We have seen that mapping HE modules to the relevant National Occupational Standards (NOS) links the underpinning knowledge in the modules to the recognised industry standards of workplace competence.¹⁵ Although workplace assessment may not be against the standards in a formal way, as they are when used in NVQs, the standards provide useful reference points, particularly for Apprentices and other NVQ achievers who will be very familiar with NOS.

The incorporation of a level 4 NVQ within a programme adds a significant dimension to the assessment. Company staff will need to be trained to assess at that level if they are to carry out the assessments in the workplace, while the institution assesses the HE modules. However, mapping the NOS within the NVQ to the modules can streamline the assessment process, so that the evidence produced for the Foundation Degree can be used to meet the requirements of the NVQ. The potential of this approach is considerable, providing work-based learners with progression that combines the rigour of higher learning with proven high level workplace competence.

It is possible to complete a whole NVQ while studying for Leeds Metropolitan University's Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness. However NVQ assessment and certification are an optional extra for which employers or students must pay. Although the university is an approved NVQ centre, assessment is too expensive without additional funding to cost in as part of the course.

AP(E)L

Work-based learners will often come to the programme with qualifications for which credit can be given towards the degree and exemption from relevant parts of the course. 'Advanced standing' through the accreditation of prior certificated learning is well established in HE, with the considerable advantage to learners of reducing completion times.

APEL can grant exemption from all or part of a module in the Foundation Degree in Sport & Leisure Management at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College. Candidates making APEL claims are asked to assemble a portfolio providing evidence of relevant work. The portfolio goes to the head of department and is then considered by an assessment panel.

Learners may lack advanced qualifications but nevertheless have experience that may qualify them for credit. Accrediting prior *experiential* learning (APEL) is more complex and less well developed than procedures for accrediting certificated learning. Practice varies between institutions. Candidates making an APEL claim may be asked to develop a portfolio evidencing their experience, and a charge may be made for this. In the future the promised development of a unites qualifications system should greatly aid the development of APEL processes.

¹⁵ Incorporating National Occupational Standards, page 11.

7. Funding HE programmes aimed at work-based learners

The programmes are funded by HEFCE grants in the usual way through bids for Foundation Degree development and places. Progression hub funding support from the LSC has enabled participating institutions to focus on the progression of work-based learners and identify the good practice that forms the basis of this guide.

Development funding has provided essential 'pump-priming' for the programmes, for example, by enabling relatively high levels of resource to be allocated to marketing and promotion. Several institutions have successfully bid to the ESF for funds to cover tuition fees for at least the first year of the programme. These additional funds have provided important support in establishing programmes in a short timeframe and enabled the first cohort of employers and learners to be subsidised for leading the way.

For the Professional Golfers' Association the upgrading of its diploma to a Foundation Degree has provided valuable financial support through the HEFCE grant, as the unaccredited diploma did not attract HE funding.

Sustainability beyond the development phase is a concern. New programmes, especially those aimed at non-traditional HE learners, take time to establish. Apprentices and other work-based learners often need higher levels of support than traditional full-time students, and this is not reflected in the HEFCE grant. When tuition fees have to be charged, this may be a burden for students. As we have seen, charges may be levied for APEL claims and NVQ assessment.

However, there are positive signs to counter these concerns. A key message for employers is that HE tuition fees, even at the higher levels being introduced, represent excellent value for money compared to the high cost of narrow product training. Employers who are Investors in People may be entitled to a substantial discount on these courses. In some parts of the sector, such as golf, there is a tradition of raising funds to sponsor the development of aspiring young professionals.

Some institutions are bullish about the marketability of these programmes and aim to be highly proactive and businesslike in 'selling' them as very effective workforce development products.

8. Case studies

Case study 1

Progression to Foundation Degree in Health-related Exercise and Fitness, Leeds Metropolitan University

Contacts: Helen Whitrod Brown, Terry Owens

A drive by the Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education at Leeds Metropolitan University to tailor provision to the needs of Advanced Apprentices and other level 3 work-based learners builds on a successful Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness. Targeted promotion of the opportunity, the appointment of a dedicated learning support officer and the development of a bespoke, four-module bridging certificate for sport Apprentices support progression to a degree that already had a strong emphasis on work-based learning through the incorporation of National Occupational Standards.

Background

The faculty is active in addressing the lack of higher education development opportunities for staff in the sector. It has close links with SkillsActive, the Sector Skills Council: Helen Whitrod Brown, Head of Leeds Met's School of Leisure and Sport Management, chairs the progression hub supported by the SSC and the Learning and Skills Council to develop Apprenticeship and other work-based progression routes to higher education.

The School's new initiative builds on the existing Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness. This programme already attracts personal trainers, gym instructors and others with NVQ or Apprenticeship achievements. The curriculum has a strong work-based learning approach and overtly incorporates more than 50 industry and management National Occupational Standards (NOS) at levels 3 and 4. This balances the academic content of the course and incorporates a competency approach that Apprentices and NVQ achievers are familiar with.

The curriculum is the product of extensive industry consultation and research at national and local levels. It is delivered full and part-time over two/three years through around 24 days of college-based tuition a year. The degree has gained the University Vocational Awards Council quality mark and professional accreditation through the Register of Exercise Professionals.

An account of the development and delivery of this Foundation Degree prior to the current progression initiatives is attached as a supplement to this case study on page 40. Researched in 2003, the account was published in 2004 by the University Vocational Awards Council in the guide *Fit for Purpose: The use of National Occupational Standards in higher education to meet the needs of employment*.¹⁶

Learning support

An important finding from experience of running the existing Foundation Degree for two years is that learners entering HE through this route have significant learning support needs, which are different to those of traditional full-time HE students. Meeting these needs was identified as a key priority by the progression hub.

"If students are working and studying they need to be able to resolve immediate issues, such as inability to access the library because a card doesn't work, financial problems with the landlord, or an issue with their employer. It is very time-consuming and academic staff don't have the time to respond quickly enough, and in any case may not have the expertise to provide such support."

Responding to the need, the School appointed a Learning and Teaching Support Officer specifically to support Foundation Degree students. The officer is not an academic member of staff and has the personal qualities necessary to engage with students and their issues. As well as his skills, a key success factor is his availability and accessibility – "a bespoke person who is there for them."

The support officer is the students' first 'port of call' when they have an issue and do not know how to obtain the right information or advice. They need both study support and non-academic support. For the latter the support officer's role is to refer learners to the increasingly well-developed support services within the university, such as counselling or financial services. The officer therefore needs to have a thorough knowledge of all the networks within the university, so that he can refer them on to the appropriate specialist. The development of 'one-stop shop' Help Zones has been a particular boon in this respect.

Study support is provided in several ways. There is a Skills for Learning website portal covering a variety of study skills at all levels, from writing essays, reports and dissertations, through basic IT to accessing academic databases. Individual support programmes and personal tutor sessions provide more personal support. In a trial programme the Support Officer met with every student at the beginning of each level to agree a 12-week support programme based around their assessments and informed by the academic staff's experience of the needs of these students. The support officer delivers the programme covering all the skills required.

"The feedback and retention since the appointment of the support officer has been phenomenal."

The support sessions are timetabled into the curriculum and academic staff actively encourage the students to attend these sessions because they are voluntary. Attendance of Level 1 students is particularly high because the sessions not only advise them on the university's expectations but also on personal development issues such as time management and stress management. The cultural mix of the students also generates specific needs.

¹⁶ The guide, by Simon Roodhouse and David Hemsworth, is available as a download www.uvac.ac.uk

The officer mostly supports students in groups but also runs a series of drop-in, one-to-one sessions. An issue with work-based learners has been arranging sessions because of the limited times they can attend. This underlines the importance of the Skills for Learning portal. Indeed, all the resources, such as information packs, used by the support officer are drawn from Skills for Learning and tailored to specific needs. To encourage use of the portal, the support officer is distributing it free on CD ROM, having purchased copies from the Widening Participation budget; otherwise there would have been a £5 charge.

“Supporting them from level 1 and progressing through incrementally has been effective. For those going direct to level 3 it is more difficult because they are going straight in at dissertation level. On the flip side, these learners are often very good at presentations.”

Academic writing, including referencing, is the biggest area of support needed by work-based learners. Many lacked confidence initially with IT, and most had never come into contact with an academic journal or academic information database before. They need support to make them aware that these resources exist, then how to use them and how they can benefit from them.

Feedback from student surveys and an end of year reports is very positive. However the support officer is increasingly stretched because of his accessibility on campus and the extension of his remit to the whole Faculty. The employment of an additional part-time support officer is under consideration.

The Teaching and Learning Support Officer offered this profile of the support needs of a typical work-based learning student:

1. Personal development

- **Time management** – balancing job, family and academic commitments. (Even those with responsible jobs may have no experience of timescales for completing and conducting academic work). If timescales are a problem we may allow an extension because of work commitments. Lack of employer support is rarely an issue.
- **Working in groups** – a big issue for level 1 and 2s. There is a huge age range, with the more mature students very focused in contrast to 18 and 19-year-olds. The dynamics of mixed groups are challenging.

2. Academic

- **Writing** – structure, grammar, punctuation.
- **Referencing** – level 1: books and websites; level 2: journals; level 3: electronic journals and databases.

3. Career

- **Employability** – for Foundation Degree students motivation revolves mainly around personal development and furthering their career within the company. The link to professional accreditation through the Professional Register is a motivator.
-

Bridging the gap: the University Certificate in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness

In a linked initiative, the School is developing a bespoke, four-module bridging certificate for professional and semi-professional sportspeople completing the new Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence. The certificate, to be piloted in 2005-6, will be based on an existing certificate in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness. It will be a level 4 (HE level 1) award of four modules of 15 credits each which will take a year to complete part-time.

The current certificate is delivered for the university by Leeds City Council at their South Leeds stadium on Wednesdays or Saturdays to give maximum choice and clear, “undaunting” progression to HE for fitness professionals. The proposed new professional sports award will follow the same model. It will be a professional development-type module with appropriate theory relating to the learners’ particular professional or semi-professional roles.

“The new certificate will adopt a building blocks approach learned from experience with the Foundation Degree, showing that work-based students learn most effectively in small chunks with frequent, incremental targets.”

Crucially the new certificate will be fully integrated with a Foundation Degree, so that, when achieved, students will gain 60 credits towards the degree through Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) arrangements.

Promoting the opportunity to Apprentices and employers

An important dimension of the progression hub is promotion to develop key messages, market the opportunity and raise awareness of the Foundation Degree offer among the target audiences, Advanced Apprentices and their employers. SkillsActive and the Carnegie Faculty held a promotional event at Leeds United Football Club attended by more than 50 people. A dinner for employers is planned.

Promotional activity is supported by a flyer aimed at Advanced Apprentices in Sporting Excellence. Entitled *Are you a Sport Apprentice...What Next?*, the leaflet sets out the benefits and features of the Foundation Degree, including the value to the employer. It profiles an Advanced Apprentice employed by Leeds City Council who has already progressed to the Foundation Degree.

What's in it for me?

As you progress through your Apprenticeship, you may have concerns about entering Higher Education...don't worry!

- The Carnegie Faculty has invested in a Learning and Teaching Support Officer. He can offer guidance in every element of academic study from essay writing and presentations to student support services such as childcare and accommodation.
- The programme has been specifically designed to minimise disruption to work patterns in the leisure industry.
- You will work on 'real' assignments based on your work environment.

What is the value to the employer?

- Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness
- Exercise Register Level 3 accredited CPD
- Effective staff development in partnership with a leading university
- Greater professionalisation of staff in a rapidly expanding industry
- Work experience directly relevant to studies
- Work-based project directly related to organisational issues (eg. membership retention at clubs, designing a weight management programme, marketing and PR planning).

Extract from the leaflet *Are you a Sport Apprentice...What Next?*, Leeds Metropolitan University, 2005

Issues

Engaging employers, particularly the private sector, is the biggest challenge. The university cites one private health and fitness club that took on a group of Apprentices, some of whom the university hoped would progress to the Foundation Degree. However, when a new manager was appointed he dismissed them all "on a whim." The university would like to see the government provide incentives for employers to take on and retain Apprentices.

Funding is a major concern. No local LSC support has been forthcoming to help promote the initiative in the area; neither is the cost of providing the level of teaching and learning support required reflected in current HEFCE funding.

The university also regrets that student applications can no longer be made direct to the institution; they have to be made through UCAS. This disadvantages employees who do not have the institutional support available to school and college leavers. The UCAS form can be a barrier for non-traditional applicants.

Future development

The progression hub will be developing case study and other promotional material, and evaluating the effectiveness of its communications strategy for the initiative. Plans are well in hand to extend the initiative to two other Foundation Degrees in Sports Coaching, one performance-based, supporting elite sportspeople, the other community-based.

Recognising the need for more learning and teaching support, at least in the short term while other support mechanisms are bedding down, the university hopes to recruit additional support through an internal bid or with hub funding.

Supplement to Case Study 1:

Extract from *Fit for Purpose: The use of National Occupational Standards in higher education to meet the needs of employment, UVAC, 2004 17*

Example: Leeds Metropolitan University: Foundation Degree in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness

Contact: Helen Whitrod Brown

"The competency-based approach broadens the portfolio a university can offer and allows flexible learning for those with family and work commitments. It enables people to improve their academic qualifications without losing out on the career ladder by having to take years out of a fast-moving industry."

The Foundation Degree addresses the lack of development at HE level for staff in the industry. The course was in its second year, with 60 students at HE level one (across partner sites) and 48 at level 2. All the FEC students are local, while 58 per cent of the university students are from the region. Many are personal trainers and gym instructors, some of whom have NVQ qualifications. NVQs at levels 2 and 3 are accepted as part-entry requirements.

Two of the graduating Foundation Degree students recently attended the launch of the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive, at the House of Lords, where they received certificates of achievement from Sally Gunnell. The students, a mother and son team, both gained distinctions.

Leeds Met's academic registrar, Cath Orange, welcomes the use of National Occupational Standards in the curriculum. She said: *"NOS support the development of learning outcomes relevant to work-based learning and employability. The standards provide a national benchmark against which we can test the reliability and validity of vocationally oriented courses. They also provide a useful benchmark and reference point when designing the vocational educational curriculum and appropriate assessments."*

Development

Supported by HEFCE development funding, the course is the product of one of the biggest Foundation Degree consortia, involving Leeds Met (as the lead HEI), the universities of Bradford and Huddersfield, and a number of FECs. The local LSC is also involved. The principles developed by the consortium revolve around work-based learning, key skills and core-specific practical skills. FEC partners were involved in developing the curriculum. Industry representatives – the Fitness Industry Association (FIA), SkillsActive (the new Sector Skills Council) and others – have informed the course. They intend to hold their first employer forum at the end of the first two years.

To gauge demand, they first consulted SkillsActive's sector workforce development plan which clearly indicated a shortage of skills in this area. Other sources included government policy documents on the sector, such as 'Game Plan'. They then looked at the local market and potential FE providers. They concluded that there was a lack of development at HE level for staff in the industry. The Foundation Degree is designed to fill that gap.

¹⁷ The *Fit for Purpose* guide, by Simon Roodhouse and David Hemsworth, can be downloaded at www.uvac.ac.uk

The course has UVAC accreditation and has just achieved Register of Exercise Professional status (at level 3; seeking level 4 for the final year Honours course) approved by the FIA and SkillsActive – the first HEI to achieve this.

Place of NOS/NVQs in the curriculum

Students are introduced to NOS at HE level 1 in the Personal Development Module, where they are asked to look at the relevance of key skills and achievement of National Occupational Standards/NVQs in relation to their own career plans. Incorporating 17 National Occupational Standards at NVQ level 3 and 16 at level 4, the module accustoms the students to the language of National Occupational Standards, which is already familiar to most of the mature students but not to others.

At level 2, the Applied Management Studies, for example, incorporates both industry-specific and generic management standards. The standards in the other modules are more biased towards sports science but they are integrated in the same way. Over 50 National Occupational Standards in total are covered in the syllabus. The course leader stressed that the NOS balance, not replace, the academic content of the course.

Delivery and assessment

NOS underpin many parts of the curriculum through assessment, practicals and content. The course is delivered locally through partner arrangements. They use common materials and sometimes share tutors. To deliver the course they have sought staff with applied knowledge rather than purely academic qualifications.

They make extensive use of self-reflective exercises. At HE level 1, for example, the Management Theory into Practice module is delivered through a distance learning pack developed by the industry. This has a series of self-reflective exercises and five short assessments. All the reflective exercises are work-based, so they must be in a workplace to do them.

At level 2, when learners are becoming experienced and autonomous, the reflective exercises are not assessed; assessment at this level is based on larger assignments – in the case of the Applied Management Studies module, for example, this is a 2,500-word case study.

The Professional Development module encompasses the work placement support at level 1, so as soon as they arrive the students are engaged in a process of reflection on where they are, where they want to be, their key skills levels, where their competencies lie, and so forth. They then draw up a learning agreement and select a work placement which they can start when they wish.

Learners are taught one or two days a week, depending on past work experience; the other three days they can use in work-based learning as appropriate (50 per cent are already in full-time relevant employment). From the second semester, all have to be in a work placement one or two days a week, so if they are already in employment they will have negotiated with their employer new skills and learning to undertake, around which assignments are constructed.

In the second year, they have a block placement of between seven and ten weeks, managed through a professional practice module involving a work-based project based on research. If the student finds this too difficult, the part-time route may be a better option.

It is possible to complete a whole NVQ but NVQ assessment and certification are an optional extra for which students must pay. They are an approved NVQ centre but assessment is too expensive to cost in as part of the course.

Success factors

The course leader has been closely involved with the industry's Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive. She and a colleague are members of the SSC panel involved in writing the exercise and fitness standards. They retain strong links with the SSC.

"NOS do reflect the vocational competencies required in the workplace. Each unit clearly identifies the key skills being developed, so that provides a link, as do the statements of required knowledge and attendant values. So in the context of HE embracing employability, NOS have a clear fit with some degree programme modules."

The Foundation Degree has scored above the mean on the Leeds Met student survey. Module reviews are also very positive. The course's external examiner is the executive director of the FIA. Close involvement of the FIA is an indicator of the FD's quality and credibility within the industry.

The course leader feels that NOS ensure a competent level of ability which matches what employers are looking for. Job vacancies increasingly specify NOS and NVQs as requirements. The incorporation of the standards therefore lends credibility.

Many industry awards and accreditations are now aligned to NVQs. By the end of level 2 the students have been taught how to promote themselves, including how to talk about National Occupational Standards and how they can meet the needs of an organisation.

Promotion

A course brochure was professionally produced and included endorsements from professional bodies. Literature is sent to all local employers. UVAC kitemarks have aided promotion.

Issues regarding NOS

It had been a "massive" task to trawl the 500 latest standards and select those they needed to underpin the curriculum. NOS language, being vocational, was also markedly different to academic discourse. Although the standards had industry credibility, the course leader felt they had not been well promoted. Furthermore, they are expensive to assess without an employer 'buying in' to the process.

Other issues

Another issue had been engaging employers in supporting Foundation Degree learners and recognising the qualification as valuable workforce development. Foundation Degrees, like NVQs, had not been well publicised. Some of the larger employers were going down their own training routes.

It also had to be recognised that Foundation Degree students required more support than that provided through standard HEFCE funding, especially in the softer skills and development of confidence, academic learning, IT etc. The course leader felt there should be funding for the appointment of a learning support officer.

She added that lack of joined-up information made it difficult to target Advanced Modern Apprentices: the LSC could not provide information about AMA starts and completions.

Progression

The new progression degree, BSc (Hons) Health-Related Exercise and Fitness has been successfully validated. In developing the Honours progression module, the consortium selected appropriate National Occupational Standards and reflected the language of NOS in the learning outcomes to ensure that their relevance and terminology were clear. Of the 15 students recruited onto the course, 13 are Foundation Degree graduates.

Future development

Leeds Met had previously piloted the application of sports and recreation leadership NOS, involving the students in determining their own assessment criteria relating to those in the NVQs. That way the students became used to working with the language and it had worked very well. They are going to adopt the same approach with the Professional Development module of the Foundation Degree.

NOS continue to be developed and refined: the course leader and a colleague are members of the standards panel involved in writing the exercise and fitness standards. To support progression of Advanced Modern Apprentices, the course leader is also chairing the national AMA to HE Progression Hubs, a government-funded project managed by the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive. Leeds Met acts as regional 'hub' for employers, trainers, LSCs and others "to create and test new progression pathways for AMA achievers into HE."

Leeds Met are also actively investigating funding sources beyond HEFCE to support the Foundation Degree, especially the LSC.

Case study 2

Progression to Foundation Degree in Sport and Leisure Management, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

Contact: Francisco Baeza

Building on its experience of Graduate Apprenticeship, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College (BCUC) has developed this new work-based learning Foundation Degree with a focus on management skills. It has been proactive in engaging employers, flexible in delivery and mindful of the needs of students juggling study with work commitments. A formal Learning Agreement signed at the outset between employer, student and the institution is important in setting expectations and balancing the flexibility of the programme.

Background

BCUC's Department of Sport and Recreation has a strong track record in work-based learning and working with employers to develop the workforce. The development of its new Foundation Degree in Sport and Leisure Management has been informed by lessons from this experience, notably:

- the risk of overloading the curriculum in seeking to marry practical, work-based learning with academic knowledge and rigour
- the need to be highly proactive in engaging employers, and to 'cast the net wide' in recruiting work-based learners
- above all, the need to be flexible in meeting the needs of a fast-moving industry, which, despite increasing professionalism, is still often in 'fire-fighting' mode.

Target learners

"We see a huge demand for higher education from people in employment."

The Foundation Degree is designed specifically as a bridge for work-based learners with the potential and desire to progress to higher education. While Advanced Apprentices are an important market, the university places few restrictions on entry. The university perceives a demand for higher skills from a range of employees, some of whom may have no formal qualifications. In any case the pool of Apprentices from which to recruit in the area is too small to run a viable course specifically for them.

The first cohort of 12 learners is therefore a mixed group, with ages ranging from 20 to 57. They all have technical certificates of some kind, with other qualifications including A levels, NVQs and unaccredited in-house training. Their motivation includes a desire to study at higher level and gain a university qualification, having never had the opportunity before; career development through higher skills and the achievement of a recognised, portable qualification; and the prospect of progression to an Honours Degree. The common factor is that they all want to learn and develop themselves.

The curriculum

The course content incorporates input provided by employers from different sectors of the industry. Because attendance at meetings called for this purpose was poor, the university adopted a more proactive approach and consulted employers individually. This provided valuable feedback that considerably influenced the final structure and content of the curriculum, which has an emphasis on business and management skills contextualised to the sport and leisure industry.

In Year 1, modules cover:

- Professional management development
- Personal development planning
- Introduction to marketing, sales and customer management
- The business context of sport and leisure industries
- Technology (low tech equipment, as well as IT)
- Health and safety at work.

Year 2 modules cover:

- Advanced skills (building on Year 1 professional management development)
- Organisational awareness (leading to First4Sport Level 3 Certificate in Sport and Recreation Industry and Organisational Awareness)
- Finance for non-specialists
- Individual, society and work
- Project (double subject) negotiated with the employer and directly relevant to the business.

The final project, a mini-consultancy or dissertation, is designed both to help prepare the students for possible progression to an Honours Degree and to provide a valuable service to the employer.

Employers were happy to take responsibility for developing technical skills, such as lifeguarding. The course could be run alongside an NVQ, and there is scope to map the Foundation Degree modules to relevant National Occupational Standards (that is, NVQ units). The university hopes to work on this with SkillsActive, the Sector Skills Council, to enable applicants with relevant NVQ units to claim credit through APEL procedures. They are also looking into bridging provision.

Delivery

"I was worried about being able to cope after not being involved in education for over 30 years, but the tutors have made it a very relaxed, concentrated delivery of the subjects. If you are unsure of anything you only have to ask and the tutors will provide all the help you require."
Nigel Mellor, Youth Development Officer, Buckinghamshire RFU

The course, primarily work-based, is delivered over two years and involves attendance at the university one day every two weeks. Between these sessions the students do independent learning. This may be done at the university and some employers allow time off for this.

The normal course fee (currently £888 a year) applies, paid by the employer and/or learner.

Students have access to support materials through the internet on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The personal development planning module, supported by three lectures, provides important skills analysis and support in the early, transitional stage of the programme. It also aims to develop reflective practice and to encourage thinking that makes connections between study and workplace.

Learning support is made as accessible as possible. The course is unique in retaining the course leader role, in order to provide a figurehead who can advise the students and visit the workplace if there are problems. This complements the support of personal tutors, skills support tutor and workplace mentors. During the initial induction session the students are personally introduced to key members of staff, including the faculty librarian.

"Learner support is critical. The Foundation Degree, unlike the HND, develops independent learning and so prepares them well for progress to Honours. Students are being transformed."

The university conducts all assessment, primarily through log-books, portfolios and reflective exercises. They do not assess in the workplace. Rather, the students are given work-based exercises which involves them gathering information from work and using that as discussion material in seminars. For example, they might be asked to research how marketing is carried out in their organisations.

Accredited prior experiential learning (APEL) can grant exemption from all or part of a module. Candidates making APEL claims are asked to assemble a portfolio providing evidence of relevant work. That goes to the head of department and is then considered by an assessment panel.

Importantly, delivery of the programme is underpinned by a Learning Agreement signed at the outset by the student, employer and course leader. The agreement (see page 28) is part of the Employer Handbook for the course. In setting out their respective responsibilities, this makes a clear commitment to the programme from all sides. It is particularly useful in setting the ground rules for the work-based programme, and gets learners 'noticed' within their organisations.

This formal commitment balances the flexibility and innovation which are hallmarks of the university's approach. Considerable effort is made to relate the programme content to each learner's role in their organisation, so that they do 'real' assignments based on their own working environment.

Team meetings to share ideas have been productive. One idea very successfully put into practice has been an assignment where the learners organise an industry forum by inviting employers from different parts of the sector to attend one of their university sessions.

"Things that look pretty on paper often do not work when applied in the real world. You have to be innovative and creative in how you do it, but that does not mean cutting corners."

Recruitment

An awareness day held with the support of SkillsActive and the LSC attracted more than 20 people, including some 'new' employers the university had not previously engaged. The course leader co-ordinates open days for the department and has lead responsibility for employer links. He actively promotes the Foundation Degree to individual employers, building on events and links made through other programmes. He has approached a wide range of organisations in the sector, including football clubs, events and conference organisers, and leisure centres. Where appropriate he approaches individuals within organisations. Potential students may ask him to speak to their employer about the course and make the business case.

The course leader interviews every candidate to gauge their capability and motivation, and does a 'career mapping' for them. In one case a candidate enquiring about a short course was referred and identified as a potential Foundation Degree candidate. After several further contacts he signed up for the course.

Key messages to potential students are that the Foundation Degree is an 'entry' qualification to HE that can be a springboard to Honours and postgraduate qualifications. For employers staff retention is an important motivator.

"It gives us great pleasure to open up opportunities to people in this way."

Tasters have proved to be an effective recruitment tool. Although potential candidates may be experienced and confident in their jobs, they are often daunted at the prospect of higher education. Some promising candidates initially think it is not for them until they see for themselves.

Issues

"It is a heavy workload and some students are coping better than others. We are monitoring the issue closely."

The course team are constantly learning and will adjust the programme in future years in the light of experience. One issue has been the pressure of work felt by students regarding the assignments, and the need to pace the work.

Foundation Degrees are not well known and 'Foundation' is a misleading term. Some university staff are more pro-Foundation Degree than others. This Foundation Degree has benefited not only from the enthusiasm of the course leader, but also the dedication of the entire team.

Case study 3

A professional association perspective

Contact: Kyle Phillpots, Director of Education, Professional Golfers' Association

The internationally recognised expertise of Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) is central to a progression hub to develop progression in the industry for golfing professionals. The project has laid the ground for aspiring professionals, including those completing the new Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence, to progress to the new three-year Foundation Degree in Professional Golf as the principal gateway to PGA membership and professional golfing status. The Foundation Degree, validated by the University of Birmingham, complements an existing Honours Degree and offers progression to the third year of that degree as a Honours top-up.

Background

The new Foundation Degree has its roots in the PGA's long involvement with developing golfing professionals through apprenticeship. The traditional time-serving apprenticeship gradually developed into a more structured two-year, and then three-year programme. In the 1990s a root and branch review led to the development of a three-year diploma programme, accredited by the Open College Network and piloted with LSC support. At the same time the PGA teamed up with the University of Birmingham to develop a unique Honours Degree in Applied Golf Management Studies.

Against a background of continued developments in the industry, the PGA was keen to upgrade the diploma. The hub offered the opportunity to raise the diploma from level 3/4 to a recognised level 5 higher education qualification. It also provided the opportunity for the PGA to work with the Sector Skills Council, SkillsActive, and others on the development of a new Advanced Apprenticeship which would meet the entry requirements of the new Foundation Degree.

From Diploma to Foundation Degree

The Trainee Diploma was already a well established and popular programme, attracting more than 300 students a year from the UK and overseas. It therefore provided a firm foundation for the Foundation Degree that would supersede it.

The PGA already had links with the University of Birmingham through its Honours Degree, so it teamed up with the university again to develop the Foundation Degree. For the university it was an opportunity to develop its first Foundation Degree, with the added advantage of having a ready-made market for the new qualification.

While much of the diploma content has been carried over into the new degree, it has been re-written in a modular way to the university specifications, ensuring that the learning outcomes and assessment procedures are appropriate, with the required supporting infrastructure. Regular contact with the industry and ongoing meetings ensures that the Foundation Degree is meeting the industry's needs. The curriculum covers business management, coaching, sports science, equipment technology, and rules and tournament organisation.

Each subject involves approximately 90 hours of study in each year of training. It is largely a self-study programme delivered through distance learning packages over the three years, supported by a variety of teaching materials. This is complemented by a five-day residential course each year, held at the PGA's Training Academy. Assessment is through assignments and regional examinations at the end of each year.

Most of the distance learning is scheduled between October and the end of March, when golf clubs are less busy. The work-based element is timed for the busy summer season, enabling the trainees to put their learning into practice.

The first Foundation Degree cohort started in 2003. All are work-based learners, a condition of entry being that they must be employed in the industry by a PGA Registered Training Professional. Most learners are in their 20s, with some in their 30s, 40s and older, all supported by a workplace mentor. In addition there is a team of telephone mentors who contact the students every six weeks to check on progress, helping them as necessary over the phone, arranging meetings or seminars or referring to other places they can go for help. Most of the telephone mentors have done the programme themselves and all have received mentor training from the PGA.

Progression from Apprenticeship

As well as developing the Foundation Degree, the PGA worked with SkillsActive to help develop the Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence ASE, contextualised to needs of professional golf players. The association provided input to the technical content and has helped the colleges and other organisations involved to set up their Apprenticeship programmes, which started in 2004. Moreover the association will assume responsibility for the programme's quality assurance, visiting the establishments, looking at the provision, facilities, coaching and playing opportunities, and ensuring they meet the standards.

This close professional involvement in the development and quality of the Apprenticeship promises to make it a firm stepping stone to the PGA Foundation Degree for those wishing to develop a career as golf professionals. Completion of this Apprenticeship will meet the demanding entry criteria of the Foundation Degree, providing the Apprentice is employed by a PGA Professional.

From the Foundation Degree the trainees will then have the opportunity to progress to the Honours top-up, which will be the same as the current third year Honours programme delivered by the university in partnership with the PGA. Two bridging modules have been built into the Foundation Degree curriculum for this purpose. The modules comprise a dissertation outline and an extended essay. The potential for progression from the Apprenticeship to the full-time Honours Degree is also under consideration.

Benefits to the profession and industry

"Feedback so far has been excellent."

The new Foundation Degree and progression route are still being phased in but promise to add significant added value to current arrangements. The Foundation Degree is a higher level qualification than the diploma it is replacing, so standards of practice among golfing professionals will be raised. The quality of the professional workforce will be boosted further by the progression of Advanced Apprentices to the Foundation Degree and professional membership.

Being a nationally recognised HE qualification, the Foundation Degree brings added status to the training programme. One of the concerns about the diploma was its uncertain standing as a qualification, particularly among the parents of budding professionals. Young people who might have been persuaded to go to university and then possibly lost to the profession can now become both graduates and golfing professionals in a single 'learn and earn' HE package.

Foundation Degree graduates will be highly employable because the degree has been designed by the profession to meet the needs of the industry. The PGA believe this gives them a considerable advantage over sports science graduates, whose employment prospects are limited. Degree status also opens wider career opportunities, and the PGA is hopeful that this will bring more women into the profession.

The opportunity to progress to an Honours Degree top-up is a significant further benefit, providing a ladder of opportunity reaching down to school and college, through Apprenticeship to higher education and continuing professional development. The PGA sees the Foundation Degree as part of a process of lifelong learning through the various levels of membership. It believes the initiative will also help employers understand better the PGA's role in developing the profession.

There are financial benefits too. Unlike the diploma, which was subsidised by the association, the Foundation Degree attracts public funding through the Higher Education Funding Council. Trainees also have access to student loans and career development loans. The standard tuition fee is charged, with an additional charge for the residentials, but the cost of these is often met through the strong club tradition of fund-raising to support the development of young professionals.

Future development

The main thrust of development in the coming years will be on distance learning. The PGA aims to introduce more web-based learning as access to broadband technology increases. Learning from good practice in other distance learning packages, the PGA is also working on the learning materials to make them more use-friendly. They aim to make better use of images, for example, and introduce 'stop and learn' devices to break up the text and facilitate learning.

Information sources

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship (LSC mini-site)

www.apprenticeships.org.uk

Apprentices Go Higher (Aimhigher Yorkshire and Humber mini-site)

www.apprenticesgohigher.org

Foundation Degrees

Foundation Degree Forward

www.foundationdegree.org.uk

SkillsActive (Foundation Degree web page)

www.skillsactive.com/promotionlist/businessespromotion/view?searchterm=foundation%20degrees

Funding

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

www.hefce.ac.uk

Learning and Skills Council

www.lsc.gov.uk

European Social Fund

www.esf.gov.uk

Government Policy

Department for Education and Skills

www.dfes.gov.uk

Quality and Regulation

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

www.qaa.ac.uk

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)

www.qca.org.ac

Research/Teaching and Learning

University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC)

www.uvac.ac.uk

Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)

www.lsda.org.uk

Higher Education Academy

www.heacademy.ac.uk

Council of Validating Universities (CVU)

www.cvu.ac.uk

Sector Skills and National Occupational Standards (NOS)

SkillsActive

www.skillsactive.com

Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA)

www.ssda.org.uk

Widening Participation

Action on Access

www.actiononaccess.org

Aimhigher

www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Lifelong Learning Networks

www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/ln

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All downloadable at www.uvac.ac.uk

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An investigation into the purposes, intentions and opportunities facing Advanced Apprentices as perceived by learners, employers and providers of higher education

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UVAC Annual Conference Proceedings, 2002. Published 2004.

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Meeting National Industry and Education Standards, 2003.

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Meeting National Industry and Education Standards, 2003.

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With City & Guilds, 2003.

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A National Higher Education and Employment Bridging Programme, 2003.

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