

From Apprenticeship to Higher Education

A guide to developing work-based progression routes
to higher education for Advanced Apprentices
and other skilled staff and managers

Funded by:



Leading learning and skills

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

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Foreword

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 this guide, 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, many the outcomes of HE progression ‘compacts’ supported by the Learning and Skills Council from 2003 to 2005. We were struck by the innovation, enthusiasm and hard work of the various institutions and partners in the compacts. Detailed case studies from the 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, Sector Skills Councils 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. In addition to this generic guide, we are publishing sector-specific, companion progression guides in electronic format, focused on Information Technology, Active Leisure (sport, recreation, health and fitness), and Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy. These are available as downloads on our website, www.uvac.ac.uk. As mentioned, we are also 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 compacts 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 Sector Skills Councils and the Sector Skills Development Agency
- drawing on the rationale in the relevant SSC Foundation Degree Sector Framework
- 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 the features of:

- Advanced Apprenticeship frameworks
- technical certificates within the Advanced Apprenticeship
- NVQs, particularly at level 3.

Developing HE programmes for work-based learners

This section provides detailed information and guidance on programme development based on experience to date in the SSC/HE progression compacts supported by the Learning and Skills Council. It provides:

- models of progression developed to date
- guidance on curriculum design and content
- guidance on how to 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, and examines admissions procedures. It provides examples of marketing and promotional methods and sets out key messages to underpin publicity, tailored to employers, individuals and type of programme.

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 provision, tutorial support and workplace mentors
- methods of assessment, including the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL).

Funding HE programmes aimed at work-based learners

This section provides guidance on the plurality of funding available to support progression programmes. 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 eight case studies:

- 1 Higher Apprenticeship in Computing and Internet Technology, Yeovil College
- 2 An employer perspective on the Yeovil programme from Aerosystems International
- 3 Foundation Degree in Computer Networking Management, Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT)
- 4 Professional Apprenticeship in Mechanical Engineering, University of Bolton
- 5 Foundation Degree in Hairdressing and Salon Management, University of Derby College, Buxton
- 6 An employer perspective on the University of Derby programme from Stephen Miller Salons
- 7 Foundation Degree in Health-related Exercise and Fitness, Leeds Metropolitan University
- 8 A professional body perspective from the Professional Golfers' Association.

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.

Policy background

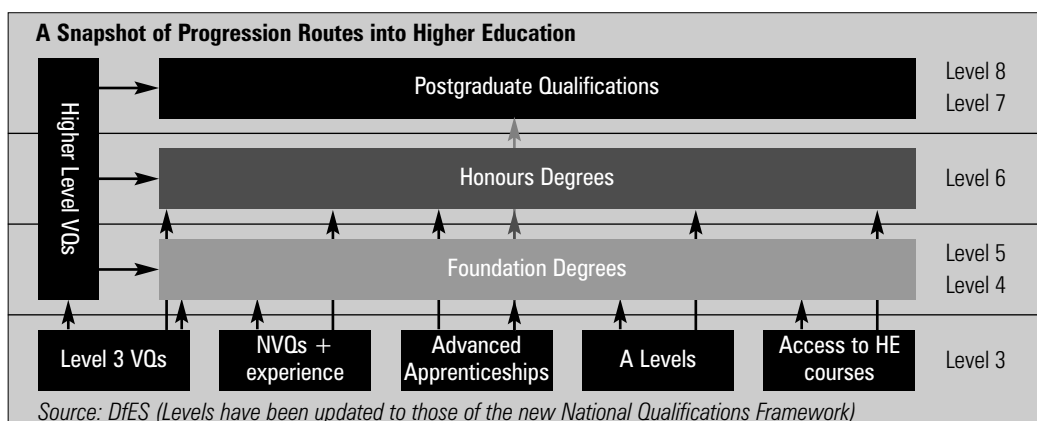
In the late 1990s the National Skills Task Force highlighted the growing need for intermediate technician and associate professional skills, fuelled by the 'knowledge economy'. The new millennium saw the launch of flexible, vocational Foundation Degrees (FDs) to meet this need, provide a ladder to further 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 2001

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 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 HE progression 'compacts' in 2003 to develop Apprenticeship progression routes. The sectors were:

- Active Leisure (sport, recreation, health and fitness)
- Administration
- Automotive
- Early Years
- Engineering
- Hairdressing and Beauty
- Information Technology.

This generic guide and three companion sector-based guides (Information Technology, Active Leisure, and Hairdressing and Beauty) are based largely on the experience of these compacts.

About the guide

The case studies which form the basis of the guide are drawn from the sector-based progression compacts for Active Leisure, Engineering, Hairdressing and Beauty and information technology supported by the respective SSC or other sector body. Publications and correspondence with other bodies, including Aimhigher and Action for Access³, have also helped to inform the development of guidance offered.

Most of 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. However, innovative models of progression developed by some of the compacts significantly broaden the scope. These integrated progression programmes combine Apprenticeship training with higher education, so have different points of entry, including entry straight from school or college. For these learners the programmes offer an *alternative* and potentially more attractive route to higher education than traditional full-time university study. For Apprentices and other employees, by contrast, progression programmes offer an opportunity to undertake higher education that was not previously accessible to them as employees with non-traditional entry qualifications. So while the guide's emphasis is on progression from Apprenticeship and vocational level 3, it also covers other entry points as part of an integrated process of work-based progression to HE.

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 been 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."

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/lln 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

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

The authors are grateful for the time generously given by people interviewed in gathering material for this guide – the staff of Sector Skills Councils, other sector bodies, higher education institutions, further education colleges, training providers and employers. 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.

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

The demand for higher skills

Changing patterns of industrial specialisation have had profound implications for the demand for skills at different levels. Major restructuring of the way that work is organised has resulted in very significant changes in the nature of many jobs within industries. These changes have been influenced by technology and other factors. New manufacturing technologies have led to the loss of many skilled jobs, while the application of information technology has displaced many low-skill jobs in all sectors.

“There is now a critical shortage of technicians qualified at sub-degree level, as employers are required to respond to the rapidly changing technical and business process challenges in industry.”

SEMTA, the Sector Skills Council for science, engineering and manufacturing technologies

On the other hand the new technologies have opened up new opportunities for growth and are fuelling a rising demand for technicians, associate professionals and managers. Figure 1 shows the rapid growth in absolute and employment share percentage terms of managerial, professional, associate professional and technical occupations. By 2012 these high-skill occupations are forecast to outstrip all others.

Sector-specific intelligence

The extent to which these findings are reflected within individual sectors of industry varies, as does the role of higher education in sector workforce development. The engineering sector has a long track record of developing work-based learning beyond level 3, linked to higher level National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), professional accreditation and continuing professional development. By contrast the demand for work-based routes to higher education in the hairdressing and beauty sector, where skills traditionally peaked at level 3, is a recent development. For many sectors management skills are the predominant concern, with a demand for industry-specific management development that is not being met by the plethora of generic management courses. In other sectors high level skills gaps are apparent in technical as well as management areas.

A higher education conference hosted by Habia (the sector skills body for Hairdressing and Beauty) in 2004 generated calls for both management and technical skills. While some delegates wanted a strong bias towards management, others called for more of a balance, pointing out that most salon managers continued to work ‘behind the chair’, and that HE could have an important role in developing the creative talents of managers in the sector.

Figure 1

Employment Levels (000s)	1982	1992	2002	2007	2012
1. Managers and senior officials	2,698	3,336	4,349	4,580	4,934
2. Professional occupations	2,003	2,501	3,305	3,650	4,008
3. Associate professional and technical occupations	2,406	3,023	4,121	4,500	4,895
4. Administrative, clerical and secretarial occupations	3,895	4,205	3,857	3,603	3,434
5. Skilled trades occupations	4,289	3,901	3,341	3,062	2,801
6. Personal service occupations	925	1,310	2,147	2,449	2,894
7. Sales and customer service occupations	1,527	1,784	2,334	2,518	2,732
8. Transport and machine operatives	2,981	2,591	2,473	2,316	2,225
9. Elementary occupations	4,463	3,989	3,409	3,094	2,735
Total	25,186	26,639	29,336	29,772	30,658
Percentage Shares	1982	1992	2002	2007	2012
1. Managers and senior officials	10.7	12.6	14.9	15.4	16.2
2. Professional occupations	8.0	9.4	11.3	12.2	12.9
3. Associate professional and technical occupations	9.6	11.3	14.0	15.1	16.0
4. Administrative, clerical and secretarial occupations	15.5	15.8	13.2	12.2	11.4
5. Skilled trades occupations	17.0	14.6	11.4	10.2	9.1
6. Personal service occupations	3.7	4.9	7.3	8.2	9.4
7. Sales and customer service occupations	6.1	6.7	7.9	8.5	9.0
8. Transport and machine operatives	11.8	9.7	8.4	7.7	7.2
9. Elementary occupations	17.7	15.0	11.6	10.4	8.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Wilson R, Homenidou K, Dickerson A, (2004) *Working Futures: National Report 2003-04*, Institute for Employment Research/SSDA

Sector-specific skills information is produced primarily by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), a list of which, together with other sector bodies and information sources, is provided on page 42. SSCs are employer-led bodies licensed by government to tackle the skills and productivity needs of their respective sectors throughout the UK. They produce a range of sector skills information which, as well as being useful in its own right, is informing the development of Sector Skills Agreements. These set out the demand for skills, the provision needed to meet that demand and the respective responsibilities of stakeholders, including learning providers, in delivering the sector skills agenda. SSCs also develop National Occupational Standards (NOS) and learning frameworks that are very relevant to this guide, including the frameworks for Apprenticeships in their sector.

Sector Skills Councils – collectively known as Skills for Business – are a key source of information and support on matters relating to sector skills needs, Apprenticeship, work-based learning, vocational qualifications and the FE/HE interface.

The Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA, www.ssda.org.uk) which funds and co-ordinates Skills for Business, is a useful first port of call, with a range of sector skills information including downloads of 37 sector reports based on the National Employer Skills Survey of 2003 and an online directory of National Occupational Standards (www.ukstandards.org.uk).

Implications for workforce development beyond level 3

Significantly, the biggest overall growth in employment is in associate professional and technical occupations – roles which require knowledge, skills and qualifications at level 3 and above. Many Advanced Apprentices and other level 3 employees already fill crucially important roles at the intermediate technician level. As skills requirements continue to rise, there will be an increasing need to upskill these employees through higher education and build progression routes for Apprentices in training. While Apprenticeship will remain a valid end-point, the case for work-based progression beyond level 3 is likely to grow in many sectors. The range of sectors involved in the HE progression compacts – engineering, automotive, active leisure, early years, hairdressing and beauty, information technology, administration – is an indication of this.

“(IT Professional) Advanced Apprentices typically undertake systems management or PC maintenance at the threshold of the technician role. The Foundation Degree will develop graduate technicians who can manage large systems and deliver the very high professional skills employers need.”

Manchester College of Arts and Technology

The wider case for progression through benefits to employers and learners is developed in the section on promoting progression programmes (page 17).

3. Target learners

“Starting the Higher Apprenticeship was one of the best choices I have ever made. The skills I have learnt are extremely useful in the workplace and have aided me in becoming a valued employee.”

John Baldock, Advanced Apprentice, REDNET

The call for higher skills is being heeded through the work-based progression compacts⁴. We describe later the variety of progression models already being tested by the compacts. The different points of entry provided by these models make for a wide range of target learners, from school and college leavers to experienced employees with work-based training and qualifications. The first group largely conforms to higher education’s traditional entry profile. The latter group – employees with training and qualifications that may be unfamiliar to HE providers, including Apprenticeship and NVQs – are our focus here.

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College anticipate that candidates for its new Foundation Degree in Therapies and Spa Management might include:

- a senior therapist seeking progression to management
 - a nurse seeking to move into the industry at management level
 - a complementary therapist looking to expand into the spa area
 - a hotel employee needing a knowledge of managing spas
 - a career changer with access to appropriate work experience.
-

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.

Example of an Advanced Apprenticeship framework

The framework for IT Services and Development, England and Wales, comprises:

- **Induction covering workplace employment rights and responsibilities**
- **NVQ level 3, IT Professional**
- **Key Skills:**
 - Communication level 2
 - Application of Number level 2
- **Technical Certificate level 3, IT Practitioner (Software Development or ICT Systems Support), offered by:**
 - OCR (iPro)
 - Edexcel (BTEC National Certificate or Diploma)
 - City and Guilds (e-Equals).

Examples of job roles which match achievement of this Apprenticeship:

- Business Analyst
- Help Desk Operator
- IT Trainer
- Software Developer
- Technical Author
- System Support Technician/Engineer
- Web Designer
- IT Architecture and System Security Technician/Engineer.

⁴ Progression models, page 12.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and technical certificates

NVQs are based on National Occupational Standards (NOS) developed by SSCs or other designated standards-setting bodies. 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.

Example of NVQ Level 3: Hairdressing

Mandatory units

Unit G1	Ensure your own actions reduce risks to health & safety
Unit G6	Promote additional products or services to clients
Unit G9	Provide hairdressing consultation services
Unit H27	Create a variety of looks using a combination of cutting techniques.

PLUS 5 optional units, only one of which may be chosen from Option Group 2. All 5 optional units can be chosen from Group 1 if desired.

Option group 1

Unit H33	Style hair using thermal techniques
Unit H23	Provide hair extension services
Unit H24	Develop and enhance your creative hairdressing skills
Unit H25	Style and dress hair to achieve a variety of creative looks
Unit H26	Style and dress long hair
Unit H28	Provide colour correction services
Unit H29	Perm hair using a variety of techniques
Unit H30	Colour hair using a variety of techniques
Unit H31	Provide correction relaxing services
Unit H35	Create complex styles using African Caribbean styling techniques
Unit H36	Style hair using locking techniques
Unit BT20	Provide Indian head massage treatment.

Option group 2

Unit G10	Support customer service improvements
Unit G11	Contribute to the financial effectiveness of the business
Unit H32	Contribute to the planning and implementation of promotional activities.

Note about the unit numbers:

- G indicates a General unit
- H is a Hairdressing unit
- BT is a Beauty Therapy unit.

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."*

Technical certificates, whose size and range vary across Apprenticeship frameworks, are a relatively new component of Apprenticeships which complement the underpinning knowledge requirements of the NVQ. Importantly the technical certificates are designed to provide a broad platform from which the learner can progress to further qualifications such as a degree.

Other work-based learners

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 compacts 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.

Manchester College of Arts and Technology's Foundation Degree in Computer Networking Management aims "to enable locally based students to undertake higher-level qualifications in a supportive college environment, who otherwise might not have seen higher education as a realistic option."

The part-time degree is aimed particularly at work-based learners, including Advanced Apprentices. According to the prospectus, "offers will normally be made to applicants with appropriate networking experience and the desire and motivation to complete the course." Any qualifications achieved must be accompanied by workplace experience.

⁵ APEL, page 23.

4. Developing HE programmes for work-based learners

Progression models

A range of models has emerged from the LSC-funded progression compacts led by the respective sector bodies. The models, which are branded 'Higher Apprenticeship' or 'Professional Apprenticeship' in some sectors, fall into two categories – those providing 'end-to end' progression from completed Advanced Apprenticeship/NVQ level 3 to HE; and models integrating Apprenticeship training and HE into a condensed, streamlined package. At least two programmes have been accepted as meeting the accreditation requirements of the relevant professional bodies. One incorporates a four-module bridging certificate, designed specifically for Advanced Apprentices, which can be credited towards the achievement of a Foundation Degree. Two others incorporate an NVQ level 4.

The emerging models are as follows:

Entry points vary. Integrated programmes are aimed at school and college leavers as an alternative to full-time university study, and who might otherwise be deterred by the prospect of student debt. The extent to which Advanced Apprenticeship is the entry point of 'end-to-end' models also varies. Most compacts have widened the net beyond Advanced Apprentices to provide progression opportunities to other employees who have the potential to benefit from the programmes. In some cases delivery is integrated with that of other learners, rather than through separate provision.

Despite these variations, the progression models share fundamentally important features. The programmes provide innovative 'learn and earn' pathways which bring significant new groups of learners into higher education. They build on the skills these learners bring to higher education, while addressing any shortfalls that may 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.

PROGRESSION MODELS

1. 'END-TO-END' MODELS:

- Advanced Apprenticeship/NVQ3 → Foundation Degree → Honours top-up
- Advanced Apprenticeship/NVQ3 → NVQ4/Foundation Degree → Honours top-up
- Advanced Apprenticeship/NVQ3 → Bachelors Degree
- Advanced Apprenticeship/NVQ3 → Foundation Degree → Honours top-up → Professional accreditation
- Advanced Apprenticeship/NVQ3 → University Certificate → Foundation Degree → Honours top-up → Professional accreditation

2. INTEGRATED MODELS:

- (GCSE/A Level entry) → Technical Certificate → NVQ3/Foundation Degree/HNC → Honours top-up
- (Relevant A Level entry) → NVQ3/Foundation Degree → Honours top-up
- (Relevant A Level entry) → NVQ3/NVQ4/Foundation Degree → Honours top-up

Examples: (★ = case-studied in this guide)

- ★ University of Derby: Hairdressing and Salon Management
- ★ Manchester College of Arts and Technology/
Open University: Computer Networking Management
- ★ University of Bolton: Mechanical Engineering
Aylesbury Training Group/Bucks Chilterns University
College: Computing
- ★ University of Birmingham/Professional Golfers' Association:
Professional Golf
- ★ Leeds Metropolitan University:
Health-Related Exercise and Fitness
- ★ Yeovil College/University of Bournemouth:
Computing and Internet Technology
- University of Coventry/City College Coventry:
Networking Systems
- ★ University of Bolton: Mechanical Engineering

Curriculum design and content

Technical and management skills

HE progression compact 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 compacts highlight this as a significant success factor, enabling them to develop and launch the programme within a tight timeframe. They also stress the advantage of having previous experience of developing work-based learning programmes, including Graduate Apprenticeships.⁶

e-skills UK are developing a framework for Higher Apprenticeships which will embrace both the IT Professional and IT User strands. The framework will require those new to the industry to complete a relevant NVQ level 3. This will be complemented by level 4 units (National Occupational Standards) which match learning outcomes of the Foundation Degree, particularly in relation to the work-based project. A proposal to award points for each NVQ unit achieved – two points for a level 3 unit and three points for a level 4, with a minimum requirement of 15 points in total – is being considered. Key Skills requirements focus on customer-facing skills – Problem Solving and Working with Others, both at level 3.

The Foundation Degree will be positioned within the draft framework as the Higher Apprenticeship's technical certificate. HNC/D may be an alternative, provided it is supplemented by a work-based project consistent with that of the Foundation Degree and of equal rigour.

Integrated versus entry from level 3

As we have seen, there are two distinct progression models – programmes which integrate components of Advanced Apprenticeship with an HE level 5 qualification, with entry direct from school or college; and 'end-to-end' programmes providing progression routes direct to HE for experienced employees, including Advanced Apprentices.⁷ The model adopted will reflect employer needs, the local employment market and institutional strengths. Where there is an ample supply of Apprentices and other work-based learners at level 3, the end-to-end model will have strong appeal. Employers seeking to develop their Apprentices through HE may be attracted by the advantages of a fully integrated programme, where partnerships exist to support such provision.

"Running the Apprenticeship in conjunction with the Foundation Degree seems like the ideal route for us... It is fantastic to be able to take 16 to 17-year-olds with good grades into the organisation, then in four years' time have them graduate and still working for us, having developed so much. Compare that with graduates straight from university. They will probably have a three-year head start."

Aerosystems International

Foundation Degree SSC sector frameworks

Importantly, the development of Foundation Degrees is also now supported by Foundation Degree sector frameworks developed by Sector Skills Councils. Currently there are frameworks covering IT, retail, the media, land-based industries, apparel, footwear, textiles and construction. A list containing links to the frameworks 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.

Curriculum flexibility and innovation

Sectoral Foundation Degree frameworks stress they are not a set of prescriptive learning outcomes and that curriculum designers have considerable latitude to tailor provision within the parameters of the framework.

The compacts have typically structured their Foundation Degree 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 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.

Innovative features can include mapping in vendor qualifications to Foundation Degree modules and incorporating a full NVQ level 4.

The Foundation Degree curriculum within Manchester College of Arts and Technology's (MANCAT) Higher Apprenticeship consists of 12 units, developed in consultation with the industry, including Cisco and Microsoft. The corporations' most popular vendor qualifications, CCNA and MCSA, both level 3 qualifications, were mapped to seven of the 12 Foundation Degree modules. The curriculum is also mapped to the relevant National Occupational Standards within the new suite of IT User and IT Professional NVQs.

A feature of the University of Bolton's Professional Apprenticeship programme is the incorporation of an NVQ level 4 in Engineering Management. The NVQ units are mapped across the Foundation Degree modules, so that all the knowledge relating the NVQ is embedded in the delivery of the degree.

⁶ see Footnote 1, page 6.

⁷ Progression models, page 12.

Incorporating National Occupational Standards

National Occupational Standards (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 the relevant Sector Skills Council's suite of industry-specific NOS and 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. 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 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.

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.

With integrated programmes the transition should be less of an issue. By definition these programmes should be structured to provide seamless progression. Admission is also likely to be very selective, attracting young people who might otherwise have gone to university in the conventional way.

The progression compacts have been very aware of the need for study skills provision. In some cases time constraints have limited development in this area. Longer development time than one year is likely to be a message emerging from evaluation of the compacts. Some have stressed the benefits of building on existing curricula, taking existing modules and adapting them as necessary, rather than starting from scratch.

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.

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 many sectors. 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.

Progression to mechanical engineering top-up Honours Degrees at the University of Bolton will bring the added benefit of Incorporated Engineer status.

⁸ For more details, see Assessment, page 22. A guide to the use of National Occupational Standards in HE, *Fit for Purpose*, is available from UVAC and downloadable at www.uvac.ac.uk/publications.html

⁹ Learner support, page 21.

Meeting the needs of employment

A prerequisite 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

Sector Skills Councils have a central role in ensuring that learning provision meets the needs of employment in the sector. As we have seen SSCs have a leading role in articulating their sectors' current and future skills needs and the learning required to meet that demand.¹⁰ Sector skills intelligence is informing the development of Sector Skills Agreements – national plans the SSCs are developing and brokering between government, employers and learning providers to take forward their sectors' skills agendas.¹¹ These strategic documents provide an authoritative overview and enable HE curriculum developers to position their courses within the national skills strategy relevant to their vocational area.

As the official standards-setting bodies for their sectors, SSCs are responsible for developing and updating their sectors' National Occupational Standards (NOS) and Apprenticeship frameworks. As we have seen, NOS are key tools for curriculum developers seeking to meet the needs of employment.¹² 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 and continuing professional development.

Direct contact with the relevant SSC at an early stage is strongly recommended. SSCs are committed to supporting HE curriculum development and 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 in the past.

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.

Understanding the regional and local employment market

SSC skills reports include 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 a particular sector is a local LSC priority for workforce development, detailed local sectoral analysis may be available. Institutions can complement this with their own research of local employers and employees. Feedback from existing students can be very revealing and informative in the development of future provision.

"We did some research and found that one of the reasons why the HND wasn't successful was that it was very management-oriented and dry, not taking account of the creativity of the learners. What we wanted [in the Foundation Degree] was a mix, tying a management module with a creative module, so that students have a balance that will maintain their interest."

University of Derby

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. In the IT sector the network of New Technology Institutes (NTIs) benefit from substantial employer involvement and have been effective in generating innovative solutions to meet the IT skills needs of business.

¹⁰ Sector-specific intelligence, page 8.

¹¹ More details are available at www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=813

¹² Incorporating National Occupational Standards, page 14.

Engaging employers in development

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 effective employer engagement in the skills agenda is difficult to achieve. The quest to engage the host of small businesses in a sector is particularly challenging. Happily there is a body of good practice that can help point the way.

Most progression compacts 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.

"A lot of institutions start from the wrong end, devising a Foundation Degree and then find some supportive employers. You've got to start with the need and then develop a course to meet that need. It's about listening and responding, rather than dictating the provision on a take-it-or-leave-it basis."

Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT)

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.

"We are responsive to employer views but you have to be careful. Employers can take a blinkered view. The university has to find the middle ground."

University of Bolton

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 the gap that gap.

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.¹³ In a demand-led system, it also needs to apply to curriculum development. Investing time in individual visits to employers can generate a very positive response and input to the programme. Although the approach is time-consuming, it can be highly effective in engaging employers and ensuring a programme's fitness for purpose.

Some employers may need little persuading. An HE provider may find itself in the fortunate position of 'pushing at an open door' with a major employer who is actively in the market for work-based learning and able to provide a whole cohort of learners. A pilot programme led by a single employer has obvious advantages, and potential pitfalls. While such an employer can expect to have considerable influence on the curriculum, a publicly-funded programme must also serve wider interests. Compromises may need to be struck to ensure the programme's wider fitness for purpose.

Aerosystems International teamed up with Yeovil College to develop a trainee programme spanning Advanced Apprenticeship and a Foundation Degree, with the prospect of further progression to Honours. The company had reservations about an internet module because it had no use for website development skills. A compromise was agreed whereby the module was adapted to accommodate the use of web-based technology, which the company uses in an asset-tracking system.

¹³ Promotion to employers, page 18.

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 potential students at whom a programme is aimed depends on the progression model adopted. Integrated programmes are aimed at school and college leavers, whereas ‘end-to-end’ programmes are seeking to recruit Apprentices and other experienced employees. This latter group, being mature students with vocational qualifications and experience rather than the traditional HE entry profile, are significantly different to the first group, which is more like the large mass of traditional HE applicants.

Whichever model is adopted, the programmes are essentially workforce development products, dependent on the support of employers as much as on the motivation and achievement of the students for their success. Marketing and promotion of these programmes therefore needs to be based on key messages appropriate to each target audience.

Because Foundation Degrees are new qualifications they are not yet widely known among employers and staff. Marketing materials could usefully signpost general information on FDs at Foundation Degree Forward’s site at www.foundationdegree.org.uk, which includes bespoke promotional material for employers and for individuals. Sector-specific information on FDs can be found on SSC websites.¹⁴

Promoting integrated Higher Apprenticeship to school and college leavers

“Young people can see that this is a programme with a degree at the end of it. That is a powerful counter to prejudice against work-based learning.”

Yeovil College

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. Further education colleges delivering these programmes have the added advantage of having potential recruits within their student body.

Being very familiar with this younger target group, institutions will be aware of the influence of parents in students’ HE decisions. ‘Learn and earn’ is a powerful selling point for families deterred by the rising costs

of higher education and resultant debts. A raft of other key messages (listed below) present ‘Higher Apprenticeship’ or ‘Professional Apprenticeship’ as an attractive alternative to full-time higher education away from home. One company sees great advantage in being able to focus its recruitment on a particular course.

“In many ways the programme provides more challenge and opportunity for able young people than full-time university study.”

Aerosystems International

However, despite the benefits and attractive features of the offers, these programmes will take time to become established. The experience of the progression compacts suggests that candidates may be initially slow to come forward. Participating institutions and employers need start their recruitment early, allowing ample lead time for promotional activities to take effect.

Promotion to Apprentices and other work-based learners

“It is difficult to get Apprentices to respond when they have left. The answer is to prepare them for progression while they are still on the Apprenticeship. Afterwards is too late.”

University of Bolton

This group, being non-traditional HE learners, presents other challenges. Course details should be written with employees in mind, conveying key messages 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. NVQ level 3 may be listed but Apprenticeship is rarely mentioned.

Because these are new, unconventional progression routes, institutions need to create demand among employers and employees. This requires a highly proactive, targeted approach is required to attract candidates. One progression compact has produced a flyer aimed at target learners. Another advertised in local newspapers.

want to be unique?
do you work in ICT? Foundation Degree ICT Support

For you as a student:
 - Gain an industry-recognised qualification
 - Earn while you learn
 - Gain work experience
 - Develop your skills and knowledge
 - Gain a professional qualification
 - Gain a degree
 - Gain a job

For you as an employer:
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce

For you as a student:
 - Gain an industry-recognised qualification
 - Earn while you learn
 - Gain work experience
 - Develop your skills and knowledge
 - Gain a professional qualification
 - Gain a degree
 - Gain a job

For you as an employer:
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce
 - Gain a highly motivated and skilled workforce

Build a foundation for a better future
call 0191 490 2246 now

¹⁴ Information sources, page 42.

Colleges delivering Apprenticeship and other vocational programmes are well placed to raise awareness among work-based learners of HE opportunities. They can also take the message directly into workplaces and make presentations to employees. Some compacts stressed the need to promote progression to Apprentices in training.

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?* sets out the course's benefits and features and cites an example of an Advanced Apprentice who is already on the course.

The success of one progression programme has been due largely to an employer actively taking the lead in recruiting learners and piloting the programme. This relieved the college of responsibility for initial recruitment and has enabled the college to plan future phases of the programme, when it will be extended to other companies. In another cases training providers have agreed to source Advanced Apprentices for the programme. Although few Apprentices have joined via this route to date, numbers are expected to increase in future years.

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. The key messages will vary in emphasis according to the type of Higher Apprenticeship being promoted.

To promote its integrated Higher Apprenticeship, Yeovil College is highlighting the relatively low risk and low cost involved, and the ability to develop a young person within the company, rather than the invest in the long learning curve of a new graduate, which has often deterred SMEs from expansion.

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 Higher Apprenticeship have an important role in 'selling' it to their employer. Either way, HE providers are central to the process and need to be proactive in stimulating demand. Only exceptionally, until demand has grown, will institutions have the luxury of employers 'coming to them'.

"If we provide good quality, it will grow by word of mouth, which is always the most effective way of marketing."

Manchester College of Arts and Technology

Awareness-raising events for employers can be very effective, provided they are vigorously followed up by telephone and through meetings. Institutions that successfully build client relationships with employers have cited having enthusiastic staff with industry experience as an important factor, one commending this activity as good staff development.

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.

Integrated Higher Apprenticeship

Key promotional messages

For school and college leavers

- Learn and earn
- Blend of practical and academic learning
- A degree at the end
- Fast-track, challenging programme, providing head start on other graduates
- Skills and qualification in shortage area
- Do not need to move out of the area
- Will not incur student debt
- Support at college and in the workplace
- Permanent employed status from year 2
- Employment in a dynamic industry
- Excellent career prospects in technical and management roles
- Springboard to further achievement, including progression to an Honours Degree (and, often, professional accreditation).

For employers

- Develops highly skilled people more quickly
- 'Catches them early', enabling you infuse students with your culture and mould them to your needs
- Significant cost savings on traditional graduate recruitment
- Relatively low risk
- Motivated, highly skilled employees
- Higher retention of locally sourced employees
- Meets skills gaps, technical and managerial
- Work-based learning – minimum time off the job
- Projects directly related to your business
- You are closely involved in delivery
- Mentor and assessment support from the provider
- Enables you to focus on and influence a particular programme
- Built-in opportunity for further learning through progression to Honours.

"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."

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

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 fully engaging them in a work-based HE programme requires sustained marketing effort.

Progression compacts 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.

'End-to-end' Higher Apprenticeship

Key promotional messages

For work-based learners

- Higher education – you can do it
- Continue to learn and earn
- Advanced Apprenticeship (and NVQ level 3 and other vocational experience) 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 progression to an Honours Degree (and, often, professional accreditation).

For employers

- Flexible, tailored to your needs
- Motivated, highly skilled employees
- Better qualified workforce
- Higher staff retention
- Meets skills gaps, particularly in management
- 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 development through HE.

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.

Application and admission procedures

With 'end-to end' progression models, where institutions are recruiting directly on to a work-based Foundation Degree, the progression compacts have generally cast the recruitment net wide, rather than restrict entry to Apprentices or others with level 3 vocational qualifications. Entry requirements are flexible enough to accommodate applications from learners 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 almost invariably 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.

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.

Before joining the University of Derby College Buxton Hairdressing and Salon Management programme students complete an e-learning module. The university is examining diagnostic approaches that would identify any additional learning the students may need when they start.

Qualifications are more important with integrated progression programmes aimed at school and college leavers. These condensed programmes require a relatively high level of general education achievement, coupled with an aptitude for the subject and desire to pursue this work-based route as an alternative to full-time further and higher education. With this route application will usually be made to the participating employer or programme agent, not UCAS or the HEI, because initial progression is to the FE part of the programme. Applicants are applying for employment as well as a learning programme, so employers have the leading role in selecting candidates with their FE/HE partners.

Aerosystems International's selection process for the integrated Trainee Software Development programme includes the same computer aptitude test used on its graduate recruitment programme. Some school applicants have performed better in the test than IT graduates.

6. Delivering HE programmes to work-based learners

Delivery modes

Duration, attendance and timetabling

Progression programmes for work-based learners are usually delivered part-time. A part-time Foundation Degree is typically a three-year course, but may be 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. Employer pressure to minimise time ‘off the job’ is a common issue and the subject of frequent dialogue with employers. Institutions should be flexible as far as possible but there are limits. The issue highlights the importance of learning agreements (discussed further below) setting out the responsibilities of each partner, including the employer’s responsibility for allowing time off for study.

Integrated programmes typically take four years, with mixed delivery modes. Trainees entering without a technical certificate or proxy normally do that first on a full-time basis, then study a day a week in college when they embark on the Foundation Degree modules.

Work-based learners may be timetabled together with other students for some or all of their college sessions. One college cited ‘in-filling’ as a significant success factor in delivering the programme by ensuring its viability, maximising the use of existing resources and enabling the programme to be launched more quickly than might otherwise have been possible. For the learners there are benefits to mixing with students on related programmes or modes of study, providing their different needs are accommodated. Mature learners, for example, may have a much more focused, work-centred view of their learning than younger students.

“We have tried very hard to make it work-based learning in concept. It is not a re-badged HNC but an attempt to deliver in the workplace and provide real progression.”

Manchester College of Arts and Technology

Work-based learning

Unsurprisingly there is a strong emphasis on 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.

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.

“We are keen to develop the work-based assignments with the students and enable them to work with people in the organisation on these modules. They should be able to fly through the course because of the sort of work they will be exposed to here.”

Aerosystems International

Stephen Miller Salons benefited from a work-based project within one of the Foundation Degree management modules which resulted in a greatly improved appraisal process. Because the company’s quarterly appraisals are linked to staff pay of 50 per cent of takings, the focus the project brought on the performance of staff contributed to increased salon turnovers. The learners’ own externally-moderated appraisals found that they were managing their staff more effectively through improved target-setting.

Distance learning

Delivery through distance learning holds obvious attractions and drawbacks. Where e-learning is the principal mode of delivery, the quality of the e-learning modules is critical (as is learner support, the subject of the next section).

In many institutions Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are playing an increasingly important role in supporting delivery. VLEs are particularly useful in supporting the learning of work-based students who spend much of their time off-campus. They can provide course materials and can provide 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.

Residentials can be very effective in complementing e-learning and other modes of delivery. Although commonly associated with summer schools on campus, residentials can be more ambitious and include travel abroad to international centres of excellence.

Keen to infuse its Foundation Degree students with the international dimension to spa therapy, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College is including at least one residential abroad in its programme. Through Danubius Hotels, which is a member of the compact’s industry group, the university is planning a residential at the internationally-renowned spa in Marienbad in the Czech Republic.

Learning agreements

Delivery can be underpinned by a learning agreement signed at the outset by the student, employer and course leader. The agreement, in setting out their respective responsibilities, 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 below.

Model 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.

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.

With thanks to Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

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.¹⁵ 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.

"They struggled with the first module in terms of the structure they needed and the rigour to deliver an assignment. It is important to prepare people from an FE background so they don't get disillusioned with it."

Stephen Miller Salons

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.

MANCAT's tutorial support has drawn praise from QAA and the OU, the awarding body its work-based Foundation Degree in Computer Networking. The college feels that inducting work-based learners to HE is less of a problem in colleges than universities because its tutors are attuned to the needs of these students and monitor them closely. Support might include varying the timescales for assignments or building in extra support. A further asset is the college's is experienced in delivering NVQs. Work-based learning is a familiar way of working, aided by having a departmental team with relevant industry experience.

¹⁵ Bridging/study skills, page 14.

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.

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 staff 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.

Stephen Miller took on the role of facilitator within his chain of salons for the distance learning Foundation Degree in Hairdressing and Salon Management. With a background in HE, he was able to give his employees crucial support at this stage to help them adjust to the requirements of the programme. Through fortnightly meetings and informal contacts in-between, he helped them to structure their learning and understand the rigour needed to deliver assignments at this level, as well as providing motivational support. As a result, their study skills over six months increased "a hundred fold," and the level of support they needed diminished considerably.

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 sector 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 of telephone mentors to support its widely dispersed students. The mentors 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.

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.

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.

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.¹⁶

Assessment responsibilities

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.

Initially MANCAT tutors will assess the work-based learning of its Higher Apprenticeship programme, with the aim of transferring at least some of the assessment to mentors in the workplace, when mentors are trained and accredited to the standards of the OU, the validating university. Development funding targeted particularly at smaller companies will support this training.

Aerosystems International intend to undertake all work-based assessment for its trainees when the trainees' mentors have completed assessor training from Yeovil College.

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College is considering offering an 80-credit module to employers involved in its Foundation Degree in Therapies and Spa Management to train assessors in the workplace.

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.¹⁷ 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.

The Professional Apprenticeship in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Bolton incorporates an NVQ level 4 in Engineering Management. The short timeframe for such a substantial programme is achieved by mapping the HE modules to the underpinning knowledge requirements of the NVQ, so that they provide evidence for the NVQ acquisition. The two major HE management modules, for example, go a long way towards meeting the knowledge requirements of the NVQ.

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. A relevant HNC, for example, could slash the time taken to complete the Higher Apprenticeship to one year.

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 unitised qualifications system should greatly aid the development of APEL processes.

"We APEL candidates for the course (Hairdressing and Salon Management) with industry experience against the learning outcomes, evidenced by a portfolio of their experience, if we judged them to be able to benefit from the course. Evidence might be a photographic portfolio of creative cutting or a competition entry. Accredited certificated learning might be a Wella training course certificate or Cert. Ed. There is no charge for prior certificated learning. However, a charge of 50 per cent of the module cost (currently £82.50) is made for accrediting prior experiential learning because of the time required to process an APEL claim."

University of Derby College

¹⁶ A forthcoming guide examines the recognition and accreditation of work-based learning in detail: Brennan, L. (2005) Supporting higher education in recognising the value of accrediting work-based learning for the benefit of commerce and individual learners, UVAC/LCCI Commercial Educational Trust

¹⁷ Incorporating National Occupational Standards, page 14.

7. Funding HE programmes aimed at work-based learners

FE and HE funding streams

The Foundation Degree component of progression programmes is funded by HEFCE grants in the usual way through bids for Foundation Degree development and places. The separate funding regimes for FE and HE, however, mean that integrated FE/HE programmes do not benefit from integrated funding. Separate funding bids need to be made – to the local LSC for the NVQ and other Apprenticeship components, and to HEFCE for the Foundation Degree. LSCs will not normally fund beyond NVQ level 3, though discretionary funds may be available if a strong case is made. Particular care needs to be taken in LSC bids to make it clear that HEFCE funding covers only the HE components, in order to avoid concern over potential double-funding.

Gateshead College and the University of Northumbria have achieved a full funding package for the Foundation Degree in ICT Support and NVQ level 4 through HEFCE and the local Learning and Skills Council respectively. The New Technology Institute is funding the tuition fee that would otherwise be charged to employers. The college felt this was an important incentive to offer employers pioneering the programme because of the work involved in establishing it.

Other funding sources

Progression compact funding support from the LSC national office 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. This and other development funding from sources such as New Technology Institute (NTI) partnerships have provided essential 'pump-priming' for the programmes by, for example, 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.

Sustainability beyond the development phase may be 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 above, 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 vendor training. Employers who are Investors in People may be entitled to a substantial discount on these courses.

"Cost is not an issue. We regard the tuition fee that will be charged from 2005 as modest and excellent value for money."

Aerosystems International

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.

"We believe that the integration of vendor qualifications into the Foundation Degree offers a significant opportunity to tap into the vendor training market. By adjusting the delivery to meet the needs of companies, we could deliver vendor qualifications very cost-effectively, with the substantial added value of the Foundation Degree. Such provision could be entirely self-financing."

MANCAT

"There is almost a sense of 'Are we charging enough?' because successful employers are prepared to pay and invest in their staff in order to sustain their success."

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

8. Case studies

Case study 1

Higher Apprenticeship in Computing and Internet Technology, Yeovil College

Contact: David Bernard

This innovative Higher Apprenticeship programme provides fast-track progression through both Advanced Apprenticeship and Foundation Degree. Tailored to the needs of the thriving aerospace industry in the area, the pilot programme is the product of collaboration between Yeovil College and Aerosystems International, an employer of highly skilled software engineers.¹⁸ The Higher Apprenticeship is opening up a new and cost-effective source of high quality recruits for the company, while giving able young people an attractive 'earn and learn' alternative to full-time college and university study.

Background

In 2004, Yeovil College's development of a Foundation Degree in Computing and Internet Technology coincided with Aerosystems International's exploration of Advanced Apprenticeship to complement its graduate software engineer recruitment programme. The college was seeking to develop progression routes to the Foundation Degree validated by Bournemouth University as part of an initiative by the HEFCE-funded New Technology Institute (NTI), a partnership of universities and colleges established to meet the ICT needs of businesses in the area. Among the national partners involved was the Sector Skills Council, e-skills UK, which engaged Yeovil College in the LSC-funded 'compact' programme to develop work-based learning progression routes to higher education which meet the needs of the sector.

Aerosystems International, meanwhile, was seeking to expand on its existing channels of recruitment. Technical recruitment across the organisation has always been successful. However most of these candidates relocate into the area. These incurred additional costs as well as the risk that the candidates would move on. There was a clear opportunity for Aerosystems to tap into the local market and complement its existing graduate recruitment which until this point has been the lowest level of entry.

The Higher Apprenticeship programme

"The 'secret' has been linking existing programmes, plus having Aerosystems International taking the initiative. It is demand-led."

Working together, Yeovil College and Aerosystems International have developed an innovative solution that is more than the sum of its component parts by integrating Apprenticeship and the Foundation

Degree in one condensed programme. The college brands the programme Higher Apprenticeship. For Aerosystems International, whose six recruits make up the first cohort, it is their Trainee Software Developer Programme.

The programme starts with the Advanced Apprenticeship's technical certificate, the BTEC National Certificate (IT Practitioner, Software Development), which provides the essential knowledge element of the Apprenticeship framework and, crucially, a bridge to higher study. Geared to the high ability of trainees enrolled on the programme, it is an intensive one-year course that is normally delivered over two years. A key principle of delivery is that the trainees 'in-fill' existing BTEC provision. The same will apply to the Foundation Degree.

Placements during college holidays develop key skills in the workplace and provide an initial induction into the sponsoring company. After Easter the trainees spend more time in the workplace, providing them with a context for their BTEC projects. By the end of year 1 they may also have embarked on units of the NVQ level 3, another key component of the Apprenticeship framework.

"The BTEC projects towards the end of the first year enable the trainees to blend their studies gently across into work."

Having achieved the BTEC certificate, the trainees embark on the Foundation Degree through study one day a week at the college. The modules cover computer systems, programming, database systems, computational methods, web development, network design and internet applications. The curriculum shares a number of units with a related Foundation Degree in Business Information Technology, giving trainees the potential to take on a management role.

Skills needs research and employer consultations informed the development of the Foundation Degree by Bournemouth University. The curriculum has been mapped to e-skills UK's sector framework for Foundation Degrees.¹⁹ It has a bias towards the aerospace industry, reflecting the importance of that industry in the South West.

The new Apprenticeship framework offers more flexibility and should allow for additional industry areas to be included. The structure adopted for the Apprenticeship means that NVQ units can be selected when the new framework is introduced. This will help ensure the programme meets employer needs.

The college will be training assessors at Aerosystems International to do workplace assessment. Assessors are likely to double as workplace mentors.

The BTEC and NVQ elements are fully funded, with no financial contribution required by the employer. The Foundation Degree carries the standard part-time tuition fee, which will be paid by the employer. Aerosystems International regard this as good value for money.

¹⁸ Profiled in more detail in Case Study 2.

¹⁹ Available at www.e-skills.com/cgi-bin/orad.pl/36/fd_it_frame_270704.pdf.

Recruitment

“The Higher Apprenticeship programme gives an opportunity to bright young people who might otherwise drift into an unsuitable qualification.”

Because the development of the programme was a partnership between Yeovil College and Aerosystems International, who supplied all the first year ‘pilot’ cohort, initial recruitment was led by the employer. The first cohort, ranging from 16 to 20 years of age, are a mixed group in terms of experience with two having done Arts A Levels. Aerosystems International already had links with local schools through a work experience programme. The company’s selection process includes the same computer aptitude test used on the graduate recruitment programme. Interestingly, some school students performed better in the test than IT graduates.

The college is planning to extend the programme to other aerospace companies in the area. In this second phase it is focusing on the bigger employers, key selling points being its engineering expertise and active links with the industry, including Westland Helicopters, as well as the success of the pilot programme. The employers will then recruit trainees through publicity and their links with schools.

The college is promoting the opportunity to both its A Level and vocational students, who include Apprentices. It is also working with Connexions to help raise awareness of the opportunity in schools.

Success factors

“Young people can see that this is a programme with a degree at the end of it. That is a powerful counter to prejudice against work-based learning.”

The initiative taken by Aerosystems International in embracing the programme has been a major factor in its establishment and success to date. This arose not simply by good fortune, but also through the college’s long track record of working with allied companies on the delivery of engineering Apprenticeships.

The college feels that building on existing provision, particularly the existing Foundation Degree, rather than developing a new curriculum from scratch, has been a very successful approach. A similarly pragmatic approach has been taken to delivery, with Higher Apprenticeship trainees ‘in-filling’ existing BTEC and Foundation Degree courses. This is ensuring the viability of the programme, maximising the use of existing resources and is enabling the initiative to be implemented more quickly than might otherwise have been possible.

The integrated progression model has many advantages. Targeting an able, younger age group with the prospect of fast-track progression through Apprenticeship to a degree while earning and without leaving the area are strong selling points. Furthermore, ‘catching them early’ enables participating employers to develop their software engineers and managers quicker, at significantly lower cost and with higher retention rates than traditional graduate recruitment.

Issues

Internally, introducing work-based learning to the computing department has been demanding because Apprenticeships for installation and support services were previously delivered by the engineering department. The college is anticipating funding issues when the programme moves into delivery of the NVQ alongside the Foundation Degree, funded respectively by the LSC and HEFCE.

Externally, a Foundation Degree curriculum issue has highlighted the challenge of balancing specific employer requirements with those of wider interests. Negotiations on an internet applications module revolve around Aerosystems International’s lack of any significant need for web development skills (which are however in demand from other employers). The company is hoping to re-configure the module so that its trainees have the option of focusing on the use of web-based technology, rather than website development.

Future development

The college aims to recruit 12 Higher Apprentices in the second phase by engaging at least two more major employers in the programme. In the third phase the college plans to engage smaller companies, optimistic that the programme will have appeal to this large group of traditionally difficult-to-reach employers. They will be highlighting the relatively low risk involved, low cost and the ability to develop a young person within the company, rather than investing in the long learning curve of a new graduate, which has often deterred SMEs from expansion.

A future challenge is likely to be accrediting the prior achievements of the able school-leavers they aim to attract, for example those with A Levels in IT or Maths. The college hopes that sector skills frameworks and the national development of the Framework for Achievement will provide a credit structure framework that will facilitate APEL procedures and enable trainees to fast-track through the programme, particularly the Apprenticeship technical certificate.

The department also aims to revive the Advanced Apprenticeship programme in its own right, with the opportunity to progress to the Foundation Degree through bridging provision.

Case study 2

Aerosystems International

Contact: Andy Margrett, HR Manager, Aerosystems International

Aerosystems International, a significant employer in the Yeovil area, have teamed up with Yeovil College to develop a trainee programme spanning Advanced Apprenticeship and a Foundation Degree,²⁰ with the prospect of further progression to Honours. The first cohort of six Trainee Software Developers started in September 2004.

Background

As an aerospace software company developing control systems for military aircraft, Aerosystems in Yeovil employs highly skilled people and has a need for all round software engineering skills. Traditionally the key software development and allied management roles have been filled through graduate recruitment.

While the company continues to recruit new graduates, it has also been attracted by the benefits of Advanced Apprenticeship. Its approach to Yeovil College in 2004 to develop an Apprenticeship scheme coincided with the college's development of a relevant Foundation Degree as a progression route for work-based learners. A proposal to integrate the two in a fast-track programme incorporating both the Apprenticeship framework and the Foundation Degree was welcomed by the company. The first cohort of six Trainee Software Developers sponsored by Aerosystems International started the programme (described in more detail in Case Study 1) in September 2004.

"Running the Apprenticeship in conjunction with the Foundation Degree seems like the ideal route for us."

Positioning the programme within the company

During the first year, when they study for the BTEC National Certificate (a two-year course condensed into one), the trainees receive a termly allowance and pay for work with the company during half-terms and vacations. After achieving that qualification, which is the Apprenticeship technical certificate, the trainees become permanent members of staff, working four days in the company and one in college.

After the first year the trainees go straight on to work-based projects, doing the core activities of a software engineer, albeit with lesser skills. They work in a testing environment initially, "working things backwards", before widening their experience to coding and developing.

The company currently brands the scheme the Trainee Software Developer programme, in preference to a variation of the Apprenticeship brand. It wanted to make a distinction between this programme and the "shop-floor" Apprenticeships of another major employer in the area.

The company's web page advertising the Trainee Software Developer programme is at www.aeroint.com/aboutus/trainee.html. It includes the opportunity to progress from the Foundation Degree to an Honours degree top-up.

Delivering the programme

The company expects to be a very fertile environment for the trainees' FD assignments. This is because the nature of work they will be exposed to – safety-critical software – is very structured and well-documented.

"We are keen to develop the work-based assignments with the students and enable them to work with people in the organisation on these modules. They should be able to fly through the course because of the sort of work they will be exposed to here."

The NVQ will be assessed in the company, initially with college support. The plan is that the company will eventually have its own assessors. They will use college assessors until company people are trained to perform that role.

Benefits to the business

"It is fantastic for us to be able to take 16 to 17-year-olds with good grades into the organisation, then in four years' time have them graduate and still working for us, having developed so much. Compare that with graduates straight from university. They will probably have a three-year head start."

Although the programme is still in its first year, the company can already point to tangible benefits. Skills shortages are a serious issue for high-tech businesses. The Trainee Software Developer programme is enabling the company to meet shortfalls in its traditional recruitment by tapping into a new, younger age group. Whereas the vast majority of new recruits, both new graduate and experienced, are from outside the area, the company is now able to recruit locally. Given the high cost of engineering recruitment at £5-6,000 per appointment, and the high retention rate of local employees, local recruitment is very cost-effective. An added bonus has been the recruitment of a female Trainee Software Developer as part of the first cohort. In an industry that is male dominated this has been an excellent development, suggesting that local recruitment will also help to deliver a more diverse workforce.

Costs are particularly low with the first cohort because, as a pilot programme, it is fully funded. The company regards the HE tuition fee that will be charged from 2005 as modest and excellent value for money.

Another major benefit for Aerosystems International is the focus on work-based learning. This will ensure that the trainees are infused with the company's culture from the start and moulded to its way of working. They expect retention to be high. Graduates from the programme will be able to pursue technical or management routes, depending on where their strengths lie.

²⁰ Profiled from the HEI perspective in Case Study 1.

Recruitment

The programme has enabled the company to focus attention for the first time on a particular course. It values this as an important recruitment tool.

The company approached the local colleges and schools to promote the new career opportunity, and advertised in the local press. They are active in supporting work experience and are currently working to develop relationships with the schools that will allow them to promote the programme to students in Year 10. In the future they see no change in the numbers of trainees they will need to recruit.

Issues

Despite the attractions of the scheme, recruitment of the first cohort was challenging. To recruit the second cohort the company started publicising the scheme in schools much earlier, with the aim of generating more applications. They feel there is much to learn about promoting the opportunity to 16 and 17-year-olds.

Potential tension between the specific needs of the company and the broader remit of publicly-funded higher education is highlighted in a curriculum issue that has yet to be resolved. The company has reservations about the relevance of an internet module. They want the course to be software-biased, because internet applications focused on website design are not relevant to them. A module about the use of internet technology would be less of an issue, because the company uses web-based technology, for example in an asset-tracking system to log all parts of an aircraft. The college is in negotiation with the validating university.

"Sometimes the speed at which things are done is different – industry wants to work quicker. The college is trying to push the pace with the university."

Conclusion

Aerosystems International are delighted with the programme to date. They judge a key success factor to be the application of high entry criteria and selection of trainees who are "all high-flyers with merits and distinctions." They are young people with the ability to go to university but for whom debt is a major issue. 'Learning and earning' is a big attraction, not least to their parents, who are a major influence.

The company stresses the rigour and academic challenge of the programme, the condensed one-year BTEC National course leading straight into the NVQ level 3 and Foundation Degree. In many ways it provides more challenge and opportunity for able young people than full-time university study.

"The trainees are doing incredibly well and the concept is fantastic. It is an interesting relationship we have with the college, who are keen to try and tap into industry."

Case study 3

Progression to Foundation Degree in Computer Networking Management, Manchester College of Arts and Technology

Course contact: Allan Southworth

This Foundation Degree delivered by Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT) is specifically designed around work-based learning and National Occupational Standards, with a sharp focus on flexibly meeting the needs of the industry. Advanced Apprentices are a key target group. A notably innovative feature of the curriculum is the incorporation of Cisco and Microsoft vendor qualifications.

Background

MANCAT wished to complement its 'conventional' full-time Foundation Degree in Enterprise Computing, validated by Manchester Metropolitan University, with a degree aimed at experienced work-based learners, including Advanced Apprentices. The college has considerable experience of delivering Apprenticeships in partnership with the training provider IT Base/Skills Solution, a subsidiary of the economic development agency Manchester Enterprises.

Manchester has a good reputation for innovation through multi-agency partnerships. MANCAT and IT Base/Skills Solution are among the lead partners of Manchester New Technology Institute (NTI), one of the national network of NTIs established to meet the IT skills needs of business. The development of MANCAT's new part-time Foundation Degree in Computer Network Management, validated by the Open University, was spurred by that partnership.

Target learners

"We have deliberately taken an unconventional approach with this degree. Nothing will ever change if we take only people with A Levels."

The programme's specification includes as one of its aims "to enable locally based students to undertake higher-level qualifications in a supportive college environment, who otherwise might not have seen higher education as a realistic option." The part-time degree is aimed particularly at work-based learners, including Advanced Apprentices. According to the prospectus, "offers will normally be made to applicants with appropriate networking experience and the desire and motivation to complete the course." Any qualifications achieved must be accompanied by workplace experience.

Although the course is not designed exclusively for Advanced Apprentices, the college has an agreement with IT Base/Skills Solution, a large provider of Apprenticeship training, that the Foundation Degree is a recognised progression route for those Apprentices wishing to progress to HE. Skills Solution are marketing the initiative as the Enhanced 18 Plus Programme. Although the number of Apprentices coming through this route is currently low, the college expects the volume to grow as the route becomes known and established.

The curriculum

"We have tried very hard to make it work-based learning in concept. It is not a re-badged HNC but an attempt to deliver in the workplace and provide real progression."

Progression for work-based learners is aided by the programme's strong practical dimension and emphasis on producing skilled, work-ready graduates through these aims:

- to develop practical skills in network installation, design, implementation and testing, and in the use of network operating systems and software;
- to produce graduates who are highly relevant to the needs of industry by maintaining an ongoing employer involvement in the design and delivery of the course
- to enable students to make an immediate contribution in employment by combining academic and vocational practical skills.²¹

"Both Cisco and Microsoft recognise the Foundation Degree as meeting the requirements of their CCNA and MCSA vendor qualifications."

The curriculum consists of 12 units, developed in consultation with the industry. Research published by e-skills UK provided base information on the skills gaps the degree might fill. Other consultation included Cisco and Microsoft, whose most popular vendor qualifications, CCNA and MCSA, both level 3 qualifications, were mapped and built into the Foundation Degree curriculum. Seven of the 12 units map against either Cisco or Microsoft modules. For example, the Internet Technology module conforms to Cisco CCNA Semester 2, while the Network Software module corresponds to the Microsoft MCSA modules 2272 & 2273. The curriculum was also mapped to the relevant National Occupational Standards within the new suite of IT User and IT Professional NVQs.

The draft curriculum was then put out for further consultation – initially mainly to the larger companies, but SMEs increasingly showed interest. Collectively the industry rejected only two proposed units, on Visual Basic and databases. In their place they wanted more 'soft' skills, including communication and working with others. These were duly incorporated into the curriculum, whose units and correspondence to the vendor qualifications are summarised in Appendix 1.

"A lot of institutions start from the wrong end, devising a Foundation Degree and then find some supportive employers. You've got to start with the need and then develop a course to meet that need. It's about listening and responding, rather than dictating the provision on a take-it-or-leave-it basis."

Delivery

The part-time degree is delivered over three years. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), however, should enable the college to reduce that for candidates relevant experience or qualifications. To avoid the burden to employers of day release, learners attend the college one afternoon and evening week.

The college continues to seek ways of delivering the course to employees with minimum absence from work. E-learning through a

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) helps to achieve this. A critical component of this provision is the supporting study material. Development funding is enabling the college to develop these materials and lighten the tutors' workload.

MANCAT's tutorial support for students has drawn praise from QAA and the OU, the awarding body. The college feels that inducting work-based learners to HE is less of a problem in colleges than universities because its tutors are attuned to the needs of these students and monitor them closely. Support might include varying the timescales for assignments or building in extra support. A further asset is the college's experience in delivering NVQs. Work-based learning is a familiar way of working, aided by having a departmental team with relevant industry experience.

Initially the tutors will assess work-based learning, with the aim of transferring at least some of the assessment to mentors in the workplace, when mentors are trained and accredited to the standards of the OU, the validating university. Development funding targeted particularly at smaller companies will support this training.

"Although HE, being largely knowledge-based, is a new experience for these learners, there is a lot of synergy with competence-based assessment. We have designed the Foundation Degree to ensure they don't fall off."

APEL will apply in a focused way. Students who have already achieved a relevant vendor qualification, for example, will have probably already covered a substantial amount of the unit content. Such candidates will be easy to accredit because of the close mapping of units to the Cisco and Microsoft vendor qualifications.

"APEL saves them from going over old ground."

Recruitment

Promotion targets both employers and individuals. Despite the speed with which it was done in the first year, with reliance on conventional marketing techniques – brochures, advertisements etc. – the college recruited well from a diverse pool of candidates.

However, given the current difficult recruitment market in IT, the college does not underestimate the challenge ahead. Its marketing department has limited resources and cannot be expected to focus on this one programme. The department has therefore determined to spearhead its own drive to engage more effectively with employers. It is training tutors to embrace this marketing role by regularly visiting companies, working with them and assisting them. This was also good development for the staff.

"If we provide good quality, it will grow by word of mouth, which is always the most effective way of marketing."

The college also targets individuals, such as students on computing courses or access courses, but emphasis is on employers experiencing skills gaps. Advanced Apprentices typically undertake systems management or PC maintenance at the threshold of the technician role. The Foundation Degree will develop graduate technicians who can manage large systems and deliver the very high professional skills employers need. This will be a key selling point in future recruitment.

²¹ Programme Specification for Foundation Degree in Computer Network Management, MANCAT, April 2004.

All admissions processes are standard. In 2004 they carried out an initial assessment for the first time of basic numeracy and literacy. This revealed major weaknesses, including dyslexia, among Apprentices.

Issues

Minimising time spent off the job was a challenge, with some employers reluctant to release employees for an afternoon. The college is considering other options but it is a difficult issue. They are in constant dialogue with employers. Employer engagement generally is challenging.

Developing the Foundation Degree and recruiting in one year has been both stimulating and exhausting. The college would have liked to have started engaging the companies much earlier.

While it is accepted good practice that institutions should not 'push' companies from the academic perspective but rather 'pull', stimulating as much demand as possible, this is not necessarily borne out in practice. Many employers are not clear about what they want. Despite the popularity of vendor qualifications, some employers were initially hostile to the links with Cisco and Microsoft. Reassurance that the curriculum was not biased towards any vendor addressed the objections and underlined the importance of communicating effectively.

On the dyslexia issue, while additional LSC funds were available to support level 3 students with this learning difficulty, this was not the case with HE. This mitigated against the progression of these learners, a significant number of whom, new college data shows, are Apprentices.

Future development

The curriculum will be mapped to the new SSC framework for Foundation Degrees. Overt mapping of units to the relevant National Occupational Standards is another priority. These measures will further enhance the degree's standing and fitness for purpose.

Although the course attracts normal HEFCE funding, with the prospect of very limited LSC funding, the college is proactive in seeking additional and alternative funding from the private sector. They believe that the integration of vendor qualifications into the Foundation Degree offers a significant opportunity to tap into the vendor training market. By adjusting the delivery to meet the needs of companies, the college could deliver vendor qualifications very cost-effectively, with the substantial added value of the Foundation Degree. Such provision could be entirely self-financing

"Companies pay more to send their employees on the vendor courses because the mode of delivery suits them. We have to ensure our delivery is flexible enough to match the companies' needs in a demand-led way."

Case study 4

Professional Apprenticeship in Mechanical Engineering, University of Bolton

Contact: Mike Lomas

This sophisticated progression model in the engineering sector produces Foundation Degree graduates with fully assessed NVQ competencies up to and including level 4, as well as the Apprenticeship grounding. Central to the programme is the mapping of NVQ units to the HE modules, so that work produced on the Foundation Degree can serve as evidence for the NVQ. The programme is flexibly structured to allow a variety of entry points supported by appropriate bridging provision.

Background

This progression compact based at the University of Bolton was established in 2003 with the support of SEMTA, the Sector Skills Council for science, engineering and manufacturing technologies, against a background of critical shortages in the engineering industry. In its rationale for the compact initiative, SEMTA said: "It has become clear that a more highly skilled UK workforce is essential if we are to remain internationally competitive... There is now a critical shortage of technicians qualified at sub-degree level, as employers are required to respond to the rapidly changing technical and business process challenges in industry."²²

SEMTA identified a significant issue with respect to those studying engineering on full-time HE courses, since destination data suggested that only 37 per cent of engineering graduates went to enter the industry. On the other hand part-time learners engaged in a company-supported higher apprenticeship scheme would not only derive considerable benefits themselves but would also be much more likely to remain in the engineering sector. To facilitate this SEMTA proposed a programme of study which:

- combined an engineering Foundation Degree with the relevant NVQ up to level 4
- met the need to develop high grade technical staff by using the work-related learning taking place within the Foundation Degree and integrating this with the skills acquired through the vocational NVQ element
- provided progression opportunities for Advanced Apprentices and other vocational learners, so that their movement into HE study was facilitated and positively encouraged.

The Professional Apprenticeship programme

The resulting programme, branded Professional Apprenticeship, is set out overleaf. It is a flexible, carefully structured menu of part-time learning incorporating:

- a practical skills module as a short intensive course providing progression to the NVQ level 3 component and removing the need to gain an NVQ level 2 in engineering
- an NVQ level 3 in Engineering Technical Support, Engineering Production or Engineering Maintenance
- a Foundation Degree in Mechanical Engineering
- an NVQ level 4 in Engineering Management.

²² EMTA (2003) AMA/HE Compact – A new pathway for engineering AMAs to Foundation Degree.

Engineering Professional Apprenticeship, University of Bolton

Year	Entry Point					
	18+ Inappropriate A-level		18+ 6 unit award in Science/Maths		18+ Advanced Apprenticeship	
	NVQ	HE	NVQ	HE	NVQ	HE
1		Balancing HE Study		Fnd Deg 20 FE credits 60 H1 credits		Fnd Deg 80 H1 credits
2		Fnd Deg 20 FE credits 60 H1 credits	NVQ 3 + Key Skills 3	Fnd Deg 40 H1 credits 40 H2 credits	NVQ 4 + Key Skills 4	Fnd Deg 20 H1 credits 60 H2 credits
3	NVQ 3 + Key Skills 3	Fnd Deg 40 H1 credits 40 H2 credits		Fnd Deg 80 H2 credits		60 H2 credits
4		Fnd Deg 80 H2 credits		Bridging Studies 20 H2 credits		BSc/BEng 80 H3 credits
5		Bridging Studies 20 H2 credits	NVQ 4 + Key Skills 4	BSc/BEng 80 H3 credits		BSc/BEng 40 H3 credits
6	NVQ 4 + Key Skills 4	BSc/BEng 80 H3 credits		BSc/BEng 40 H3 credits		
		BSc/BEng 40 H3 credits				

Fitness for purpose

The university sits on various groups where the industry is represented, but it finds that the most effective way to consult is directly with employers, face to face. Development funding enabled the university to go out to employers and gauge the extent to which the course met their needs. Although overall employers were content with how the course was developing, one large employer, Christie's, the cancer specialist hospital, needs tuition in electronics, which is not provided for in the current programme. Aware that many of its local employers want people to be multi-skilled, with both mechanical and electronic skills, the university is responding by seeking to re-validate the Foundation Degree programme with a broader curriculum incorporating electronics-based modules. At the same time they are developing a mechatronics top-up Honours programme which will provide a better fit to the newly-designed Foundation Degree and offer progression to Honours without the need for bridging studies.

"We are responsive to employer views but you have to be careful. Employers can take a blinkered view. The university has to find the middle ground."

Through SEMTA the university is in negotiation with the Institute of Incorporated Engineers to confirm that the Honours top-ups will meet the criteria for Incorporated status. Accreditation of the programme from the University Vocational Awards Council is also being sought.

Target learners

The programme has three level 3 entry points for employees at 18+:

- Advanced Apprentices
- Employees with A/AS Levels including a 6-unit award in science or maths
- Employees with other A/AS Levels.

The first cohort of eight students are well qualified, with BTEC National Certificates or A Levels and in two cases an HNC. Although no Advanced Apprentices were recruited in the first cohort, they are prime target for the programme. Advanced Apprentices, who will already have achieved the industry NVQ level 3 component and relevant technical certificate as part of their Apprenticeship framework, will usually progress straight to the Foundation Degree and NVQ level 4. They will not only fast-track through the programme in less than three years but also, because of the advanced standing afforded by their Apprenticeship training, have time complete in year 3 the bridging studies programme required for progression to an Honours Degree. Apprentices will thus typically achieve the programme with Honours in four and a half years.

The students are already middle technicians. A number of employers have aspirations for them to top up with an Honours Degree in order to progress them into middle management.

"Our degree should be well suited to Apprenticeship progression because it has a style of learning that is not at too great an odds with what Apprentices are used to."

Delivery

The programme is delivered in partnership with Tameside College and Skills Solution. The university and the college share delivery of the Foundation Degree modules through attendance of the students one day a week, while the training provider delivers the NVQs. The short timeframe for such a substantial programme is achieved, crucially, by mapping the HE modules to the underpinning knowledge requirements of the level 3 and level 4 NVQs, so that they provide evidence for the NVQ acquisition. The two major HE management modules, for example, go a long way towards meeting the requirements of the NVQ level 4.

In all about 30 per cent of the programme is assessed in the workplace through assignments, projects or exercises. For the college-based modules there are practical exercises as well as 'open book' and 'closed book' examinations, so there is a blend of assessment methods.

The delivery partners work closely together to make the assessment as streamlined as possible. Skills Solution keep abreast of the in-college assessments, so that they can ask to view assignments that map across to the NVQs and can be incorporated into the NVQ portfolios. The university is keen to avoid dual assessment which would be a great burden on the students.

"Although on paper it looks as though they are coming into college in a fairly traditional way, apart from perhaps the project module where they would only be coming in to liaise with their supervisor, they actually undertaking assignment tasks within the workplace in a number of the modules, including for example the science module."

Because the intake is highly qualified, the university has been able in two cases to give exemption to some of the science and maths modules. They are filling the gap for these students with electronics modules undertaken in another university department, for which the employer, Christie's, allows them an extra half day a week.

Accrediting prior experiential learning (APEL) is more difficult. The university's policy is to recognise experiential learning by working with the individual to develop the necessary portfolio of evidence (showing currency, relevance etc.) that will provide direct course credit. A charge may be made for this. They are careful to verify students' claims and may require them to do a test. One candidate with only A Levels had worked at such a level in the workplace he was able to demonstrate that additional learning had been acquired equivalent to first year degree understanding in the subject.

Learners are supported by a cohort tutor as well as module tutors. Workplace mentors are being appointed to coincide with the introduction of the NVQ. Mentors will not only help facilitate the NVQ but also the work-based assessments on the course. They will not carry out assessments but will ensure that the students have access to the necessary materials and so on for their assignments. Study skills, including IT, are built into an initial HE module to help students make the transition to HE and support their personal development plan.

The local LSC are funding the NVQ level 3 and have agreed on outline to support the NVQ level 4; Skills Solution are responsible for these funding bids, as the funding goes direct to them. They also have co-funding from the European Social Fund which allows them to provide fee remission to employers, at least for the first three years of the course. Module costs will otherwise be chargeable, currently at £190 each, with up to four modules studied each year.

Recruitment

Skills Solution was largely responsible for marketing the initial concept, not least because of the pressures on the university to validate and launch the programme in one year. In the future the university would like to get more actively involved in the marketing and promotion. It has already forged a relationship with Bolton West, a partnership of a training provider, Alliance Learning, two high schools and Bolton FE college. One of the high schools has technology college status and is considering running a GCSE engineering course. The university has worked with a small group to devise a progression route for their young people, especially those who have achieved the Advanced Apprenticeship award.

With Skills Solution the university has developed sets of marketing information for the target audiences. They have run a number of activities to engage employers, often under the auspices of AimHigher. A recent event targeted young people who might already be on full or part-time courses in colleges. Incorporating electronics should give the programme wider appeal and help future recruitment.

Aiming for future cohorts of 15 or 16, the university is keen to promote all progression routes, particularly from Advanced Apprenticeships, and are working with Skills Solution and Alliance Learning on this. One externally funded project aims to raise the aspirations of Apprentices and awareness of progression opportunities among employers and parents. They have followed up Apprentices after they leave Alliance Learning with a questionnaire to establish their interest in HE study and with the inclusion of inducements to encourage response.

“Students benefit by:

- *being able to ‘earn and learn’ and so avoid the accumulation of large financial debt during their studies*
- *being able to bring practice-based experience to their theoretical studies, enabling them to contextualise and apply the learning more effectively, frequently reflected in the grading of the final qualification*
- *continuing to develop their career whilst learning, so that their studies contribute immediately to CPD and career enhancement.*

Employers benefit by:

- *the opportunities provided to link issues, problems and investigations at work to ‘live’ student projects, enlisting the support and expertise from academic tutors, but without incurring consultancy cost*
- *having access to government financial support and European training grants which make the education and development of their employees more cost effective*
- *targeting the development of committed, motivated employees, who are able to make immediate significant contributions to business effectiveness.”*

University of Bolton/Tameside College (2004) Employer briefing on Professional Apprenticeship

Issues

They are concerned that they should increase the cohort numbers to ensure future viability. Alliance Learning feel that aspirations among Apprentices are too low. It has also been difficult to engage employers; attendance at events has been poor. The university will adopt a more proactive, face-to-face approach with future recruitment. The large number of SMEs within the region is a particular challenge.

Despite taking soundings with employers, the university had failed to recognise the need for a broader-based engineering Foundation Degree, incorporating both electronic and mechanical elements. If they had that level of intelligence from the outset they would have developed a different programme, but this is now being remedied.

“It’s a hard sell. It is difficult to get Apprentices to respond when they have left. The answer is to prepare them for progression while they are still on the Apprenticeship. Afterwards is too late.”

In addition, there is an issue with the Advanced Apprenticeship frameworks in terms of their adequacy for HE entry. Candidates who have done an Apprenticeship with a BTEC National as the technical certificate, where the maths content is significant, should make the transition without problems. Others without that level of maths are likely to struggle. For this reason the university is keen to develop a part-time access route (‘balancing study’) so that these candidates can do that bridging course when they embark on the programme. They are currently validating such a course.

Success factors

The university stressed the importance of having a good partner – in their case the training provider, Skills Solution. This partnership was key to making the programme work by integrating the delivery of the NVQ and the Foundation Degree.

“The programme works because we don’t pay lip service to work-based assessment, tagging it on as an afterthought as some Foundation Degrees, especially re-badged HNDs have done. By embedding work-based assessment in the HE modules, students are able to accumulate a body of evidence that meets the requirements of the NVQ without the burden of dual assessment.”

Case study 5

Progression to Foundation Degree in Hairdressing and Salon Management, University of Derby College, Buxton

Contact: Sarah Rawlinson

This Foundation Degree in Hairdressing and Salon Management aims to develop managerial, technical and business skills of those currently working in the hairdressing industry and provide progression routes into higher education. The part-time route, currently in its third cohort, is attracting experienced hairdressers, most of whom have completed the Advanced Apprenticeship or the Hairdressing NVQ level 3. The three-year course, launched in September 2003, is delivered primarily by e-learning, with learners located across the UK from Cornwall to the Shetland Islands.

Background

When the college offered the HNC programme to employees, it quickly exhausted the local market. Yet the Sector Workforce Development Plan by Habia, the standards-setting body for the industry, identified a significant lack of management skills in both salons and amongst freelance businesses as a major deterrent to business expansion and retention of staff. This came at a time when many hairdressing businesses were seeking to expand into high quality services such as spa treatments and holistic health. With the industry training norm rising from level 2 to level 3, there was a nationwide latent demand for opportunities to develop beyond level 3 through progression to higher education levels of achievement. The University of Derby developed this part-time, distance-learning Foundation Degree to meet that need.

The curriculum

The curriculum provides a balance of managerial and technical skills. It is designed to build on the existing experience of hairdressers, particularly at level 4, in order that learners gain confidence by researching subjects that are both familiar (for example, perming, colouring, creative cutting) and of practical use in the workplace, alongside more theoretical management subjects such as marketing and human resource management. This balance aims to meet the industry's needs and enable learners with different learning styles to succeed.

Curriculum development

The curriculum was developed to meet the industry's higher level skills needs and continues to evolve in response to feedback from employers and learners. Habia provided input in person and through its Sector Workforce Development Plan. The developers included staff with considerable knowledge and experience of Apprenticeship.

"Engaging the employers wasn't the problem; the challenge was managing their diverse interests on the industry forum."

Employers have been involved through an Industry Forum and through informal employer contact. Employer input has influenced the content so that it now includes a finance module. Discussions continue on a

module relating to competition work, which at least one employer would like to re-focus as a commercial brief.

"There is still debate about the curriculum and a significant division of opinion between those that think it should be purely management and not things like creative cutting and perming etc. We did some research and found that one of the reasons why the HND wasn't successful was that it was very management-oriented and dry, not taking account of the creativity of the learners. What we wanted was a mix, tying a management module with a creative module, so that the learner has a balance and mix that will maintain their interest. We are looking at areas such as the historical development of hair design, how they can put together a good photo-shoot etc. So it is diverse, not just marketing, finance, HR, leadership etc."

Feedback from learners stressed the need for a more diverse programme than a focus purely on management skills advocated by some employers. They argued for the inclusion of other skills and knowledge useful to the hairdresser such as reflection, design and technical skills development.

Links have been made with company training and development programmes such as Wella. These have been mapped against the learning outcomes of the Foundation Degree and APL is offered where appropriate.

Learners successfully completing the Foundation Degree may progress to the University of Derby's BA (Hons) Degree in Hairdressing Salon Management (subject to validation). Learners are required to complete the Research Methods module available at Stage 2 for progression to the BA programme.

Delivery

The part-time programme is tailored to the needs of work-based learners. Students study via e-learning, supported by workplace mentors and academic tutors. The programme provides opportunities for workplace assessment for practical modules. The assessment strategy offers a variety of assessment methods which include portfolios, report writing, examination and AP(E)L.

"We APEL candidates with industry experience against the learning outcomes, evidenced by a portfolio of their experience, if we judged them to be able to benefit from the course. Evidence might be a photographic portfolio of creative cutting, or a competition entry. Accredited certificated learning might be a Wella training course certificate or Cert. Ed."

This blended delivery model builds on work-based learning with which the industry is familiar. The aim is to develop a network of FE colleges who will work in collaboration with the university to provide additional support which is local to the learner. A successful bid for ESF funding accelerated the programme's launch before this network was in place, so this is a current priority in improving delivery of the programme.

"Some learners do need somebody local to keep them motivated."

Both learners and tutors regard the role of workplace mentors as crucial to the motivation and retention of those on the programme, particularly in helping the learners to achieve a work/study balance.

Career and business development

Learners taking this route are typically senior stylists and salon managers. Employers will look to these more highly educated and trained staff to assist the development and diversification of their businesses to meet the growing demand for high quality hairdressing and beauty products and services. By offering progression routes for study and the opportunity to enhance technical and management skills, employers hope that the profile of hairdressing as a career will be raised, staff retention improved and a new and higher calibre of recruits attracted to the industry.

Recruitment

Promotional activities are targeted at employers and employees with NVQ level 3 through trade journals, Habia and FE colleges. The approach has been to promote:

- NVQ Level 3 as an entry qualification to HE
- the opportunity for non-traditional learners to progress to HE
- the benefits of continuing professional development
- higher level development as a staff retention strategy.

The university does not normally interview candidates; applicants are treated on the same basis as on any other course.

Induction

Before joining the programme students complete an e-learning module. The course itself is introduced with a Professional Studies and IT module. This aims to develop academic skills and self-confidence in learners by introducing basic research methods and approaches to reading source material, note-taking, essay and report-writing and oral presentations. The module also provides an appreciation of the benefits of IT to the industry and develops basic practical skills to make use of that technology.

The university is examining diagnostic approaches that would identify any additional learning the students may need when they start.

Funding

The course draws down funds from HEFCE, with additional development funding obtained from the ESF. Fees of the first cohort piloting the programme are met by the development funding. Thereafter fees of £165 per module are charged. These are normally paid by the learner, as there is no tradition in the industry of funding long courses. However, an employer of the pilot programme students, Stephen Miller Salons, intends to pay the fees of subsequent employees on the programme. Furthermore, where candidates are FE lecturers, many FE institutions pay 50 per cent, subject to the lecturer remaining in post for an agreed period.

There is no charge for prior certificated learning. However, a charge of 50 per cent of the module cost (currently £82.50) is made for accrediting prior experiential learning (APEL) because of the time required by the APEL process.

Evaluation

Learner feedback is sought at the module level through module evaluation questionnaires and at programme level through programme committees. Feedback indicates that learners are motivated by the opportunity to gain an HE qualification while working. They feel the programme has been designed to meet their needs and appreciate the balance of modules that allow them to demonstrate their skills and

knowledge through modes of assessment other than written and gain academic credit. Nevertheless they find the programme challenging, particularly the academic vocabulary and the writing skills. While they gain higher grades in the practical modules, the more academic modules are challenging.

Success factors

In providing successful progression to HE for Apprentices and other employees, a range of critical success factors has emerged from experience to date and feedback on the programme. The diversity of the curriculum, with a balance of creative and management skills, was a major benefit for learners, particularly. Debate about the curriculum continues, with some employers calling for a management bias, but overall the content mix is considered to be a major strength. Crucially, the course was designed with the progression of NVQ learners in mind. When creating the assessment strategy, for example, there was a focus on the range of ways that these learners can achieve, rather than a reliance on report-writing.

The pre-course and induction modules are important bridging elements of the programme, enabling work-based learners to gain an understanding of HE learning, which is likely to be significantly different to learning they have previously experienced. Using IT is an essential part of this early provision. Many of the learners had very limited IT skills at the outset.

In addition, the role of workplace mentors is critically important in this remotely-delivered course.

Issues

The big issue has been keeping in touch with and supporting learners spread across the British Isles. Many learners need support with managing work and study. Unless they are clustered, learners do not meet up, so are potentially isolated, and the level of workplace support is variable. Currently they have an assessor for the practical modules who travels to assess them in the workplace, which is costly.

These issues are being addressed through work to develop a national network of colleges to provide local support, described below.

In addition, most learners on the programme are self-funded, with no financial support from their employers. This represents a major financial commitment by the student.

Future development

Developing a national network of colleges to provide local support to learners is a priority. This could build on existing Apprenticeship arrangements, whereby a college assessing Apprentices in the workplace could also at the same time support salon managers or senior stylists on the Foundation Degree and perhaps do some assessing of the practical modules. The university sees this as an opportunity for FECs to draw down HEFCE funding, sharing the delivery and paying the university for the e-learning delivery and managing the quality system. Alternatively, colleges might consider offering the whole programme as a day release course, in which case they would draw down all the HEFCE funding and then pay the university for managing the quality and awarding the qualification.

Case studies of individual learners on this course are available on Habia's website at www.habia.org/Foundation/introduction.htm.

Case study 6

Stephen Miller Salons

Contact: Stephen Miller, Stephen Miller Salons

Stephen Miller has a chain of six hairdressing salons in Cheshire and Staffordshire. The business employs around 50 hairdressers. Six employees who have completed the Advanced Apprenticeship are the first cohort of the University of Derby's Foundation Degree in Hairdressing and Salon Management, delivered by e-learning (Case Study 1).

Background

"Level 3, rather than level 2, is now the industry standard, so there is a need to progression beyond that. The Foundation Degree helps to fill that gap."

The company already had a well developed staff development programme, both commercial training and training with the Apprenticeship framework. There are typically more than 20 Apprentices in training at any one time. It is company policy for all staff to achieve NVQ level 3, and all senior staff are expected to gain an assessor's award. The company, committed to developing its staff, currently has 15 NVQ assessors. Proprietor Stephen Miller saw the proposal to develop a Foundation Degree as an opportunity to extend and raise the company's training to a higher level.

Bringing a commercial perspective to the curriculum

As a member of the industry forum steering the development of the Foundation Degree, Stephen Miller was keen to bring a strong commercial perspective, so that it was a work-based, college-centred qualification. He played an important role in developing and re-orienting proposed modules to ensure commercial relevance. For example, one module was focused on competition work in ways that he felt were not viable in a salon environment. He called for a more thematic approach, because at this level he expected to be able to give his staff a creative brief. This might be to support a marketing drive with a series of 'looks', rather than creating a model on the night. Such an approach, would be more in tune with the needs of the industry by emulating a commercial brief from a company that wanted to dress hair for a specific advertising campaign. It would also be easier to measure.

Positioning the Foundation Degree within the company

"We want the Foundation Degree to be part of their overall career structure, so that FD graduates will then support others in the company to do it."

The company considered how relevant the Foundation Degree would be to specific job roles and how it could be matched to their existing training and development. They looked at the modules being developed

and then mapped to them their existing training programme. Their approach has been to ensure that existing training, such as the management training provided by Wella, is structured to support the relevant Foundation Degree modules. This also helps to ensure the modules are relevant to the workplace.

Embarking on the programme

"I had some concerns over the study skills required, particularly the computer skills. There was a study skills module at the start, but that required a computer to access it, so it was a Catch 22!"

Six Stephen Miller employees – two directors, a training manager and three salon managers – embarked on the course in September 2003. They all found the jump from FE to HE challenging and struggled at first. An initial module to do with research skills was difficult to deliver in an e-learning environment without contact with a tutor.

Workplace support for the learners

"They struggled with the first module in terms of the structure they needed and the rigour to deliver an assignment. It is important to prepare people from an FE background so they don't get disillusioned with it."

Stephen Miller, in his former role as salon facilitator²³, and with a background in HE, was able to give his employees crucial support at this stage to help them adjust to the requirements of the programme. Through fortnightly meetings and informal contacts in-between, he helped them to structure their learning and understand the rigour needed to deliver assignments at this level, as well as providing motivational support. As a result, their study skills over the previous six months had increased "a hundred fold," and the level of support they needed diminished considerably.

"When they first started I would get lots of email queries. Now they only contact the facilitator when they have a real problem."

Early benefits to the business

"It is changing the way they think about what they do, so they are becoming more receptive to new ideas, not just in the degree but all their work, more analytical about what is on offer."

For the business the benefit was not just about having employees with a better knowledge of, say, marketing, but also in the raised awareness among the learners of what they do within the salon, particularly within the management role, and in their improved analytical skills.

A work-based project within one of the management modules had resulted in the design of a greatly improved appraisal process. Significantly, because the company's quarterly appraisals are linked to staff pay of 50 per cent of takings, the focus the project brought

²³ Stephen relinquished his role as salon facilitator when he was appointed an Adult Learning Inspector. A colleague now performs the facilitator role within the business.

to learners on the performance of their staff contributed to increased salon turnovers. The learners' own externally-moderated appraisals found that they were managing their staff more effectively through improved target-setting.

Fuelling company growth

The challenge now is to ensure that the learners are presented with appropriate and demanding opportunities to use the skills they are developing. Stephen Miller sees this as an opportunity to develop the company through new business planning, with the aim of expanding from six to possibly ten salons over the next three years. Foundation Degree graduates will be earmarked for appropriate positions to drive that growth by extending their responsibilities beyond just one salon. Stephen Miller therefore values the FD as a staff development tool and catalyst for company development.

Delivering the programme

Although the practical modules are linked in with salon work, the learners study in their own time. This is because other staff development in company time has continued undiminished, and not least, because time off would involve significant loss of earnings. The learners find that time required for study is about double that estimated by the university.

All delivery is done by e-learning. Stephen Miller commended the module just completed on trichology as an excellent e-learning package. One of the management modules, however, lacked clarity and had required substantial support from him as facilitator to get the learners on track. However the end result of this module had been very beneficial to the company.

Whereas at the outset the learners were not very computer-literate, they now communicate fluently by email, with each other and with their mentor. This enables the company to track individuals' progress and intervene as appropriate.

"I am aware how pressured they feel. It isn't easy with the timescales given."

Learners have a heavy workload. For example, one learner was doing a Master Colour Award as well the Foundation Degree, and struggled. The company supported her through the award so that time was freed up for the degree, and that solved the problem. Added to the pressure of tight deadlines is the continuous nature of the programme, with no 'holidays'.

The learners support each other by meeting on their own initiative about once a month. The facilitator attends when invited to address a particular query or topic. None has dropped out "and nobody will."

Costs

Because they are piloting the programme, all costs are covered by the development funding. Subsequent tuition fees of £600 a year will be paid by the company out of the training budget. Cost is not an issue for the company, not only because they will be able to claim back 50 per cent an Investor in People, but also because the cost is small compared to that of other training.

The biggest issue for them with the FD will be its currency and

standing within the industry. The alternatives would be more development in an artistic area without accreditation. The FD gives a very tangible qualification.

Progression to Honours

"I would encourage anyone wanting to progress to Honours. As an employer I feel I should give them that opportunity."

Stephen Miller is involved with the development of an Honours curriculum to provide progression to a third-year Honours 'top-up' for those Foundation Degree graduates that wish to study further. In particular, Stephen has advocated study of the sociology of hair because there is a range of academic texts that could support such a module.

Conclusion

"The FD is a brilliant way forward and incredibly good value."

Stephen Miller feels that, despite early hiccups, the programme is working well. The issues arising were no more than he would expect from a pilot programme. They are providing feedback that will inform changes from which subsequent cohorts would benefit.

He sees a need for a short introductory course on computer literacy and other skills the students would require, and for an improved study skills module. He also stresses the critical role of workplace mentors. He feels that distance learning is feasible without direct teacher input, provided the e-learning packages are of consistently high quality. Overall the Foundation Degree is "a brilliant way forward."

Case study 7

Progression to Foundation Degree in Health-related Exercise and Fitness, Leeds Metropolitan University²⁴

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.

This account builds on an earlier case study of this course which 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*.²⁵

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.

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.

²⁴ An extended version of this case study is available in a companion to this guide, *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*, LSC 2005

²⁵ The guide, by Simon Roodhouse and David Hemsworth, is available as a download at www.uvac.ac.uk/publications.html.

“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 compact 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 compact funding.

Case study 8

Professional Golfers' Association

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 compact 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 user-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
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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

Department for Education and Skills	www.dfes.gov.uk
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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)

Sector Skills Development Agency	www.ssda.org.uk
NOS Directory (pilot)	www.ukstandards.org.uk

Sector Skills Councils and other sector bodies:

AssetSkills: property, housing, cleaning and facilities management	www.assetskills.org
Automotive Skills: retail motor industry	www.automotive-skills.org.uk
Central Government SSC	Tel: 020 7276 1611
Cogent: Chemicals, nuclear, oil and gas, petroleum and polymer industries	www.cogent-ssc.com
ConstructionSkills	www.constructionskills.net
Council for Administration	www.cfa.uk.com
Creative and Cultural Skills: arts, museums and galleries, heritage, crafts and design	www.ccskills.org.uk
Employers' Organisation for Local Government	www.lg-employers.gov.uk
Energy & Utility Skills: electricity, gas, waste management and water industries	www.euskills.co.uk

Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB)

www.ecitb.org.uk
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e-skills UK: information technology, telecommunications and contact centres	www.e-skills.com
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Financial Services Skills Council	www.fssc.org.uk
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GoSkills: passenger transport	www.goskills.org
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Hairdressing and Beauty Industry Authority (Habia)	www.habia.org
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Improve: Food and drink manufacturing and processing	www.improveltd.co.uk
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Lantra: environmental and land-based industries	www.lantra.co.uk
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Lifelong Learning UK: community based learning and development, further education, higher education, library and information services, work-based learning	www.lifelonglearninguk.org
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People 1st: hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism	www.people1st.co.uk
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Proskills: Process and manufacturing of extractives, coatings, refractories, building products, paper and print	www.proskills.org.uk
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SEMTA: science, engineering and manufacturing technologies	www.semta.org.uk
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Skillfast-UK: apparel, footwear and textile industries	www.skillfast-uk.org
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Skills for Care and Development: Social care including children, families and young children	Tel: 0113 245 1716
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Skills for Health	www.skillsforhealth.org.uk
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Skills for Justice: custodial care, community justice, police	www.skillsforjustice.com9
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Skills for Logistics: freight logistics industry	www.skillsforlogistics.org
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SkillsActive: active leisure and learning (sport and recreation, health and fitness, playwork, the outdoors and the caravan industries)	www.skillsactive.com
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Skillset: broadcast, film, video, interactive media and photo imaging	www.skillset.org
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Skillsmart: retail	www.skillsmartretail.com
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SummitSkills: building services engineering (Electro-technical, heating, ventilating, air conditioning, refrigeration and plumbing)	www.summitskills.org.uk
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Voluntary Sector Skills	www.voluntarysectorskills.org.uk
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WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Action on Access	www.actiononaccess.org
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Aimhigher	www.aimhigher.ac.uk
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- LSC (2005) 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
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