



Issue 14: March 2008

building foundation degrees

## ***Employer Consortia***

***Foundation degree Advertising Campaign  
Changing Face of the Public Sector  
fdf and Lifelong Learning Networks***

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**Derek Longhurst**, Chief Executive

# Innovating workforce development

**Derek Longhurst**  
Chief Executive, **fdf**

This issue of **forward** represents the central focus of **fdf**: working with employers across both the private and public sectors to stimulate demand for higher level skills that will generate business improvement and meet the needs of the knowledge economy. Increasingly we work at a national level to construct employer engagement with higher education in ways that will enhance dialogue and mutual understanding of the benefits to be gained from employee development through higher education.

While the Foundation degree remains central to many of our strategies, we are well aware both of our wider remit from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (to use our expertise to engage employers with higher education generally) and of the various debates around the issue of 'qualifications'. Employers frequently use qualifications for recruitment but then do not see education and training as defined in relation to completion of a qualification. On the other hand, there is increasing recognition that the achievement of a qualification can be motivating for employees and that their attainment does make a significant contribution to workforce development.

This is why we have developed our **Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA)** service which will be launched at a national level at the House of Commons in March. **fdf** offers specialist, free-of-charge consultancy services to facilitate links between workplace training and higher education institution (HEI) accreditation in ways that will deliver tangible outcomes without undue bureaucracy and regulation. Such workplace training can become integral to a bespoke higher education (HE) qualification such as a Foundation degree.

In April there will be a public launch of the Retail Foundation degree programme. In this issue Charles Pickford outlines the process in developing a generic sector-wide programme supported by distance learning materials. This has been funded and project-managed by **fdf** and involves partnership with University of the Arts, Manchester Metropolitan University, Skillsmart UK, The Retail Academy. The programme has been successfully piloted by Tesco and can be customised distinctively to meet the needs of other retail companies.

This is a model we are pursuing in other sectors as Charles Pickford describes (eg ICT and Telecoms) with very positive results. While many of the major employers with whom we work are competitors, they also engage in joint projects and there is a growing recognition of the benefits of raising the skills levels of the workforce generally in a sector to the advantage of all, including smaller and medium-sized companies that may not have the resources available to engage in designing and developing a Foundation degree programme.

One of the benefits of this approach, therefore, is to reduce the extent of potential one-to-one transactions and to gain employer buy-in at national levels. This strategy also means that **fdf** is increasingly seeking cross-regional synergies in different sectors.



**Derek Longhurst** and **Liz Smith**, Director of Unionlearn

It is no accident that we have selected specific sectors to target for development. On the one hand they constitute the sectors that will contribute most to the knowledge economy nationally and regionally and, on the other, hand, they are also the sectors in which there has been 'market failure' in terms of Foundation degree provision. Our regional analyses demonstrate that there is, generally, a very poor match between priority sectors defined by Regional Development Agencies and the provision of Foundation degrees. Initially, the business case for institutions has heavily favoured developments for full-time students in fields of known student demand (health, education, art and design/creative and cultural industries) although both health and education are sectors that are significant for part-time provision.

It should also not be forgotten that the Health and Education sectors are significant contributors to the knowledge economy. Indeed, the private sector knowledge economy is largely centred on London and the south-east with the rest of the UK largely dependent upon the public sector knowledge economy. This, too, is changing, often driven by city-regions that are becoming enterprise powerhouses within the knowledge economy. For further information see Clayton (2008).

In this issue Sue Tatum reviews the public sector and various issues around workforce development. These are informing **fdf** strategy and driving the employer-led Foundation degree projects currently being funded and supported by us. It is intended that the outcomes of these initiatives will be disseminated at a national conference in June 2008.

In early summer we should also have available the outcomes of an independent research report examining the impact on workforce development in the North-West Strategic Health Authority where there has been a large-scale investment in Foundation degree provision. This will enable us to define the issues that require further work and development but will also allow genuine assessment and evaluation of the qualification as a form of workforce development designed for both trainees and for existing employees.

This issue of **forward** also provides a brief summary of a major research project commissioned by **fdf**. This has been conducted by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) in collaboration and was designed to evaluate the impact of Foundation degrees producing business improvement for employers as well as offering substantive evidence about the impact upon individuals. This has been designed to be a qualitative analysis from which we will be able to learn in terms of practice. As the article indicates, there are many positive experiences outlined in the research but there remain some significant challenges also.

One of these challenges for institutions involves the development of more flexible modes of delivery than is common in other forms of higher education. According to HEFCE data (HEFCE, 2007), about 16% of Foundation degree provision is offered through distance learning and the research indicates that there are generic issues around different learning styles between different students. At the same time, it is evident that institutions could do more to break the mould

and to establish their Foundation degrees as 'cutting edge.' This issue offers some examples of programme teams who are addressing the need for greater flexibility in the modes of learning that meet the needs, especially of employees who are pursuing their Foundation degree on a part-time basis.

To support institutions in their development of employer engagement strategies, **fdf** can now offer resource packs to guide successful partnerships and this can be supported by a staff development programme led by Clare Stoney on our behalf.

In this issue also Penny McCracken outlines the purposes of the Foundation degree 'Endorsement Service'. This is currently being trialled in a significant number of institutions and we will subsequently have the approach independently evaluated to consider whether it has a longer term future and, if so, in what form.

### **The Leitch Review of Skills**

As we go to press with this issue of **forward**, the government's Higher Level Skills Strategy is imminent. The response to the Leitch report (DIUS, 2007), said little about HE in representing government policy and the new Strategy document will, therefore, focus very clearly on HE. The significant challenge will be to deliver the Leitch aspirations for 40% plus adult workforce engagement with higher education achievement and there should no doubt about the size of the task ahead.

**fdf** views the Leitch Review of Skills as central to its Strategic Plan and so, in addition to our work with employers, we are placing significant emphasis upon collaboration with Unionlearn and other employee organisations. In this issue Susan Hayday outlines the work we have done to date in developing information, advice and guidance (IAG) materials to support Foundation degrees. There is recurrent evidence that IAG remains a significant issue, particularly for adult employees who may be less familiar with the higher education sector and the opportunities it can offer.

This is related, in turn, to the communications strategy, outlined by Lorraine Westwood, which has been largely orientated towards employers, with specific targeting of HR Directors and Finance Directors. It is still the case that the 'brand' name of **Foundation** causes some confusion about the distinctive identity of the degree qualification but it is encouraging that, once the issues of work-based learning, flexibility and other possibilities, such as accreditation are outlined, employers are very positive in their responses.

In 2007-2008 there are c.72, 000 students on Foundation degrees nationally and we are on course, it seems, to meet the government's

target for 100,000 by 2010-2011. There is no room for complacency, however, and it is important that we maintain qualitative as well as quantitative measures of success.

It is encouraging that the overwhelming majority of students interviewed for the CHERI/LSN Research project indicated that the Foundation degree was their 'first choice' and the evidence is that the qualification is becoming embedded in the HE sector. On the one hand, the Foundation degree attracts a significant percentage (c 17%-25%) of students who already have an HE qualification and this constituency looks set to grow as a consequence of the government's decision not to fund students who already have an HE qualification; Foundation degrees are exempt from this policy. Nationally, there are currently in the region of 40,000 FTE students on part-time degree provision who would not be funded under the new regulations. It is likely that a percentage of these students will be interested in the Foundation degree and that institutions most affected by the Equal and Lower Qualifications (ELQ) policy.

HEFCE data (HEFCE 2007) also indicate that part-time provision of Foundation degrees also attracts a higher percentage of students from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds. Consequently, there are opportunities to be explored from work-based learning that will support widening participation, access and diversity strategies in ways that are central to the mission statements of many institutions.

I hope that you enjoy this issue of **forward** and that it encourages you in your work with Foundation degrees – or that it may stimulate an interest in becoming involved with them. We will be very interested in any feedback that you may have to guide us in the development of future issues.

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# Developing sustainable employer-led higher education

**Charles Pickford**

*Director of Employer Partnerships, fdf*

## Introduction

As the higher education (HE) response to the challenges and aspirations of the Leitch report unfolds and matures, valuable experience has been gained about employers' needs and how best they can be met.

Work with employer groups across a range of sectors provides the empirical evidence base that employers expect HE to offer provision that meets the following criteria:

- Strategic long-term developments
- Collaborative relationships between HE partners
- Consistent, but not prescriptive, national provision
- Alignment to national standards
- Delivery by staff with current industry knowledge
- Embraces employer expertise
- Values and maximises the opportunities for work-based learning
- Accredits employer based training
- Offers delivery modes that meet employers and learners needs

Several approaches to deliver HE provision aligned to the above criteria have been developed and are being tested. Amongst these are: Sector Skills Council (SSC) Foundation Degree Frameworks, many of which were developed in partnership with **fdf**; schemes to kite mark or endorse qualifications as fit for purpose; partnerships between a single employer and one provider offering unique 'closed' provision; and regional or local provision supported by localised clusters of employers. All these initiatives have particular strengths, yet they do not fully meet all of the criteria listed above.

There are several examples where employers have collaborated to ensure that their needs and those of the wider sector are met through sector-specific HE provision. Most notable among these is the consortium of rail infrastructure companies that have an established partnership with Sheffield Hallam University to deliver the national Foundation degree in Railway Engineering.

A consortium consisting of **fdf**, Tesco, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of the Arts London, Skillsmart Retail and the Retail Academy has developed a technology-assisted Foundation degree for the retail sector. Although Tesco have piloted the Foundation degree programme with their workforce, the consortium is now growing to include other retailers and providers. The consortium will eventually form a national network that will deliver a consistent Foundation degree in Retailing that can be customised to the needs of retailers. Although **fdf** is currently supporting this initiative the longer term ambition is that the network will evolve to be self managing.

Building upon the practice and example of rail and retail, **fdf** has embarked upon a programme to develop several national and regional employer-led consortia. This approach does not provide easy solutions to the challenge of developing employer-led provision, however, if managed effectively all the criteria identified above can be met. Central to the development is the commitment by all parties to partially step out from organisational and institutional self interest and recognise that the wider interests of the sector, inclusive of the supply chain, must be addressed to attain the education and skills for global competitiveness. Encouragingly the evidence gained so far from this approach indicates that employers and providers are prepared to overcome the organisational and procedural barriers that constrain collaborative working.

**fdf**, in partnership with SSCs and Regional Development Agencies, is developing employer-led consortia across the following sectors:

- Information Technology (IT) and Telecommunications
- Water Utilities
- Electricity Utilities
- Biopharma and Health Technologies
- Aircraft Maintenance
- Business Operations
- Travel and Tourism

The following case study looks at the development of the IT and Telecommunications consortium and outlines the reasons for development, the processes involved and progress to date.





## ***Developing a consortium-based approach to delivering higher education for the ICT and Telecommunications sector***

### ***Sector background***

In depth information about the sector is provided by the Technology Counts IT & Telecoms Insights 2008 publications produced by e-skills UK. The background information below is drawn from these publications.

There are over 109,000 businesses in the UK's IT & Telecoms industry – 92% of which are IT and 8% Telecoms. Nearly 1 in 20 people employed in the UK work in the IT & Telecoms workforce (1.5 million people). This comprises around 888,000 in the IT & Telecoms industry itself and a further 588,000 working as IT or Telecoms professionals in other industries. Employment in IT & Telecoms professional occupations (within and outside of the IT & Telecoms industry itself) has almost doubled since the early 1990s. 40% are now employed as 'ICT Managers' or 'IT Strategy and Planning Professionals', and these are the occupations that have grown most rapidly in the last six years.

### ***The IT and Telecoms workforce***

Both software development and many traditional 'entry level' jobs are increasingly located off shore, whilst work in the UK is increasingly focused on the application of technology to improve business performance. As IT moves deeper into the heart of businesses, growing importance will be placed on skills such as relationship management, business process analysis and design, project and programme management, business change management, systems architecture, networking, risk management and security. Web and internet specialist skills will be increasingly in demand, as will the partner and contract management skills to manage outsourced work. More generally, IT & Telecoms professionals are increasingly expected to be multi-skilled, with sophisticated business and interpersonal skills as well as technical competence.

Employment in the IT industry is predicted to grow at 5 times the average for the UK. Over a fifth (22%) of the IT & Telecoms companies who are trying to recruit IT & Telecoms professionals report difficulties in attracting applicants with the right skills. In a recent statistically valid survey of over 3000 employers, 23% reported that their staff had skills gaps and over 80% of companies with skills gaps report an adverse effect on business.

IT-related HE remains an important source of talent for the sector's work force requirements. There has been a massive drop off in the uptake of computing degrees over the last five years. UK applicants to Computing/Information Systems/Software Engineering courses have dropped by 50%, down to 13,500 people by 2006. This is of great concern for a discipline of strategic importance to the UK.

### **Establishing the need for consortium in ICT**

The role of the ICT professional is changing and employers are increasingly demanding a wider set of skills that include a broad understanding of business oriented technology skills, problem solving, project management, team working and excellent communication skills. In truth they are probably some of the most demanding employers in the UK economy, not only needing technical specialists, but business-focussed technical specialists.

In July 2006, the Chief Executive of the Institute of Telecommunications Professionals (ITP), Brendan Omahony, invited a group of HR Directors to an open forum to discuss the development of higher level skills and education. The event quickly established that the demand for employees with the right higher level skills was common and that in the main, many employers had simply relied upon traditional graduate recruitment to fulfil these needs. Many of the employers had little knowledge of Foundation Degrees, with only larger organisations such as BT making any significant investment in this area. In the main, employers' knowledge of the development of Foundation degrees was limited and the process driven predominantly by universities.

The employers agreed to work collaboratively to develop a Foundation degree for the whole sector, with the aim that this would enhance quality of provision, improve employee retention, and reduce the workload of individual employers in designing and developing content on a one-to-one basis with institutions. The development of a sector wide qualification that had national recognition and consistency of content, structure and delivery would establish the Foundation degree as the preferred route for the development of higher level skills across the sector. This approach would also help employers of both large and small organisations to identify fit for purpose Foundation degree provision across the UK. Employers in this sector are looking for a range of outcomes for the Foundation degree, some want to develop Foundation degrees directly as a tool for supporting new entrants into the sector, others are linking the Foundation degree with the Higher Apprenticeship Frameworks and others are looking to continue using Foundation degrees as a workforce development tool.

### **Consortium - In Action**

In April of 2007 **fdf** and the ITP, along with a consortium of leading employers from the IT and Telecommunication sector, launched the ICT Foundation Degree Project. They agreed to work collaboratively to support the development of a sector-based Foundation degree that will meet their skills requirements and can be delivered through a network of HE providers in a way that suits their business needs. Employers have recognised that this is a challenge and will stretch their ability to work together as competitors in this sector. They have also recognised that this will challenge the established mechanisms for developing HE and will require innovative solutions to delivery modes that meet employers' needs and form new ways of partnership working with employers and universities.

The consortium of employers is driving this project. **fdf** are providing the leadership and resource to support both employers and providers with their target of having fit for purpose provision available by the autumn of 2008.

*'BT is on the project steering group developing a sector-based Foundation degree in IT and Telecoms. The employers included in this development are: BT, Vodafone, EDS, Oracle, O2, Royal School of Signals, Orange, RWE and the NHS. We are currently working with: Staffordshire University, Glasgow Caledonian University, the University of Bath, the Open University, the University of Teesside and Thames Valley University. Once development and validations are complete we will have a Foundation degree that will be recognised by the leading employers within the sector. In the design process we are committed to having the content of the Foundation degree relevant and applicable to all organisations within the sector. This in itself will mean that an individual would be able to use the qualification should they choose to pursue another career option with a different organisation within our sector. The additional benefit of a sector based Foundation degree is that SME's will have access to the 'product', offering a career option that they know will be recognised within the sector, thus offering a valuable qualification to its employees.'*

#### **Mark Biffin**

*Apprenticeship Programme and Strategy Manager, Openreach*

### **Process and Progress**

The first stage of this project involved developing a shared understanding of the business drivers that employers in this sector are facing and how education and skills deficits are impacting upon organisational performance. Interestingly, this part of the research into employers needs highlighted wider concerns than solely a higher level skills deficit. Related concerns were about recruitment, retention, graduate performance and expectations, behavior and attitude to work, cost of recruitment and staff development.



**Phases 2, 3 of the project, divided into seven strands of activity. Many of these strands will now run simultaneously between January 08 and November 08.**

Strand One	Strand Two	Strand Three	Strand Four	Strand Five	Strand Six	Strand Seven
<b>HE Provision</b>  To agree on a collaborative model, that designs and delivers an ICT Foundation degree, as agreed by the consortium, through to validation and rollout.	<b>Employers</b>  To ensure continuous engagement of consortium members and their agreement to outputs, through the design and validation phase.	<b>Marketing &amp; Communications</b>  To provide a consistent communications strategy and ensure wider engagement through targeted marketing.	<b>Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA)</b>  To investigate the opportunities to accredit existing in-house or third party education and training.	<b>Professional Body Accreditation</b>  To ensure that any requirement for professional body accreditation is researched and implemented.	<b>Rollout</b>  To provide policy and process to support the rollout of the Foundation degree.	<b>Evaluation</b>  Provide end of project evaluation and Foundation degree evaluation after 1 year.

Figure 1  
**Activities associated with the continuation of this project**

Building upon these shared concerns an in depth analysis of employers higher level skills needs was carried out. This utilised tried and tested methods of interview and questionnaire. These results were then tested against job roles and in addition are being validated by Chief Technology Officers from several employer organisations.

This first stage was completed with limited input from HE providers and was an almost entirely employer facing activity to ensure that employers interests are at the heart of this initiative. The activities associated with the continuation of this project are shown in Figure 1.

The subsequent stages of the project are underway and the employers have identified a number of key institutions they would like to work with in the first instance. The institutions recognise that collaborative working ensures that they are meeting the needs of the sector, individual employers and learners. This offers providers a sustainable model that is not reliant upon one single employer relationship. Providers are currently working together to develop a model that meets the employers needs in terms of skills and knowledge, whilst ensuring that the learner experience will be very similar across institutions delivering the programme.

## Conclusion to date

This is hard but rewarding work. Challenges include competing stakeholder agendas and funding mechanisms, processes and practices that are largely geared towards 18 year olds attending universities to receive an educational experience unique to that institution. Despite the challenges, employers and providers have demonstrated the willingness and commitment to look beyond immediate self interest and recognise that long-term sustainable fit for purpose provision is the objective. This cannot be achieved without collaboration.

## References

e-skills UK (2008). Technology Counts IT & Telecoms Insights 2008. Available at: [www.e-skills.com/Research-and-policy/1043](http://www.e-skills.com/Research-and-policy/1043) [accessed 20 February 2008]



## Foundation degree advertising campaign

**Lorraine Westwood**

Director of Communications, **fdf**



The **fdf** remit for Foundation degrees was broadened in 2007 to include more general profile-raising activity. This work is being funded by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and covers the current academic year.

A key element of this new activity is an advertising campaign designed to underpin other more focused activity. The key target audience is employers, with students as a secondary audience and the intention is to enhance rather than duplicate advertising activity which providers already undertake in the field of student recruitment.

An initial 'warm-up' campaign ran through November and early December 2007. The key media used included national, regional and sector-based print media and outdoor media. From a regional perspective the key areas of focus were London, Birmingham and Manchester.

The creative for the campaign aimed to address the issue of the word 'foundation' which had positioned the qualification as pre-degree level and resulted in the identity of the qualification being widely misunderstood. A 'find' / 'found' approach was developed to explain what you would find in a 'Found'ation degree.

The adverts carried a website address as a response mechanism: [www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk](http://www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk). This was a new site created specifically for the campaign and, therefore, statistics on usage of the site gave very direct feedback on the impact of the campaign. In the first three weeks over 30,000 unique visitors went onto the site. In 2008 the full campaign will run from January to July. The approach will remain basically the same in terms of both creative and placement but with higher volumes. It is planned over time to evolve the creative to include photography and endorsement from case studies of key employer and student experiences.

Opportunities are also being offered for providers to work with the campaign. These include a tool kit for providers, consisting of a display stand and leaflets explaining what a Foundation degree is (available free of charge). Advertising can also be adapted to include provider details – in this case **fdf** will provide artwork to the provider's chosen advertising agency or, if preferred, **fdf** will arrange placement as well although providers will have to pay for media placement costs.

For further details of the campaign and how to get involved please contact **Lorraine Westwood**, Director of Communications - **fdf**, [l.westwood@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:l.westwood@fdf.ac.uk).

## fdf Marketing and Communications Update

**fdf**, in consultation with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), commenced development and implementation of a comprehensive communications strategy in April 2007. This has included the development of a communications plan and the appointment of a director of communications who joined **fdf** in September 2007.

In the initial phase, April to September, work focused around partnership development and employer engagement. Consortia were developed to establish clear employer demand in sectors such as ICT, biopharmacy, energy and utilities. Employers included BT, Orange and Pfizer.

Partnerships have been developed with regional Chambers of Commerce and the British Chamber of Commerce. The aim here is to raise informed awareness of Foundation degrees with small and medium size enterprises (SMEs). Further employer engagement resulted from a number of high profile presentations, round tables and one-to-one interviews which have been held with over 300 human resource (HR) directors of large companies, and there are plans to extend this activity to include finance directors in 2008.

Phase two followed the appointment of the director of communications. This phase saw the completion of the communications plan and the appointment of key agencies in the areas of advertising, media relations and market research.

Activity in the period to December 2007 has included the launch of a national advertising campaign and the commissioning of a piece of market research aimed at benchmarking current perceptions of Foundation degrees. In addition a new website focusing on the promotion of Foundation degrees was also launched:

**[www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk](http://www.findfoundationdegree.co.uk)**

December saw the unveiling of a new corporate identity for **fdf**, reflecting the organisation's widening remit. Whilst a key focus continues to be Foundation degrees, our remit from the Higher Education Funding Council for England involves stimulating employer partnerships with higher education generally and across the wider spectrum of work-based learning.



# The Impact of Foundation Degrees on Students and the Workplace

***In 2007, fdf commissioned the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) to undertake the first major piece of research examining the impact of Foundation degrees on students and the workplace.***

Twenty Foundation degree programmes covering a range of sectors and locations were selected for inclusion in the study. The study team worked with practitioners, students and employers associated with each of these programmes to explore the impact of the Foundation degree for each stakeholder group. Practitioners also prepared an in-depth case study detailing their experience of designing, developing and delivering the Foundation degree. The initial findings were discussed at two research seminars held in London and York in November 2007. Practitioners and employers also presented a number of case studies at this event.

*The CHERI/LSN project was designed to:*

- explore the impact of Foundation Degrees on students and the student experience
- explore the impact of Foundation degrees in the workplace from an employer perspective
- examine the nature and extent of employer involvement in Foundation degrees
- build research capacity among (mainly) staff in further education colleges delivering Foundation degree programmes through the involvement of practitioners in the study

Benefits of the Foundation degree to students and employers. The study found that students and employers perceive a range of benefits that Foundation degree study brings to individuals and the workplace.

Students reported that they:

- gain business and industry experience
- gain a broad knowledge of a specific industry

- develop relevant knowledge and skills, including critical reasoning and reflective skills
- make employer contacts
- have an opportunity to get back in to learning at higher education level
- gained confidence through their studies

Employers reported:

- that employees gain a broader understanding of the industry as a whole and bring fresh ideas to the workplace
- that employee performance improves
- employee confidence and willingness to take initiative increases
- that employees sharing new knowledge and skills with colleagues
- that employee motivation and commitment is enhanced

## Engagement

The study found that students enrol on Foundation degrees for a number of reasons. Full-time students who were looking to enter employment reported wanting to gain knowledge of a particular industry, and opportunities for getting a job as the main reasons. Individuals who were already employed in the relevant sector regarded Foundation degrees as a way of developing personally and professionally, whilst continuing to work. Around a fifth of recently-enrolled Foundation degree students had been sent on the Foundation degree by their employer.

Practitioners reported that engaging employers effectively can be challenging and described several issues commonly faced by providers when developing Foundation degrees in response to employer demand. These include: a lack of awareness of Foundation degrees amongst employers; the challenges inherent in working within complex partnerships of higher education institutions, further education colleges and employers; and the need to ensure that vocationally based learning is meaningful in an academic context and to balance more theoretically oriented curriculum content with professional workplace practices.

The degree to which employers were involved in the design and development of the Foundation degrees included in this study was very variable. It was also noted that employers became involved with Foundation degrees through a number of different routes.

Interestingly, many employers questioned suggested that they would like to have been involved with Foundation degrees and would have responded positively had they been approached by providers.

## Dissemination

Later this year, **fdf** and the Higher Education Academy will be holding a joint research conference at which delegates will have the opportunity to hear about, and to discuss, this work and other recent research on the impact of various forms of work-based learning. See page 41 for further details.



# *The changing face of the public sector: challenges, opportunities and successes for employer-led education*

**Dr Sue Tatum**

*Director for Employer Partnerships  
(Public Sector), fdf*

## ***The challenges: new drivers for change but new education and training?***

Most readers of this article will have personal experience of how the public sector is changing. For public services as a whole, the emphasis is on the recipients of the services – the users of the service - ensuring that they have a voice in informing and shaping changes and receiving a personalised, quality service from whoever provides it.

A 'business-focussed' approach informs the way that most public sector organisations now work. It is also shaping the nature of education and training opportunities with a new emphasis upon 'employability' outputs. The employers and the users of the service (the learners, in this case) are now driving the curriculum.

Whilst the refocusing for the public sector is not new, the present emphasis on skills and employability is. 'Best value' in local government, Gershon Efficiency savings, outsourcing and increasing procurement of services from the independent and third sector have been with us for a number of years. This paradigm shift is regarded uncomfortably by many who work in the public sector. Working within the sector is seen not merely as a job, but as part of a wider system of values; a commitment to 'make a difference', to ensure that people receive the best service possible and that employees are valued. The more recent shift to a business management approach for education and training has challenged the sector, in terms of its financial model and how it can get the best value for the best price. This may mean a radical re-engineering of the services provided and how they are delivered, including recognising that, in some cases, they may be better provided by others.

The public sector has a tradition of employing a high number of graduates. It has a strong history of funding the development of its workforce, either prior to entry into work in the sector through government funding for professional training<sup>1</sup>, or through providing continuing professional development opportunities and supporting employees to develop specialist skills<sup>2</sup>. This investment contributes to a number of organisations within the sector already meeting the 2007 target of 40% of the workforce with a higher education qualification at level 4 or above (DIUS 2007). The temptation is for the sector to argue, therefore, that additional investment is not required. It is pleasing to note, however, that the Sector Skills Councils in the sector recognise that the nature of the sector's business requires a highly qualified workforce. In Leitch terms, this means raising the skills of those who are already graduates, providing opportunities for others to obtain graduate status and a drive to achieve a higher target than that set by Leitch (Wilshaw 2007).

Indeed, Wilshaw poses three challenges to achieving that goal for the civil service sector which are worthy of wider consideration:

- **Organisational complacency**  
As the civil service has traditionally never struggled to recruit staff with the right skills the need to be more proactive about skills development is not apparent.
- **Personal complacency**  
Wilshaw argues that the organisation and the individuals within it think they are doing better than they are and so there is not felt to be a need to develop skills and expertise. The fact that they are not doing as well as required is clearly shown in the findings of the Government's Departmental Capability Reviews (Wright 2007).
- **Elitism**  
Within central government, staff development funding is primarily invested in senior leaders. This finding is not unique to the civil service. Fryer (2006) cites the Labour Market Survey for the NHS which indicates that 40% of NHS staff are qualified only



at level 2 or below. Likewise, one third of NHS staff reported having no opportunities for taught learning during the previous year, with 70% stating they had received no 'on the job' training. For 2007-08, the Multiprofessional Education and Training budget (MPET) (funds pre-registration and continuing professional development training for health professionals) is £4.3 billion. This contrasts with the new Joint Investment Framework (NHS with the Learning and Skills Council) allocation of a maximum £100 million to support the development of the wider workforce from NVQ2s to Foundation degrees.

In order to achieve the step change that is required it will be necessary to present arguments in support of redressing the balance of access to education opportunities and its associated funding. It will also be necessary to explore the impact of the identified drop in the adult population eligible for work from 2012, especially given the proportion of the sector workforce who are over 50. This will require identifying and presenting arguments that feed into the particular needs of the sector. It will require making strong arguments (within this new 'business' climate) that indicate the cost effectiveness of education and training opportunities for existing employees. For a non-profit making sector there is no slack in the system to vire funding or to make extra investment. If an additional investment in education is to be made then, it is often argued, this will be at the expense of the quality and volume of the service provided. This is somewhat ironic at a time when the Government is stressing the importance of a skilled workforce and actively fostering employer engagement in workforce development, education and training at all levels.

Likewise, the sector now operates with a relatively streamlined workforce with little slack in the system. Sending staff on lengthy training programmes is a cost to the organisation not only in relation to the course charges, but also in relation to the implications of any associated staff replacement costs and efficiency impact.

The case for such an investment, therefore, needs to be set within the wider strategic context with a clear relevance and application for the sector. It needs to be powerful and robust. **fdf** has taken on a key role in commissioning research and information gathering to inform the case for investment in education and training.

## **The opportunities: A changing sector – new ways of working and new ways of learning**

The restructuring of the public sector to produce more efficient and effective services actually offers a real opportunity to present the argument for continuing to support continuing (professional)

development. A major cost within the public sector is people. Staff costs are high given the people-intensive nature of the activities that are provided – policing and custodial care, teaching, nursery education, children's care, adult health and social care, shaping and implementing policy. The quality of the service axiomatically reflects the quality of the staff, their commitment to and capability of delivering the services. If the person who is providing a service does not believe in that service or its value then research tells us that the outcomes will not be positive for all concerned – the service user, the person providing the service and the organisation. In some sectors, the people we most come into contact with are those who are the least qualified.

*'The NHS and social care sectors spend more than £5 billion annually on training and developing staff. Only a small fraction is targeted at staff working in support roles - the least qualified don't get the opportunity to participate in learning and development... It is not acceptable that some of the most dependent people in our communities are cared for by the least well trained.'*

Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services.

**Department of Health (2006)**

Therefore, investment in the organisation must incorporate a major investment in the staff of the organisation if these step changes to services are to become real and highly regarded.

The argument needs to be that education and training opportunities for employees at all levels can drive the realisation of service transformation. Education will develop staff who are better able to lead successful change. Education is not a drain on resources but an investment in the future of the organisation. It will support retention through a better-motivated and skilled workforce and enhance recruitment through the attractive proposition of a career pathway.

This means looking at the development needs of staff across the organisation. It means looking at different approaches to delivering education and training. The Skills for Health Career Framework (Figure 1) provides a useful model to inform how we can look at developing the skills of the workforce as a whole. This is set out in nine levels (not to be confused with academic levels) that have some correspondence (but not an absolute one) with the NHS Agenda for Change pay bands. Whilst the framework mainly presents clinical roles it does also incorporate consideration of managerial roles.

<sup>1</sup> health and teacher education

<sup>2</sup> human resources and finance

The framework is linked to the 'skills escalator' approach. The Prison Service College has also adopted this approach but uses the term skills elevator for its framework. For both, the emphasis is upon fostering the development of staff within the organisation and opening up learning opportunities. This aligns well with Leitch. The sector changes require the development of fairly generic skills sets and also specialist skills. It requires individuals who can be flexible – working independently and in teams; eager to acquire new skills and with the capability to extend their knowledge and practice as lifelong learners. These staff need critical, enquiring minds, confident and capable of making effective suggestions, solving problems and analysing impact. They may also require highly specialist skills in technical, financial and clinical fields.

We have good evidence from research undertaken by Unison that employees within the public sector are keen to enhance their skills and to progress their careers. Fryer's research further supports this.

The staff are keen and outcomes to date indicate high levels of untapped ability. This provides a strong argument for seeking to make sure that real development opportunities are there – rather than offering learning that does not lead anywhere. Linking learning to a skills escalator type approach with a career framework provides a good model that employers and employees readily understand.

However, such a framework must only be a 'model', a representation, not a fixed descriptor. It should not be used as a straightjacket. The Skills for Health Framework presents as hierarchical, framed within the present composition of the registered professional workforce. The Government's emphasis upon integrated services and personalised services (requiring people with knowledge and skills that move with the client along their journey through the service) requires staff with different skill sets – those that span professional and discipline boundaries. Educational training and qualifications have tended to remain the same whereas the skills needs within the workforce to deliver service differently has changed. There is real opportunity for new professionally-orientated qualifications such as Foundation degrees to fill this education and training gap. There are many examples of emergent interdisciplinary roles in the sector such as sport; fitness and health; integrated children's services; public health; and the new Foundation degree in sustainable communities sponsored by the Academy for Sustainable Communities.

Within health and social care there is now much work taking place to develop the workforce at levels 2, 3 and 4 of the Career Management Framework. Foundation degrees are increasingly being used to support staff onto level 4 (assistant/associate practitioner) by marrying theory with practical competences, and so enabling staff to act as skilled practitioners respected by patients and clinicians alike. Importantly, this forms part of wider changes to the skill mix, competency needs and team working. It means raising the base skill levels of the practitioners, opening up opportunities for practitioners to move into higher level roles (in the Skills for Health framework to levels 6, 7 and 8) and supporting a culture of learning and learner support at all levels within the workforce. The educational needs are not only to develop staff but also to develop a culture and infrastructure that supports learning within the workplace. A key role for higher education is, therefore, working with the sector to build capacity.

### ***fdf's Public sector employer engagement strategy***

**fdf's** Public sector employer engagement strategy exploits these drivers for change. It sets an approach that identifies the potential for higher level development in relation to the workforce development needs stemming from changes in service delivery. **fdf's** strategy also builds on examples of good practice, promoting the business advantage that working in partnership can bring. It supports and draws from good practice and research to inform implementation.

Figure 1

***The Skills for Health Career Framework***



It exploits the potential to enhance employer engagement in relation to national and regional imperatives, ensuring buy-in, take-up and sustainability.

So how does this strategy work? The top section (Figure 2) represents the key national drivers and the lower section the pointers for local and regional implementation. Government policy (the top circle) is the major driver. This sets out the change agenda and informs the potential for, and the nature of, workforce development requirements. Requirements to deliver services differently and achieve efficiency gains are key to highlighting where education can support the step change to enable service transformation. Labour market information, Sector Skills Councils' skills gaps research and qualifications strategies, and accumulating information on educational impact, inform and shape implementation.

There is now an increasing wealth of information about the value and impact of higher level skills development, particularly in the form of Foundation degree provision. **fdf** has commissioned two different research projects looking at how Foundation degrees are regarded by students, employers and education providers. The outcomes from this will be available later this year. We are also gathering information from other projects and sources: programme evaluation data; feedback from employers about curriculum and delivery approaches that meet their needs; infrastructure development needs; in-house training and its accreditation; good practice in work-based learning linking with the Higher Education Academy project; and from the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills 'Gateways to the Professions' projects with the CWDC and the Department of Health's WPILSU. With regard to Foundation degrees in the public sector this information tells us that:

- The specific changes to service are, in many cases, still being worked through with the implications for workforce development needs emergent. It is a catch 22 situation
  - quality service change cannot be achieved without a trained workforce to deliver; however the educational programmes cannot be devised if the overall service requirements are unclear.
  - Therefore, educational approaches must reflect this and flexible – readily able to immediately accommodate revisions or new requirements.
  - They also need to be able to be implemented in the relative short-term. This means that education providers must respond quickly to developing new programmes. It also requires immediate visible outcomes for the employer that demonstrate the impact of the learning on their employee's abilities and the impact of the learning in the workplace.
- There is a need for both generic and specialist educational development. However, programmes that are too generic may not result in the skill enhancement and workplace impact that the employer is looking for.
  - This means that any programme structure should incorporate commonalities between the learning needs of different groups and foster sharing.
  - Work-based learning must support the rigorous application of the learning, demonstrating positive benefit within the workplace.



Figure 2  
**fdf's Public Sector Strategy**



- The programme structure should enable shifts to occur between generic and specialist learning requirements and for new specialist requirements to be factored in.
- A number of Foundation degrees programmes have a short life or fail to recruit viable student numbers. This is not cost effective for education providers or employers and could also result in the qualification being seen as having a limited currency.
- Education providers should seek to ensure that programmes will be sustainable (a minimum of three years). This can be achieved through better content interchanges between and across programmes (within and across education providers) which also gives greater viability.
- Many of the service changes require new skills sets to support new ways of working. Whilst some of the skills within the new skills sets will already be held by education staff others may be new to the institution. Staff may require training to teach these skills at the required level and/or to acquire new skills. The capacity of the organisation to develop new areas of expertise needs to be explored within the wider package of cost effectiveness and the imperative to deliver a high quality educational experience. Real benefits have been realised when education providers have worked together, drawing upon their specific academic/practice expertise.
- Education development opportunities need to be provided for teaching staff (both in-house and in the service environments). As a key member of the public sector how can higher education itself extend the opportunities for its own staff to gain higher level skills qualifications?
- Drawing on the expertise of the employers will ensure the relevance, currency and application of theory to workplace practice.
- Working in partnership with other education providers will secure the required breadth and depth of expertise.

A Foundation degree 'framework' approach that incorporates core, generic and specialist learning requirements which can be packaged together in different ways to meet specific sector requirements provides a quality and cost-effective development model. It can readily accommodate the growth, flexibility and change that is required, incorporating specialist inputs from employers and other education providers where required. It enables education provider organisations to respond quickly and positively to employer requirements for Foundation degrees; importantly it also allows them to deliver learning in a style that reflects the organisation's culture and ethos.

The key to the strategy is setting out the requirements across the sector from a national perspective to ensure that developments have both national as well as local resonance and transferability. Setting the national imperatives within the regional and local context will be informed by *fdf*'s regional directors and consultants, working with local 'champions', the Lifelong Learning Networks. It can build upon programmes already in place and foster partnerships between education providers to support innovation in learning delivery.

## *The successes: Further opportunities*

One aspect of this is to promote and build on educational activity that can be described as 'fit for purpose.' 'Fit for purpose' is often used to describe whether the activity or product 'does what it says it does.' However, there is a further perspective to this with regard to education and training – does it also do so in a way that meets the needs and requirements of the users, purchasers and commissioners of the activity? The *fdf* Foundation degree endorsement scheme is enabling employers and education providers to explore the fitness for purpose of their Foundation degree programmes and how they can be further improved.

Several Lifelong Learning Networks are drawing upon the strategy to develop a sector framework approach in their locality and/or region. This is already working within London, and is underway in the West Midlands and the North East. The challenges are not proving insurmountable and the rewards are obvious.

If you are aware of a specific or emergent opportunity that you wish to explore further, or if you wish to work more closely with *fdf* in applying our national public sector strategy within your region, please contact your regional director, see [www.fdf.ac.uk/contact\\_us](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/contact_us) or Dr Sue Tatum [s.tatum@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:s.tatum@fdf.ac.uk)

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# ***fdf and Lifelong Learning Networks: Supporting progression***

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The synergy of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) and **fdf**, is implicit in Kevin Whitston's statement that LLNs should 'open up detailed curriculum discussions with employers and Sector Skills Councils on developing new courses (such as Foundation degrees...) ...and innovative approaches to work-based learning' (HEFCE, 2007a). It is therefore not surprising that nationally and regionally **fdf** is working closely with LLNs. Examples include:

- increasing LLN capacity for employer engagement through staff development activities with Sussex LLN
- assisting LLNs in the North West to carry out a stock take of current provision to identify the gaps where programme development needs to be focused
- joint projects in the East of England responding to regional sector priorities such as health and social care and the built environment

**fdf** also has an important role in joining up developments across LLNs and regions. In the West Midlands, **fdf** is working closely with all four regional LLNs to develop a business-focussed Foundation degree and companion masters degree to meet the challenges faced by the region's industry, in line with the regional economic strategy. The business operations programmes, which will come on stream during the next two years, aim to address business process knowledge and management and leadership attributes, with the prime focus on improving business performance. Another instance of 'joining up' is where **fdf** is sharing practice developed in the North West around embedding business skills into Foundation degrees serving the creative industries with the Creative Way LLN and the National Arts Learning Network.

Such developments are designed to facilitate progression into employment and are firmly rooted in the prime objective of LLNs which is to embed vocational pathways that are as robust and well understood as the GCSE/A-level 'highway' to higher education. LLNs, for those unfamiliar with the initiative, are local or regional networks of higher education institutions and colleges that are funded by HEFCE with an overall objective 'to improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education' (HEFCE, 2007b).



There are 28 LLNs, each of which has developed approaches informed by its local economic context and regional skills needs. In addition to an approach to curriculum development predicated on supporting progression, LLNs are expected to remove barriers to progression and to develop 'information, advice, guidance and learner support systems that allow LLNs to engage, and track, learners in the context of lifelong learning opportunities.' (HEFCE 2007b)

**fdf** shares a concern to ensure that any barriers to progression, particularly to Foundation degrees, are removed and has identified a lack of awareness about Foundation degrees amongst many advisers. Consequently **fdf** has developed a set of information, advice and guidance (IAG) training materials (**fdf** 2007) and a training programme to make sure those advising young people and adults:

- are well-informed about Foundation degrees
- have access to a range of resources to support IAG related to Foundation degrees
- understand how and where they are delivered.

LLNs have been critical in rolling out this training to ensure it reaches not only those in LLNs with a remit for IAG but also to the IAG agencies that LLNs work with such as Aimhigher, unionlearn and Connexions. An example of this activity is the two training sessions held recently in the East Midlands in partnership with LEAP AHEAD (Derby and Nottinghamshire) and Skills for Sustainable Communities (Leicestershire, Northampton, Lincolnshire and Rutland). The sessions updated delegates on locally available Foundation degrees and familiarised them with the **fdf** IAG training materials and the flexible ways they can be used. Attendees committed to using the materials to disseminate knowledge and understanding about Foundation degrees within the IAG providers that they worked for. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with comments highlighting aspects such as:

- how flexible Foundation degrees can be
- that they are particularly appropriate for more mature applicants
- the usefulness of the file of tutor resources that form part of the materials
- the knowledge of the presenters and clarity of information
- the helpful case studies.

Training sessions have also been held in Yorkshire and Humberside and in the North East and more are planned for other regions. **fdf** is also exploring with the LLN IAG work strand (National Forum for LLNs) how the IAG materials may be expanded to include a more general introduction to the HE sector as some advisors are unfamiliar with the HE sector and with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. They therefore struggle to understand the level of Foundation degrees and how learners might progress both to them and from them.

LLNs are at different stages of development; some are celebrating their first year of operation, others are nearing the end of their funding. All are looking at ways of sustaining the initiatives and good practice they have brought about. To consolidate and further promote LLN developments, **fdf** and the National Forum of LLNs have planned a joint conference, Working Together to Engage Employers in Higher Level Skills, to take place on 10 April 2008. The event will be at the Lakeside Conference Centre in Birmingham and aims to demonstrate the added value of **fdf** and LLNs working together on the higher skills agenda and to facilitate further networking to spread effective practice. Delegates will find out more about **fdf** initiatives such as Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA), and IAG training, and consider the potential for implementation within their network. Workshops will cover a range of successful developments such as:

- work with Chambers of Commerce to reach small businesses
- promotional activity, including marketing Foundation degrees
- cross regional work to meet sector needs such as for construction and utilities
- progression mapping tools.

Workshops will focus on sustainability and transferability of practice. We expect the event to stimulate continuing joint initiatives to further progression into and through higher education.

**fdf** and the National Forum of LLNs joint conference **Working Together to Engage Employers in Higher Level Skills**.

Will take place on 10 April 2008. For further details see page 40.

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[www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln/) [accessed 13 February 2008]

## Further information

Lifelong Learning Networks: National Forum (web page)

[www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk/](http://www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk/) [accessed 13 February 2008]

# Quality enhancement services

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## Update on the Foundation degree endorsement service

The endorsement service has been developed as an enhancement tool to help providers work with employers and deliver Foundation degrees that are current and relevant for the sector. Forty programmes from 12 different sectors are included the pilot phase of the scheme. The sectors represented range from health and social care to the creative arts and from security to management, demonstrating that the process is likely to be sufficiently flexible to cater for programmes all sectors. Where small clusters of programmes share some common modules, these are being combined into one process.

The majority of programmes in the pilot phase are existing ones, some of which have been running for a number of years. A minority are approaching revalidation and taking this opportunity to incorporate changes in the sector into the provision. These programmes are able to show evidence of their employer involvement and ways of integrating work-based learning across the curriculum with reference to the earlier programme. A smaller number are brand new programmes. Some programmes with a validation or revalidation event are choosing to have endorsers present at the event, believing that this will assist in the enhancement of the programme by enabling providers to take onboard ideas raised in discussion at the event.

There are now some 35 trained endorsers, consisting both of Foundation degree specialists and experts from the relevant sectors. There is evidence that the three training events held to date have greatly assisted understanding of the higher education (HE) context, and that of Foundation degrees in particular, in the Sector Skills Councils and standard setting bodies. Those who have been trained report that they are able to disseminate this information to colleagues and others in the sector. HE institution staff have also commented that the nature of the questions concerning employers and work-based learning which are addressed during the process (see the *fdf* Handbook for Endorsement, Annex B) have been helpful for the enhancement of their validation processes.

*fdf* is commissioning an independent evaluation of the pilot after its conclusion in June.

## International issues

With employers working globally, providers are beginning to consider how to help Foundation degree students to benefit from international links. Sometimes practices already developed for other programmes could be transferred or adapted to Foundation degrees in a particular sector. With this in mind, *fdf* organised its first conference with an international theme at the end of November 2007. This was attended by some 85 delegates.

Peter Williams, Chief Executive of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), steered the audience through the developments in the Bologna Process and particularly the inclusion of Foundation degrees in the structure. He reminded the audience that the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area need to be considered by all HE providers.

Professor Dan Shannon, Dean of the William B and Catherine V Graham School of General Studies at the University of Chicago, set out the findings of US research concerning the demand for HE by mature students, the needs of the economy in terms of 'upskilling' the workforce and the provision of training in the workplace by universities. Dr Pina Frazzica, Director General of the Centre for Training and Research in Public Health of the Sicilian Government, took delegates through the development of her organisation and how it contributes to retraining graduates from other disciplines for the health service. Dr Frazzica also described how individuals in marginalised sectors of the community are encouraged to undertake training, thus helping to reduce unemployment and providing much needed workers for the health sector.

The four workshops demonstrated ways in which Foundation degrees could be internationalised. David Taylor of New College Durham gave an account of the framework project and its website for tourism and hospitality students that provides information about work available with employers across Europe for Durham students and those from other participating countries.

Mike Marchant, of UKWoodchain, the standards setting body which works with employer bodies internationally, led a discussion that covered a range of issues of faced by institutions working in an international arena. Issues raised included cultural differences, the need for caution in interpreting overseas statistics without a firm understanding of their basis and the fact that equating qualifications with competence can be misleading.

John Konrad led a discussion on European developments in the recognition of prior learning. Delegates were pointed to useful websites and literature and reminded of the relevance of this work to the EQF and to Bologna.

Karl Foster and Darren Raven of the London College of Communication (LCC) at the University of the Arts London, outlined the recent history of a cooperative venture with ETIC (Lisbon) with a view to admitting Lisbon students directly to the final year of the Foundation degree in Graphic Design at LCC. Delegates then took part in a 'thinking tools' activity to develop creative solutions to some of the issues associated with this initiative and with developing Foundation degrees in the sector more generally.

### **Quality Enhancement Network**

The Quality Enhancement Network has been in existence since 2004 and has a membership of 40 higher education institutions. During the last year the Network has become the forum for meetings to address current issues of relevance to the HE sector. An electronic forum for members with particular interests such as work-based learning, validation and progression has also been developed. Where there is space available we are happy to welcome some non-members to meetings. Given the Higher Education Funding Council for England's agenda for employer engagement and active encouragement to seek co-funded places, particular emphasis will be given to this area of work during forthcoming meetings.

### **Programme for 2008**

#### **10 April**

Employer-provider partnerships: an introduction to **fdf**'s web-based resource

#### **19 June**

Working with employer organisations

These meetings will be held at the MIC Conference Centre, next to Euston Station. For further information and to register, please contact Jane Heslington (j.heslington@fdf.ac.uk)

### **Further information**

For further information about the **fdf** Foundation degree Endorsement Service and to download a copy of the Endorsement Handbook go to:

[www.fdf.ac.uk/home/information\\_for\\_universities\\_and\\_colleges/foundation\\_degree\\_endorsement\\_service](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/home/information_for_universities_and_colleges/foundation_degree_endorsement_service)







# Employer partnerships: working both ways

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This article will address the nature and impact of employer partnerships and involvement in a new Foundation degree: the FdA Business and Management, delivered at Richard Huish College (RHC), Taunton, in partnership with Bristol Business School (BBS) at UWE. In particular, it will explore the distinctive programme features resulting from key partnerships with local employers and professional bodies and the contribution these partnerships are making to the student experience.

Currently in its first year of delivery, the Foundation degree has recruited well and course tutors report an enthusiastic reception by the student cohort. The programme offers the option to study full or part-time and has proven popular among learners already in employment. Those who complete the qualification satisfactorily can gain direct access to Level H of BA(Hons) Business Studies or BA(Hons) Business Studies with Accounting and Finance at UWE. The programme represents an exciting new collaboration between two providers. BBS and RHC have worked together on a range of projects over the last five years, however, the development of the UWE Federation concept by UWE's former Vice Chancellor, Sir Howard Newby, offered a new opportunity for even closer collaboration. The federation concept provides a framework for UWE to work closely with its regional FE partners in developing a co-ordinated and linked approach to learning, and BBS and RHC agreed that this was a good basis for Foundation degree design and delivery.

The two providers have strong reputations and a wealth of relevant expertise in working with employers and professional bodies. Crucially, the Faculty of Business and Professional Development at RHC has well-established relationships with employers within the local community. BBS and RHC jointly envisaged a Foundation degree programme which would meet the needs of employers in the region and offer local learners innovative learning opportunities emphasising employability alongside academic skills. Recognising that effective employer engagement is essential if learners are to acquire the skills and knowledge local employers require, and to benefit from meaningful work-based learning, the programme team wanted to utilise and incorporate employer perspectives and professional body requirements within design and delivery.

Two professional bodies are involved in the Foundation degree: the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT); and the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). At an early stage, ILM were invited to discuss ways in which its Level 4 Award in Management could be mapped against the curriculum and this has resulted in the integration of the award within the programme. There is also the opportunity for students to progress to the ILM Certificate in



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Management (Level 5) on discussion and agreement with their personal tutor. In addition, students who have previously successfully completed AAT (at NVQ Level 4 or Diploma Level) will be entitled to 120 credits of accredited learning as entry to the second year of the Foundation degree.

RHC has used the development of the Foundation degree as an opportunity to build on its links with local employers. At an early stage in programme design, an employers' forum was established to scope and discuss the content and delivery of the qualification and the ways in which local employers could become involved over the longer term. Forum members identified specific skills as weak in many applicants for employment:

- they recognised that while younger people in particular are often well-equipped with skills relating to information technology, they often lack confidence in interacting with customers and clients on the telephone and face-to-face.
- concern was also expressed about weaker skills in written communications eg: drafting letters and reports (with particular reference to spelling and grammar).

In response to this feedback, personal skills development has been integrated throughout the Foundation degree, in assessment methods and within the personal development programme. The latter provides an opportunity for students to log and reflect upon their personal skills development as the Foundation degree progresses, including comments from their workplace mentor and personal tutor. The input into curriculum design and the integration of a professional award represent two clear benefits of employer/professional body engagement. A further distinctive feature of this programme is a mechanism by which employers themselves are offered a professional award through participation in the Foundation degree.

As many of the assignments focus on the working environment, students are encouraged to identify an appropriate work-based mentor who will support them to gather appropriate work-related information for assignment purposes; 'open doors' in the workplace; as well as supporting students in reflecting upon their skills needs and development. In discussion with employers and as a way for providers to demonstrate recognition of the value placed on workplace support, it was decided to offer the opportunity to develop coaching and mentoring skills to those employers providing the work sites for the work-based learning element of the Foundation degree. The first step in making this a reality was to invite employers acting as workplace mentors to attend a two-hour introductory course entitled 'The Role of the Mentor', free of charge at RHC. This outlined their involvement in guiding and supporting students as part of their personal development programme. Workplace mentors are also offered an opportunity to take this further and gain an ILM Level 3 award in coaching through RHC. Employers have proved extremely enthusiastic about these opportunities. This mechanism has the potential to enhance employers' skills and hence develop their commitment to the success of the programme.

The programme team feel that the success of the Foundation degree to date is a result of the close relationship that developed between the two providers, the active involvement of employers through the employers' forum and the support of the two professional bodies throughout the development. This has resulted in a unique model for future working: an effective triangulation between education, employers and professional bodies. The opportunity for students to work towards achieving a professional management qualification has proved to be attractive to employers and prospective students alike and this enhances the relevance of the qualification in local and national employment contexts. Local employers have a greater awareness of, and voice in, the learning process and this type of employer engagement serves to 'reinforce ownership of the qualification among all stakeholders and establish the currency of the award' (QAA, 2004).

*Matt and Adam have chosen to stay at Richard Huish College and work part-time rather than follow a business and management degree away from Taunton. When asked about their reasons, both students said they wanted to work whilst following a degree and hoped that the course would allow them to develop the skills that would be useful in the workplace. They have already found the organisational behaviour module useful in learning how to prepare, and reference a business report. They have also made oral presentations. The course has helped to develop their confidence and they are now able to understand some of the business terminology heard at work and on the news.*

*Both Matt and Adam are keen to take the ILM qualification, starting at the end of the first year of the degree, to add a professional management qualification to their CVs. They hope that the FdA and ILM qualifications will help their employment and promotion prospects in the future.*

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# *Flexibility of delivery and employer engagement: Regional and national perspectives from Newcastle College and the Open University*

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## **Introduction**

This article builds on presentations by staff from the Open University and Newcastle College at the **fd** National Conference in July 2007. We will seek to show how making the change from delivering components of Foundation degrees at specific locations and times to more flexible, student/employer-led provision requires some investment – but should pay major dividends for all stakeholders in terms of market attractiveness, flexibility, vocational relevance and employability.

In this article we will compare and contrast the development processes for the Foundation degrees, define the student markets they were designed for and identify the key stakeholders involved. We will then describe the modes of delivery and explain why they are appropriate for the different student audiences. Finally, we will explore the potential benefits for the key stakeholders.

## *Case study 1:*

### **Newcastle College and the Foundation degree in Airline and Airport Management**

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Newcastle College is a Grade 1 OFSTED and Beacon college and one of the largest further education (FE) colleges in England with approximately 40,000 students of which about 2,500 are higher education (HE) students. The Lifestyle Academy offers courses from levels 1-3 (FE) and C, I and H (HE) in Hospitality, Travel and Tourism, Beauty and Holistics and Sport.

Foundation degrees allowed college staff to work with the local aviation industry to create a Foundation degree in Airline and Airport Management, which is vocationally relevant and delivered flexibly to an industry unable to access more traditional existing courses. Employers contacted included the airport human resources (HR) staff, property services, airside operations, security, the major ground handling agency and some airlines. Potential students at Newcastle Airport are full-time employees and work in jobs operating on a 24 hour, seven day a week basis.

Newcastle College has invested heavily in this area: it has a Boeing 737 and an Aviation Academy on site at Newcastle Airport. Aviation lecturers, with extensive industrial experience, worked co-operatively with airport and airline employers to develop vocationally relevant module packages, all of which are offered on a roll-on, roll-off basis (usually over six-seven weeks). There are also two year-long modules: personal and professional development, and the work-based project. The most important aspect of this method of delivery is the type of contact Newcastle College staff have with students. Students are offered tutorials at the airport Aviation Academy on a weekly basis or,



if unable to attend, they are contacted by e-mail, phone or webcam to check on their progress. Tutorials can be re-arranged at the discretion of the staff, depending on their availability – for instance, one student has his tutorial regularly at 7am in the coffee lounge of the airport!

This development has proved very successful and the college has reached the stage where a completion award (BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management) validated by Leeds Metropolitan University has been offered since October 2007. A Foundation degree in Cabin Crew Management has also been developed to meet the needs of cabin crew staff.

### *Case Study 2:*

## **The Open University and the Foundation degrees in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Business Information Technology (BIT)**

In contrast to the local need identified and addressed by Newcastle College, the Foundation degrees in ICT and BIT were both developed as a response to a national demand for 'upskilling' and reskilling of the ICT workforce - not only from within the ICT sector itself, but from those working with ICT across all employment sectors.

As a large university involved in supported distance learning nationally and internationally and seeking to offer qualifications to a wide student audience, the Open University (OU) decided that it needed a national employer 'voice' to work with in the development phase. e-skills, the Sector Skills Council for IT & Telecoms fulfilled that role in a couple of important ways. Firstly, it developed a foundation degree framework against which OU could map its Foundation degree in ICT (and for which we received e-skills' endorsement) and secondly we had e-skills representation on the team that developed the crucial work-based learning (WBL) modules that are common to both Foundation degrees.

The Foundation degrees in ICT and BIT can be delivered entirely at a distance using a mix of text, audio-visual, on-line resources and collaborative tools supported by experienced OU tutors and work-based facilitators. Tutors communicate with students in on-line forums, by instant messaging, e-mail or phone - whichever is the preferred option for the student. Face-to-face tutorials are also offered as optional extras. The WBL modules are aimed at people who already have some kind of paid or unpaid employment which involves significant work with ICTs. They must be able to draw on some real work experience to complete the WBL modules successfully.

Like Newcastle College, the OU recognised the need to be as flexible as possible in our method of delivery, and both institutions, although working in very different contexts, came up with solutions based on the same principle, ie as far as possible, keep the learning and teaching as close to the workplace as possible. This means allowing contact preferences in terms of location and frequency to be led as much as possible by the student and not dictated by the academic institution. This has the important benefit that students feel more in control of their own learning experience and employers see that their employee is learning in the workplace rather than learning out of context.

### **Work-based learning courses – pedagogy, structure, and content**

There are a variety of technical and business modules from which students can construct pathways through the awards; however, it is the WBL modules that are central to the distinctiveness of the student learning experience. The WBL modules cover topics such as learning at/through work, professional standards and ethics, personal and career development planning, understanding the organisational context, report writing, adding value through continuing professional development, and implementing change at work through developing a proposal for a change project.





## **Constructivist philosophy**

The modules are based on a constructivist pedagogy. We understand that students come with different levels and kinds of knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and values. Students with different mindsets are going to acquire and process knowledge differently.

Presenting students with ready-made meanings is counter-productive to the learning process – it means they don't have to think things through for themselves or engage seriously with learning opportunities. In the WBL modules students learn by trying to make sense of the course resources based on what they already know from their past experiences. The OU aims to enable students to construct their own meanings from the learning experience by encouraging an active learning approach.

## **Active learning approach**

This keeps students working and thinking throughout the course. It is a way of getting them to identify and engage with learning opportunities in both academic and vocational contexts in order to help them get the most from the learning process. Making activities interesting and relevant to the student is the key thing to achieve, so getting them to think about what they already know or can do is a good initial step. During this process they obviously think about the gaps in their knowledge and skills as well. This provides a prompt to help them think about what they need to know and how they can go about acquiring new skills and knowledge. Trying to contextualise

knowledge and skills is an important aspect. How is this knowledge useful to me? In what context(s) will I be able to use it?

## **Metacognitive strand and reflective practice**

Students are encouraged to think about how they acquire knowledge and what kind of knowledge they possess and they are then asked to think critically about their practice with the aim of identifying strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement.

## **Conclusion**

In this article we have compared and contrasted two very different initiatives – one developed by a large local FE college to meet the needs of a major local employer and one developed by a large university to meet a national need for upskilling and reskilling in the ICT workforce. What the initiatives have in common is that they have identified employer engagement and flexibility of delivery as key aspects of a successful programme.

The methods of delivery described above, although different in many respects, are based on a philosophy that allows students/employees and employers a great deal of flexibility to negotiate when and where study is undertaken and how communication should take place – taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of both the individual and the employer. This approach offers clear benefits in terms of student empowerment and motivation and puts the onus on employers and students/employees to reach an agreement that meets the needs of both.

## **Further Information**

For further discussion of issues arising from the article contact Neil Murray (c.n.murray@open.ac.uk) or Alison Thomson (alison.thomson@ncl-coll.ac.uk)

For further information about the Foundation degrees featured in this article:

ICT see: [www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?Q01G04](http://www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?Q01G04)

BIT see: [www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?Q01G13](http://www3.open.ac.uk/courses/bin/p12.dll?Q01G13)

Newcastle College Foundation degrees:

[www.ncl-coll.ac.uk/international/2yeardegrees.html](http://www.ncl-coll.ac.uk/international/2yeardegrees.html)

# Flexible Foundation degree delivery for experienced women practitioners

**Elaine Hallet**

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Health and Sciences, University of Derby

*Flexibility is one of the defining characteristics of Foundation degrees. Flexibility facilitates responsiveness to the needs of learners and to the changing demands of employment. In the FdA in Children and Young People's Services programme, flexibility is a key component embedded throughout the teaching, learning and assessment strategy and pedagogy. In developing the programme, the needs of non-traditional students - generally experienced women practitioners employed in the early years or school sectors and with family commitments - was a key consideration. To accommodate these complex life demands, a 'wraparound learning' model of flexible study was designed in which students are at the centre of programme delivery. A range of programme delivery opportunities gives students wide programme access. Their individual learning plan identifies each student's available study time, when and where to study, the selection of work-based modules to suit their work role and the time taken to graduate. The programme provides flexible learning opportunities through blended independent modes of learning. This flexibility of study wraps around an employed non-traditional student's family and work commitments.*

*This article describes the development of this student-centred model of flexible delivery, discussing the benefits for students, employers, university and colleges, and how flexibility can challenge the culture of higher education programme provision.*

The University of Derby's Foundation degree in Educare and Early Childhood for Early Years Practitioners and Teaching Assistants was one of the first programmes to be Department for Education and Skills' (DfES)' early years sector-endorsed and had one of the first Foundation degree graduates nationally to be awarded senior practitioner status. The programme has been successfully delivered since 2002, mainly recruiting experienced women practitioners studying part-time one evening a week.

In 2006, the programme was due for revalidation. The programme team took this opportunity to significantly rewrite the programme to meet the changing needs of practitioners working in integrated children's services and to address study access for experienced women practitioners. The new programme, an FdA in Children and Young People's Services (Pathway) is now being delivered to practitioners and non-practitioners working with children and young people from birth to age 19. This includes experienced early years practitioners, teaching assistants, after school workers, play workers and youth workers who are employed in a range of settings. These practitioners have work and family commitments. The majority are women who are the main or co-carer for children, young people and elderly family members. In developing the Foundation degree the following questions arose about the study experience for these non-traditional students:

- **When do they have time to study?**
- **What is the best time for them to study?**
- **Where is the best place for them to study?**
- **How could this new programme accommodate their work and family commitments?**

Flexibility is one of the 'defining characteristics' (QAA 2004) of a Foundation degree and is central to the innovative approach to the teaching, learning and assessment pedagogy developed for this Foundation degree. In the programme the student is at the centre of the programme delivery. The programme is delivered in a flexible way to wrap study and learning around each student's work and family commitments rather than the student having to fit into a planned programme delivery schedule which may restrict their study and learning opportunities.

**Flexibility is threaded throughout the programme in the following ways:**

## **Flexible start to the programme**

Advice, guidance and interviews are given throughout the year. Use of accredited prior learning (APL) and/or accredited prior certificated learning (APCL) enables practitioners' prior experience and higher education credits to be recognised and facilitates quicker progress through the programme. Flexibility in terms of start times allows students to begin their studies in September or January, according to their life needs identified in their individual learning plan.

## ***Individual learning plan - flexible delivery study centres and study times***

The programme is delivered through a collaborative partnership involving the university, further education colleges and work-based outreach centres. The modules are delivered in the daytime, in the evening and on some Saturdays. This provides opportunity for students to access all modules at a local study centre or at centre farther away. Students choose:

- what modules they want to study to support their work role
- when they wish to study to fit around their work and family needs
- where they want to study
- when they want to graduate

At the start of their programme each student develops their own individual learning plan of these study choices with their personal tutor and together they monitor progress through regular progress review meetings.

## ***Flexible learning, teaching and work-based assessment***

Flexibility in modes of teaching and assessment provides a blended independent approach to a student's learning which is carried out on-site, at home, through on-line resources, e-learning, directed study tasks, work-based research, face to face, group, e-mail and telephone tutorials. The coursework assessment activities are work-based and written in a flexible way so that the module learning outcomes can be achieved in a range of settings. This may include conducting a SWOT (strengths/weakness/opportunities/threats) analysis of provision or, writing a leaflet for other practitioners or parents. Each student is supported by a work-based mentor who supports the student's work-based learning by sharing their knowledge, skills and understanding of the sector and the setting or organisation the student works in.

## ***The benefits of flexibility***

The revamped programme has only been running since September 2007 but already the benefits are being seen:





## For students

The student's individual learning plan has been well-received by students, particularly the modules delivered on Saturdays as childcare arrangements can be made more flexibly with partners to allow practitioners to attend. However, younger students are also choosing to study modules in the evening and on Saturdays in order to fit their study around the part-time hourly paid work that they undertake. This has provided a mixed class group of experienced and non-experienced practitioners who learn from each other. This is particularly beneficial for the younger students who gain from employed practitioners sharing their experiences of practice.

Prior to the redesign of the Foundation degree, students could only access modules one evening a week in a restricted module schedule. Students studying part-time can now complete the Foundation degree in two years. This is because they are able to access more modules through the choice of delivery times, use of electronic and on-line resources, directed study tasks and work-based research. Students can also select modules that are relevant for their job role. Students on the new programme have submitted their first assignments and their grades are noticeably higher as a result of the assessments being contextually relevant to their work.

## For employers

The flexibility of the module delivery fits around the needs of the employer's organisation as the employee can choose study at times to suit their work commitments. The range of work-based modules and assessment activities enables the employee to study modules relevant to their work role and to influence and develop practice in the work setting. Work-based learning and reflective practice enables employers and work-based mentors to support their employee so that their personal and professional development has direct impact on the professional practice within the setting.

## For the university and further education colleges

The flexibility of provision is attractive to students and recruitment is high. Students starting the programme have been retained as their individual learning plan puts them at the centre of their study and learning.

*'Flexibility on the part of the institution, the learner and the employer is central to many aspects of Foundation Degrees. It facilitates responsiveness to, for example, the needs of learners from a variety of backgrounds and to the progressive and changing demands of employment.'*

**Foundation Degree qualification benchmark (QAA, 2004)**

## Summary

In developing this Foundation degree flexibility was the key consideration. The programme is therefore responsive to each learner's work and family commitments, wrapping around each student's individual work, family and study needs. This flexible approach to programme delivery challenges the university's structure of a two-term undergraduate programme and the existing 'programme-led' rather than 'student-led' culture of programme delivery in higher education. For flexible delivery to become a reality these cultural differences need to be discussed within higher and further education institutions to accommodate the range of students' needs, particularly recognising the needs of employed women students and the additional family commitments they have to enable them to fit in relevant study time within their other life demands. The unique Foundation degree defining characteristic of 'flexibility' will then become flexibility of study for students and part of the culture of higher education

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QAA, 2004. *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*. Gloucester: QAA

<sup>1</sup> DfES became the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) in 2007



# Higher education and work-based learning

*Look after the learning, and the 'facts' will look after themselves: transition from a didactic approach to workforce development*

**Nicholas E. Rowe**

*Lecturer, Bournemouth University*

The credentials of higher education are increasingly valued by society, and yet the appreciation of the academic institution is in decline. Employers and students in programmes that commonly utilise work-based learning, often experience difficulty in relating the theory of higher education to practical skills assessment in the workplace setting.

Partnership working is central to professional development at all levels, with key stakeholders including students, institutions and regulating authorities. Yet there is often a mutual incomprehension that detracts from effective workplace learning and achievement. Roles and responsibilities are often unclear, resulting in an inconsistent approach to learning and teaching. In turn, this slows the progression of workforce development with considerable implications regarding cost, time commitment and final outcome. These factors in themselves have a negative feedback upon the partnership working process.

By means of literature review, this article aims to highlight key factors that support effective practice assessment, and to identify areas for improvement and consideration. Emergent issues centre upon three specific themes:

- 1) partnership working
- 2) communication and comprehension
- 3) the assessment process

Notably, there is significant coverage of factors that detract from an effective learning process. Clear communication and early exploration of conceptive objectives may be of greater benefit than a more specific didactic/instructional model of learning. This may further enable independent learning and development across a broader range, and release the academic and professional potential of those involved.

Many areas of modern day employment have their roots within a work-based learning approach to development. Healthcare, business and industry have all undertaken a transition from previous didactic teaching and instruction, to the higher education approaches that comprise the curricula of many foundation and development programmes. The dual concept of practical work tasks, supported by a strong theoretical underpinning is beneficial to the quality process of many work settings.



## **Work-based learning systems**

Brown et al (1997) cite studies showing that the purpose and assessment structure of work-based learning systems is often unclear to placement employers, students or educational staff, especially at foundation levels of study. In looking to highlight key concepts that may optimise placement learning, a literature search was carried out. Emergent literature themes centred upon three specific areas:

- partnership working
- communication and understanding
- the assessment process

Many sources present these topics as being mutually involved. Interestingly, the literature obtained did not cite specific methodologies and innovations as being of primary importance to effective student assessment, but emphasised more fundamental concepts. Whilst the search was directed towards healthcare professions, the social and professional contexts of other professions were acknowledged, as many sources discussed transferable principles.

### **The role of partnership institutions**

Academic institutions have input into workplace learning and hold a bridging role on a number of levels. Within the relationship with service providers and employers, lie small work groups and inter-organisational links specific to the field of endeavour (Jacobsen 2001). Jacobsen goes on to illustrate that members of these partnership collaboratives work as a team in order to improve organisational performance and this serves to engage students and workers into a process of shared learning.

Hellström (2004) highlights a 'knowledge paradox', in which the increased societal value of knowledge is balanced with a decreased appreciation of higher education and the institutions involved in its delivery. In considering the aims of knowledge and the approaches to professional and academic issues, Hellström attributes a withholding of information and fragmented approach on the part of education providers, as being contributory to this loss of academic credibility. This withholding of process information is often more a reflection of it not being clearly presented, as opposed to any direct secrecy. Jargon and complex infrastructures may be contributory to this. Partnership is dependent upon trust and as such, the issues raised by Hellström give focus to the examination of current workplace learning and assessment.

### **The dual role of workplace educators**

In practice education, dual roles exist on a number of levels. Institutions work in partnership, with staff often fulfilling both a professional and educational role. At student level, this mirrors the requirements of the educational institution, combined with those of the workplace; a balance that students often find difficult to manage. Meeting the joint expectations of involved parties requires a high

degree of self-directed management and governance, and this is inherent in both professional and evidence-based. In common with the workplace environment Wilson (2003) cites time as a major factor in maintaining a work balance for staff. In order to effectively undertake the roles required of a profession or institution, there is a stated need to understand both the requirements and commitments of any role undertaken, in addition to any perceived norms, values and epistemologies, held by the institutions involved. Time planning may then be mutually agreed between involved parties, to meet specific role requirements.

The consideration of institutional or professional requirements as a risk concept may also hold benefit. In looking to achieve high standards, meet institutional need or to ensure the valid rationale for individual practice, McWilliam (2004) proposes that the minimisation of perceived risk can lead to self-instigated development on the part of staff involved. This in turn can lead to the establishment of professional expertise with potential transferability to related areas. Students inherently develop motivation from the risk of failing a project or assignment. If the related issues of professional and institutional accountability are highlighted to workplace staff involved in student development, then individuals may use a self-development approach in order to protect themselves from any real or perceived judgement (McWilliam 2004). This shared learning may also promote workforce development and improve organisational efficiency.

### **Academic challenges**

In an article that considers nursing students studying at university, Hendry and Farley (2006) outline the previous didactic approach to nursing education, and the comparative current higher education approach of facilitated learning. Clinical practice education and assessment requires a combined approach in order to instruct practical skills, whilst examining the theory/rationale that supports practice. Those staff who have not perhaps had first hand experience of the higher education process are expected to operate at, or above, the higher educational level being delivered in relation to their educational and clinical evidence-based practice. The 'theory - practice link' is still an area that healthcare practitioners have difficulty reconciling. Wilson (2003) asserts that teaching and 'research' remain different activities and that compatibility should be sought in order to take advantage of their similarities and differences. In practice, staff often have little problem with the training of staff in practical tasks, but experience difficulty in relating and employing the theoretical evidence base. At Foundation degree level, research often involves the establishment of best available evidence to support practice. When placed in this context, shared learning may serve to promote staff engagement with the academic process, with emergent knowledge from both student and staff members being adopted into practice.

## Student engagement

In looking at workplace and institutional culture, appreciation of the individual within the group is highlighted. Hoffmann and Kretovics (2004) look at the place of the student as a 'partial employee' within an institution. They cite others as describing the student as a 'customer' (Comesky et al 1992; Schwartzman 1995; Tovote 2001), a 'product' (Sirvanci 1996) and as an 'employee' (Helms and Key 1994), yet 'partial employee' is perhaps suitably reflective of healthcare students in the placement setting. Where students may not be contractually employed by the placement institution, it may reflect the psychological contract that exists between the student and the workplace (O'Donohue and Nelson 2007), and the reciprocal obligations that each hold. This needs clear acknowledgement when undertaking work-based learning activities in order to foster student engagement and to establish clear parameters within which learning may take place.

Students often feel isolated from the academic or workplace institution. A student study by Trotter and Cove (2005) cites poor personal and academic process familiarity as being key factors in student withdrawal from higher educational learning. The need for approaches to teaching and learning which consider both the mature student and younger students is highlighted. If work-based learning, higher education and professional development are indeed shared learning experiences, then this needs consideration.

There is a correlation between poor perception of the educational environment and under-achievement (Mayya and Roff 2004), and often, these perceptions are formed by first impressions and experiences which occur at the commencement of a learning stage (Trotter and Cove 2005). The importance of student perception is also applied to assessment strategy by Gijbels et al (2005) who, whilst promoting techniques that employ both surface and deeper learning, show that initial perception is likely to shape a student's approach to learning. As such, it is important to clearly outline the aims and processes in place for work-based learning and allow student input.

Trotter and Cove (2005) identify that students chose their selected programme as a route to a career. This motivation may be less influential in the professional development of workplace staff, where a career is already secured. Where staff development is either desirable, or in the case of many healthcare professions, a mandatory requirement, there is little workplace evidence of any career threatening consequences should staff choose not to engage. This adherence to 'traditional' practice may contribute to the dual working standard observations of students, when meeting the 'reality' of the workplace.

In conclusion, there is significant coverage of factors that detract from an effective learning process. Clear communication and early exploration of the conceptive objectives of higher education may be of greater benefit than a more specific instructional model of learning. This may further enable independent learning and development across a broader range, and release the academic and professional potential. Engaged learning is likely to be both current and contextualised, with a greater contributory value to organisational performance. Combined, this serves to promote a mutually beneficial practice partnership that operates at individual, group and institutional levels.

Look after the learning, and the 'facts' will look after themselves.

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## News and events

Thursday 10 April 2008

### **Quality Enhancement Network Meeting Employer-provider partnerships: a toolkit for providers**

MIC Conference Centre, 81-103 Euston Street, London NW1 2EZ | 10.30 - 15.15

This meeting will focus on the employer-provider partnerships toolkit that has been designed to help providers engage with employers. The meeting will update participants on the project in order to identify any quality assurance and enhancement implications and to initiate action planning to see you take forward this agenda with colleagues and how **fdf** might help.

If you would like to attend this day, please contact Jane Heslington [j.heslington@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:j.heslington@fdf.ac.uk)

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Thursday 10 April 2008

### **Working Together to Engage Employers in Higher Level Skills**

*A joint fdf and Lifelong Learning Networks event*

Aston Business School, Aston University, Birmingham B4 7ET

This event focuses on the range of ways in which **fdf** and LLNs are working together on the higher skills agenda; encouraging progression into and through higher education, and developing provision that meets the higher skills needs of business. It is a key networking event for sharing effective practice and kick starting further collaborative work.

Keynote speakers include Hugh Tollyfield, Special Advisor, Employer Engagement, HEFCE; and Derek Longhurst, Chief Executive, **fdf**.

Please see [www.fdf.ac.uk/events](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/events) for programme details and how to register for this event.

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Tuesday 8 July 2008

### **Innovating workforce development in health and social care**

Central Hall Westminster, Storey's Gate, Westminster, London SW1 9NH

This one day conference will review some of the vast array of work that is taking place in the Health and Social Care Sectors with the aim of developing and implementing new Assistant/Associate practitioner roles supported by Foundation degrees. The event will explore the implications of workforce development at this level for service providers, education providers and the learners themselves. A variety of workshops will provide opportunities to investigate examples of development innovation from the DH/DIUS/**fdf** Higher Level Skills Group 'Invitation to Bid' 2006 projects. The findings from the NHS Northwest/**fdf** research of their major, commissioned Assistant practitioner/Foundation degree project will be presented.

Programme details and registration information will appear on [www.fdf.ac.uk/events](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/events) in the near future.

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Wednesday 9 July 2008

***Researching Work Based Learning:  
Constructing an Evidence Base***

Austin Court, Birmingham

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) and **fdf** are hosting a one day event focusing on current research which contributes to the construction of an evidence base to inform the development of, and policy for, work-based learning (WBL). The event will provide an opportunity to: hear about, and to discuss, recently commissioned work on the impact of various forms of WBL; to engage in workshops based around specific topics and themes in this area; and to contribute to discussion on the future direction of the research which will be needed to create a robust evidence base to support work in WBL.

Please see [www.fdf.ac.uk/events](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/events) for details of how to register for this event.

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9 and 10 October 2008

***Innovating workforce development:  
productivity and opportunity***

Park Plaza Riverbank, 18 Albert Embankment , London SE1 7TJ

The **fdf** annual conference has changed: a new venue, a different time of year, and a programme driven by employer partnership with higher education. This unmissable event begins with a gala dinner for delegates, employers and policy-makers addressed by Will Hutton. This will set the context for this conference focusing upon the social and economic drivers for work-force development.

The conference continues the following day with keynote speeches from policy-makers and employers offering a strategic perspective on the higher level skills agenda, and seminars offering an employment perspective stimulating innovative and effective approaches to workforce development.

Further details of this event will be available shortly. See [www.fdf.ac.uk/events](http://www.fdf.ac.uk/events).

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# Publications

## **EBTA**

### *Boost your Profits and Productivity*

A new leaflet giving information about the EBTA initiative. It outlines:

- How EBTA works
- How employers can benefit
- How to make contact

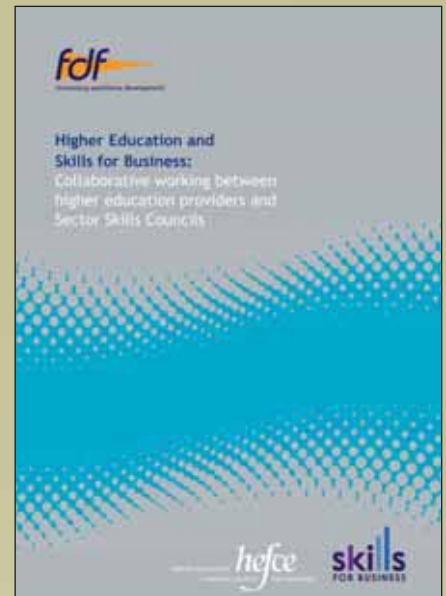
Free copies are available from Kat Price [k.price@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:k.price@fdf.ac.uk)



### ***Higher Education and Skills for Business: higher education providers and Sector Skills Councils***

This new publication examines how Sector Skills Councils and higher education providers can work collaboratively in response to employer and industry needs and grow the demand for higher level skills.

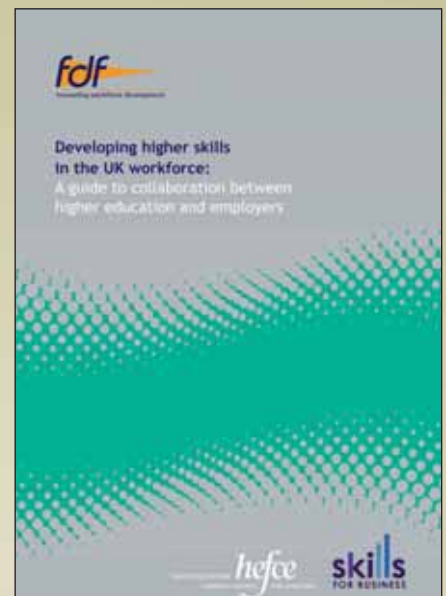
Free copies are available from Kat Price [k.price@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:k.price@fdf.ac.uk)



### ***Developing higher Skills in the UK workforce: a guide to collaboration between higher education and employers***

This guide looks at collaboration between higher education providers and employers, the role of higher education in developing the UK workforce and the culture change required to meet the ambitious targets set out by the Leitch Review.

Free copies are available from Kat Price [k.price@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:k.price@fdf.ac.uk)



# Publications

## **Student leaflet**

### *What is a Foundation degree?*

A new leaflet for students that provides answers to questions such as:

- What is a Foundation degree?
- Who pays for a Foundation degree?
- How do I apply?
- Where can a Foundation degree take me?

Free copies are available from Kat Price [k.price@fdf.ac.uk](mailto:k.price@fdf.ac.uk)



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Dick Coldwell CBE (Chair)	Former Member of the HEFCE Board
Joe Eason	Former Training and Education Development Manager, Corus
Linda Florance	Chief Executive, Skillfast-UK
Mike Goldstein CBE	(former Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Coventry University) <i>Independent</i>
Deian Hopkin	Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, London South Bank University
Fran Hulbert	Former Director of Skills Policy, North West RDA
Pat Jackson	Director of West Midlands Regional Skills Partnership
Anil Kumar	Director of Education and Policy, Engineering and Technology Board
Derek Longhurst	Chief Executive, <b>fdf</b>
Chris Mullen MBE	Project Director for Delivering the Workforce, Greater Manchester Strategic Health Authority
Dick Palmer	Principal and Chief Executive, City College Norwich
Gareth Parry	Professor of Education, University of Sheffield
Mike Stapleton	Training and Education Manager, Compass
Stephen Uden	Director of Citizenship, Microsoft
Beverley Webster, OBE	Chief Executive, Prosperis

## **Observers:**

Sarah Millet	LSC
Pat Morrison	DELNI
Richard Parsons	DIUS
Wendy Staples/Liz Franco	HEFCE

## **Secretary:**

Gay Bligh	Director of Operations, <b>fdf</b>
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