

Employer Engagement in Foundation Degree Design

Amendment History

| Version No. | Date | Reason for Amendment |
|-------------|----------|----------------------|
| 1 | 21/06/07 | New Proposal |

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Document Distribution

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Responsibility</i> | <i>Action/Information</i> |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Bridget Thornton | NEWC | Programme area Manager | Project manager |
| Russ Henry | NEWC | Head of Department | For information |
| Tim Maxfield | UW | Worcester business School | Involved in project |
| Debbie Lambert | LLN | Manager | For information |
| Geoffrey Elliott | UW | Steering Group | For approval |
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| Donna Obrey | LLN | Project Officer | For monitoring and tracking |

Background

North East Worcestershire College has been running a Foundation Degree in Business and Management, validated by the University of Worcester since 2003. Re-validation of the programme is due in April 2008. The College views the re-validation process as an opportunity to research and design an innovative, distinctive Foundation Degree in Business and Management; a programme which is shaped by local employer needs and one which will impact positively on learners' careers or job progression.

A recent research report commissioned by Foundation Degree Forward, Heist (2006) found that Foundation Degrees which were designed with very little market intelligence and employer involvement usually failed to recruit. Conversely, those

Foundation Degrees which were fully researched and designed in collaboration with employers flourished.

It is envisaged that the revised Foundation Degree in Business and Management will be designed in genuine partnership with local employers. This involvement of employers in the design of the Foundation Degree, will form part of a longer-term employer engagement strategy which seeks to engage employers in an 'evolutionary' way.

Objectives of the Project

1. To review the need for the Foundation Degree in Business and Management amongst local employers.
2. To identify the specific higher-level knowledge and skills that local employers want incorporated within the revised Foundation Degree in Business and Management.
3. To engage local employers in the design of a revised Foundation Degree in Business and Management (curriculum and delivery modes).
4. To establish an Employer Advisory Board which supports the further development of the Foundation Degree in Business and Management.

Project Approach

Stage 1 (September – November 2007)

Structured telephone interviews will be conducted with twenty training managers (or other individuals responsible for training and development) working within a range of local employing organisations, including large employers and SMEs across the private and public sector. The objective of the telephone interviews is to gather data on what demand there might be amongst local employers for the new Foundation Degree programme. A thematic analysis approach will be used to identify key themes within the interviews (e.g. current demand for skills, perceptions of Foundation Degree programmes, areas for future development etc.)

Stage 2 (December 2007)

Follow-up interviews will be conducted with five training managers who participated in the stage 1 telephone interviews (a self-selecting sample). The stage 2 interviews will take the form of face-to-face in-depth interviews and will focus on the identification of the specific higher-level skills and knowledge needs of their businesses.

Stage 3 (January 2008)

Using the research findings from stages 1 and 2, the programme development team will prepare initial ideas on curriculum content and delivery modes and produce a draft programme specification for the new Foundation Degree.

Stage 4 (January 2008)

A breakfast meeting will be held to test aspects of the proposed Foundation Degree in Business and Management curriculum with local training managers. All

participants in stage 1 of this project will be invited to the meeting. Following this meeting interested employers will be invited to join an 'Employer Advisory Board'

Stage 5 (February 2008)

Using employer feedback from the breakfast meeting, the programme development team will finalise the programme specification for the new Foundation Degree in Business and Management.

Scope

A Key Products from the Project

- A newly designed Foundation Degree in Business and Management based on a good knowledge of local employer demand.
- A model for employer involvement in the design of Foundation Degrees, which can be used to inform other similar initiatives elsewhere within and beyond the Lifelong Learning Network.
- Recruitment of an 'Employer Advisory Board' to support future development and sustainability of the Foundation Degree in Business and Management

B Out of Scope

The later stages of the Foundation Degree programme development process are beyond the scope of this project, for example; the embedding of other national qualifications/ professional certification and the use of blended learning to enhance access opportunities.

Constraints

There is a very low awareness of Foundation Degrees at present among employers nationally. Even where there is awareness the relevance of Foundation Degrees to business is not fully understood. Hence, there could be reluctance amongst local training managers to engage with this project.

This constraint is compounded by the fact that; only 30% of employers within Herefordshire and Worcestershire who train their staff use Further Education Colleges; hence there may also be resistance amongst local employers to engage with research carried out by a College.

Initial Project Case

- The design of a 'demand led' Foundation Degree which will offer the opportunity to increase and widen participation in Higher Education locally through vocational progression
- This project will build on the work of the College's 'Centre of Vocational Excellence in Management and Professional Studies', offering an articulated progression route to students successful at level 3, including Apprenticeships
- A collaborative project involving a University, a Further Education College and a range of local employers

Benefits of the Project

Key Benefits to the Learners:-

- Access to a Foundation Degree in Business and Management which will equip learners with a combination of; technical skills, academic knowledge and transferable skills that are valued by local employers.
- Greater employer awareness of this specific Foundation Degree programme, should lead to employers recognising the benefits of employee participation and to rewarding the outcomes of the learning.

Key Benefits to Employers:-

- Availability of a Foundation Degree in Business and Management which has been specifically designed to develop the skills and knowledge of the local workforce.
- The newly designed Foundation Degree in Business and Management could be used as a vehicle for local organisations to 'grow their own managers'.
- Flexibility in design may reduce the amount of time that learners spend away from the workplace
- There is evidence that investment in Foundation Degree development can enhance employee recruitment and retention

Key Benefits to North East Worcestershire College:-

- Increased enrolments on the Foundation Degree in Business and Management programme, ensuring its future sustainability
- Collaborative approach with employers will serve as a catalyst for a longer-term employer engagement strategy

Key Assumptions

- The availability of key members of the project team and associated release from other duties by the College.
- At least twenty local employers will engage effectively with the project.

Costs

The total cost of the project will be £4,840, breakdown by key milestones:-

| | £ |
|----------|------|
| Stage 1: | 900 |
| Stage 2: | 450 |
| Stage 3: | 1620 |
| Stage 4: | 250 |
| Stage 5: | 1620 |

How will the Project be Evaluated?

The success of this project will be evaluated by measurement against outcomes identified as 'key products' from the project. Evaluation measures will include:-

- A comparison of curriculum content and delivery models between the original Foundation Degree in Business and Management and the revised programme, with a focus on increased employer involvement.
- Monitoring and review of the activities/outcomes achieved by the Employer Advisory Board in relation to the newly designed Foundation Degree programme
- A model for employer involvement in the design of Foundation Degrees formulated, articulated and available for dissemination via academic journals and at good practice events.

How will the Project be Sustained?

The 'Employer Advisory Board' established at stage 4 of this project, will be the mechanism which ensures local employers remain actively involved in the future development of the Foundation Degree in Business and Management.

Initial Risk Log

The following table summarises the risks that have been identified that may prevent the project being completed to the required quality, budget and timescale. The probability and impact of each risk has been graded as low, medium or high to indicate the relative importance attached to each element of risk.

| Risks | Probability | Impact | Containment Plan |
|--|-------------|--------|---|
| Release of staff to implement the project | Low | Low | Rationalisation of project objectives and key stages to match staff availability |
| Lack of sufficient employer involvement | Medium | High | Involvement of relevant Sector Skills Councils and Chambers of Commerce to assist in recruitment of suitable employers |
| Sustainability via Employer Advisory Board | Medium | Medium | Other employer engagement /feedback methods would be pursued if the Employer Advisory Board failed – e.g. employer satisfaction surveys |

Project Team

Bridgette Thornton, Programme Area Manager at North East Worcestershire College

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