

Employers' Engagement with Foundation Degrees:

*A Study of the
Experiences of Ten
Employers*

March 2009

Of interest to partners, providers and employers, and all those interested in learning and skills in the East Midlands



Employers' Engagement with Foundation Degrees

Report to the Learning and Skills Council
on a Study of the Experiences of Ten Employers
with Foundation Degrees

John Benyon and Belinda Mckee
with
Elain Crewe and Katie Morris

**Institute of Lifelong Learning
University of Leicester**

128 Regent Road, Leicester, LE1 7PA
Telephone: 0116 2525914; Email: ijw3@le.ac.uk

Contents

1. Introduction to the study	1
2. Employers' involvement in the course/programme concept	2
3. Employers' involvement in course development and curriculum design	4
4. Employers' involvement in course/programme delivery	5
5. Employers' involvement in marketing and publicity	6
6. Employers' experience of working with the college and/or university	7
7. Employers' issues and concerns	8
8. Employers' involvement in finance and other support	9
9. Employers' evaluation of the foundation degree's impact and benefits	11
10. Employers' views on progression	13
11. Hindsight and scope for change	14
12. Conclusions	16
13. What has been learned?	17
14. Appendix 1: Survey Instrument	19
15. Appendix 2: Employer interviews – key facts	22
16. Bibliography	24

1. Introduction to the study

During 2007 and 2008 the Colleges–University of Leicester Network (CULN) undertook a study looking at the factors influencing the success of foundation degrees. The CULN group is a dynamic partnership of 19 FE Colleges and 3 HEIs in the East and West Midlands who work together to promote co-operation between members and increase learner progression on to HE.

'Successful' foundation degrees were taken to mean courses with viable numbers of students enrolled, where the majority of students completed their programme of study, and where students had access to effective progression routes.

The study particularly looked at the role of employers as one of the main factors affecting the success of foundation degrees. The research was carried out in three phases that included a survey of all foundation degrees developed by CULN members and 5 case studies of particular foundation degrees. The case studies involved focused interviews with employers, college staff and students. The interviews asked about the role of employers, from the first initial concept through to shared delivery of programmes, and provided an opportunity to reflect on how employers' involvement may have changed over time. The final report of the study is entitled *Successful Foundation Degrees – A Study of the Role of Employers and Other Key Factors*.

As an extension to the study, CULN was asked by the Learning and Skills Council to undertake ten further interviews with employers who already had an involvement with foundation degrees. This report is a summary of those interviews. The numbers in brackets following each quotation in the report relate to the interviews listed below.

The ten interviews were based upon a series of questions that had been devised for the original project on *Successful Foundation Degrees*. The questions aimed to explore the role of the employer in each foundation degree and to identify how they contributed to the success of the programme. The interview schedule is reproduced in Appendix 1.

	Interviewee	Organisation
1	Manager	Kidaroo Childcare Ltd
2	Manager	St. Clements Day Nursery
3	Superintendent Radiographer	Leicester General Hospital
4	Training Manager	West Yorkshire Police
5	Senior Strategy Adviser	Youth Justice Board England & Wales
6	Training Manager	City of London Police
7	Centre Tutor	Bradford Diocese
8	Manager	Aquarius
9	Manager	CAN – Drugs, alcohol, homelessness
10	Manager	Leicester Youth Offending Team

The research team would like to end this introduction by thanking everyone who assisted with the project, especially the members of the Steering Group, and staff in the colleges and higher education institutions who participated in the study. Particular thanks are owed to the ten employers, listed above, who took part in the interviews which are the subject of this report.

The team would also like to thank all the staff in the Institute of Lifelong Learning at the University of Leicester who have helped with the project, especially Isobel Woodliffe and Jo Leadbetter. Finally, the researchers wish to thank the Learning and Skills Council for funding the study and those who have assisted the project in other ways, particularly Steven Hunt.

2. Employers' involvement in the course/programme concept

Not all the employers who were interviewed had been involved in setting up a foundation degree, but they were all currently involved and in several cases other staff from their organisation had been involved from inception. There were also examples of a college or university developing a qualification and then taking it to employers. This was more apparent with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which did not have the resources for programme development or the regular supply of students.

What was important in these examples was for the college or university to have a representative sample of employers to steer and guide the programme development, and this seems to have been the case, though interviews with academic partners did not form part of this survey. It was typical for training managers and other staff to have had little knowledge and understanding of foundation degrees before the course was developed.

The original impetus for the development of the foundation degree varied considerably. There were, though, four main findings from the ten interviews which can be categorised as follows.

2.1 Government requirement for training

One of the government requirements is that by 2010 each full day care has to have somebody with the qualification. (1)

This reason led some employers to encourage their staff to enrol on the relevant foundation degree. In some cases it led to the manager undertaking the programme so that they remained better qualified than their staff.

Where the government had also made funding accessible this had greatly increased the opportunities for employees to enrol of the foundation degree.

Now funding is available, I jumped at the chance to do the course. (2)

2.2 Shortage of qualified staff

In some cases the impetus came from the employer who was having difficulties in recruiting suitably-qualified staff.

The idea for the foundation degree came from the Society of Radiographers' four-tier career structure. One of the drivers was the fact that we couldn't appoint qualified staff: there were not enough qualified radiographers. The assistants started off doing a NVQ3 in Health Care, which gave them the stepping stone on to the foundation degree. Before we developed this course they went on to a distance-learning course which was fairly mixed in terms of delivery, and we didn't feel it fully supported either the students' or department's needs at that time. This course we developed received formal accreditation from the Society of Radiographers. (3)

2.3 Accreditation of programmes

There were several examples of existing programmes, often 'in-house' training, for which the employer had sought external accreditation. In some cases this included training to national occupational standards.

The impetus came from the chief constable in a request to accredit student officer training programme to foundation degree level. We worked with the university and we started by looking at the broad issues and the strategic design, then drilled down to the detail. We have to train to national occupational standards so we wanted a programme that was accredited to those standards. We wanted a coherent programme that was not seen as divided between university and workplace. (4)

I've always been a firm believer that police training or police learning and development should receive accreditation because an awful lot of learning goes on within a police officer's career and very little of it receives any form of accreditation. (6)

In some cases the training that had been available had been a short, stand-alone programme, and through developing a foundation degree the employer was then able to offer a qualification framework that enabled staff to progress through a range of modules.

We started with a certificate called the Professional Certificate in Effective Practice, which is an award that is offered to people working in the Youth Justice System, and that was at level 2 and level 3. The foundation degree grew up around that. Strategically we provide a kind of qualification framework for staff in youth offending teams. (5)

Originally it was a certificate course which was changed to a foundation degree six years ago with very willing partners working together. (7)

2.4 Changing external conditions

The rapid requirements for change that were mentioned by many employers were occasionally a stimulus for developing new courses, but the stronger requirement was for regular updating once a course had been developed.

No changes have been required to the programme so far, but when there are changes to legislation then we would obviously want that incorporated and we would want things to be kept up-to-date because it's a very fast changing world. We monitor it very closely. We obviously need to make sure that it is very much up-to-date, we

can't have parts of modules of the degree that actually make reference to something that was accurate two years ago. (5)

However there was an example from the police service where the closing down of national training centres required forces to take on responsibility for the training of student officers. As this coincided with the content of training programmes needing to change, it provided an ideal opportunity to develop a foundation degree.

3. Employers' involvement in course development and curriculum design

There was not a set pattern of employer involvement in the development of a foundation degree. It again tended to vary with the size of the organisation. Larger organisations, with existing training materials, tended to approach a college or university for help and validation.

We worked very closely with the pro-vice-chancellor for the university and she was really our main academic sponsor for this. I've fed in to the foundation degree group that looks at existing new programmes, their implementation, making them better etc., and we receive a considerable amount of money for HEFCE funded places. That certainly helped in taking things forward. (6)

Some organisations shared the development of content with the college or university.

We agreed an appropriate course content and structure and lecture programme and we worked with the college in conjunction with anatomy and physiology. We provided all the in-house, technical teaching and supervision and also the holistics of patient care. As student numbers were modest (the largest group size was 7) they were able to tap into a foundation degree that the college was already running. (3)

I actually designed the programme model and the structure of it all and I had an academic seconded to my team who helped me write submissions and the module guides. So it was pretty much driven by us but with the expertise to give us the academic validity that's required. (6)

There was an example in the public sector of managers finding that academic institutions did not share information as readily as their own sector.

We did some research, looking at what other forces are doing. The thing is with the police forces, in many cases they are quite keen to share information across all disciplines, you know not just training, across all policing, but universities of course are working in a different environment and probably more in competition with each other and so therefore we had access to some information but not complete information. (4)

Other employers used their existing materials as an exemplar and left the college or university to write materials that they could approve. This way provided a consistency of approach and ensured quality standards.

We have a whole range of both research materials and our own kind of learning materials which we also can share with the university so they specifically write the materials and services to the context we require. They have the academic overview and we have critical readers both within the YJB and within the Youth Justice System who design and amend it, so I think at the end of the day we came out with a project that has an academic rigour as well as being tested for its application and relevance to the working place. (5)

It was important for the foundation degree developed to include any professional qualifications that were required and the relevant national occupational standards.

Occupational standards are built in to the structure. We've just had new standards revised this year, so actually in our workforce development framework they're built in to that qualification structure and they are referenced rather than being explicit. The content of the modules will reflect the occupational standards and particularly reflect the common core, which is obviously an important. (5)

4. Employers' involvement in course/programme delivery

There was again no standard response for employer involvement in programme delivery. SMEs were substantially less likely to deliver any of the foundation degree to students, but were likely to mentor or supervise students on the programme.

The following examples provide an indication of the varied nature of foundation degree delivery by employers.

It has been a shared delivery with the college. They provided half a day of lectures a week, we provided the other half a day and the students had half a day's study during the week as well. (3)

Delivery of the programme is shared with approximately 25% by the university and 75% by police force. One of the things we insisted upon was that the students do try and integrate with the university as much as possible. For example, we didn't want the course to be delivered by our own police officer training staff on university premises, we wanted it to be delivered by university lecturers who came from a variety of backgrounds, and weren't all ex-police. So it is truly a partnership and our student officers get a different experience when they're at the university from what they get when they're doing their practical police training on the police site. (4)

We don't share the delivery – the university delivers it, but we we're involved in terms of design and then fine tuning and critical reading. We meet them regularly and filter back and come up with comments and concerns. We are obviously involved in the monitoring of quality assurance and the evaluation of what the students are saying. Modules are delivered by distance learning with some day workshops. (5)

In the very early days, probably, 95 to 98 percent of it was delivered by police officers and the remainder by external specialist guest speakers. The problem that we've had is that the programme is delivered fifty weeks of the year, and it didn't fit the normal model for academic appointments, so we made the conscious decision to supplement the process with police officers and then as we worked out the needs and

demands we gradually made the transition to a more equal collaborative approach to the teaching and probably more a 50–50 model. (6)

Our criminal justice manager has been involved in delivering some of the sessions. (9)

I've got oversight of the students so we have regular supervisions on about a monthly basis. I do shadowing with them, allocating cases, ensuring that they know what the policies and procedures are, and just supporting them. (10)

5. Employers' involvement in marketing and publicity

The majority of the employers interviewed did not have any involvement in marketing or publicity for the foundation degree. There were several reasons for this:

1. It was not necessary where the foundation degree was a compulsory part of the employment.
2. SMEs who placed their employees on a foundation degree did not see the relevance of being involved with marketing outside their own organisation.
3. In cases where the foundation degree had been developed and delivered by a college or university, it was felt that the responsibility lay with that institution.

Some employers were involved in raising awareness of the principles of foundation degrees, and found that it was a slow process in helping people to understand how they were different to traditional higher education in ethos, in modes of delivery and in assessment strategy.

It's been an important point selling the degree as a training vehicle. It is a degree in theology and ministry and so there's an emphasis running through the course both in the way we teach it and also in the assessment strategy. It is not just reading books and writing essays. It's about ministerial skills as well. So some of the assignments are presentations because we want them to grow in communication skills. It is skills based and competency based, different from the previous course. I make sure that the change of emphasis from earlier courses is known. I think I'm winning, but I've had many conversations where people have assumed because we've gone from a Certificate in Christian Studies to something called a degree we're raising the bar unnecessarily high for this form of ministry and so I've had to explain that it is a foundation degree and what that involves and why we think this is a better vehicle than the previous one. (7)

It obviously takes some time for the whole notion about foundation degrees to get in to a peoples' consciousness and also for local authorities to understand. There's still a fairly traditional view about how people undertake higher education and so it's something that is going to take a bit of time. (5)

There was also an example of a foundation degree that was struggling to maintain viable student numbers, where advertising was tried as a route to boost the intake.

We did try to advertise the course and recruit nationally but we didn't have any success. We tried quite extensively to advertise it, but we weren't offering distance learning at that time, so we really felt we could only really go for Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, and we didn't have any uptake. (3)

6. Employers' experience of working with the college and/or university

Employers' experiences of working with an academic institution were largely positive, though several remarked on the different culture that existed and the effect this had on working together.

The university were very good which was the whole reason why we went for that particular university. They had the approach of 'we're the subject matter experts, we will help'. There was certainly a clash of cultures and there were personality conflicts but professionally we worked through these. On the real positive side was that the person that was working with the team had a lot of the knowledge and expertise to help us make that transition so though there was a clash of cultures there was also recognition of the expertise that they brought to it. (6)

It is very interesting, because there were a lot of things as you might imagine that we were in agreement on, but then it's two different cultures, the university culture and of course the police culture, and so there were some areas where we had some challenges in the design. (4)

Where an employer had experienced any difficulties with their education partner, then they appeared to have tackled it and things had improved, or in one case they had changed partners.

With the first cohort there was some conflict and lack of communication between the college (delivering) and the university (validating) – for example, with what was expected from assignments. This has settled down now. (1)

We changed universities for a number of reasons. One was because the new university has national coverage with regional centres and they have a distance-learning approach, which seemed to give us a lot of flexibility for staff who are working in youth offending teams and secure that they could have that more flexible approach when they undertake their work. (5)

At its best the academic institution provided a true partnership approach and listened to the feedback from their employers.

The university is very partner orientated and if we say this module isn't quite meeting our needs, they really do move heaven and earth for us. We've just gone through a revalidation and they took on board any number of different points that we said about certain modules that weren't quite working and indeed they'll write new modules at our request and consult and bring us in to that process if we say we need a new module on this or that. They're very good. They give tutor training every year and we go to module planning meetings every term. (7)

There were some examples of frustration from employers that everything took a long time, even quite minor changes, but this was not the predominating experience.

It's in an academic institution and therefore change takes a bit longer. (8)

Although all the employers understood how to contact their academic partner, there were examples where the communication system that was in place did not seem adequate.

The supervisors' meetings are quite widely spread out. We obviously have the ability to contact the university to say if there are any issues we need to look at, but in terms of how this fits with the work we do, or how it is evolving, I've tended to save that for the supervisors' meetings. I've been surprised with the limited reporting back that is being asked for and although I'm not begging for huge reports to be required I think there would be some value in reports that were more detailed. (9)

If I was given a substantial amount of notice of meetings, if meetings were in a local location and also if we were given notice, there would be no reason why we couldn't come in and assist with training. (10)

I think the degree is a very drawn out process. It works from the ground zero in some ways but the work over two years could have been done in one. I think that having a forum for employers and the tutors on the course would be very helpful. Our meetings are held by one key link tutor and actually having discussion with the tutors who are working on the coalface and looking at the curriculum in a more direct way might be more helpful. I think things sometimes get translated in the middle. (8)

7. Employers' issues and concerns

There were a variety of issues raised by employers. Some of these appeared to be teething issues that had initially caused concern, but had subsequently been resolved.

It was disorganised at first, as we were the first cohort and the college didn't have enough resources – for example, they didn't have enough books. You went to the university and you weren't allowed to use the library because you were an outreach student. All these things contributed to making it a really hard first assignment. (1)

The first students we had were not hugely positive about the teaching element of the course. This was partly the style of teaching that was more lectures than interactive and I think we were very conscious that this was the first intake and therefore there were elements inevitably that would be improved over time. (9)

There was also an interesting example of a foundation degree that was no longer viable. It highlighted the variety of problems the employer faced. This example is given in full and provides a picture of changing external codes of practice, changing access to qualified staff and its subsequent effects on both employer and education partner.

We will not be running our foundation degree next year. There are a number of reasons.

- 1. Our course was approved by the Society of Radiographers, but there were many other courses in existence that ran on an informal basis and still called their radiology assistants, 'assistant practitioners', for example after six months training. The Society has now brought out a code of practice for assistant practitioners which is more restrictive. We were producing assistant practitioners who were almost radiographers; there were only a limited number of duties that they couldn't perform. The new code of practice is very strict and narrow in its definition of supervision for these individuals and also the kind of work they should undertake. For an employer, an assistant practitioner is suddenly less attractive as they cannot use them in many situations and are employing less. This has had an effect on the number of assistants being trained. We cannot afford to run the course again. Actually we're training two this year, if we were to train another two next year it just would not be viable or cost effective.*
- 2. The university we were working with stopped running the foundation degree that our students mapped into, making the situation difficult.*
- 3. Four years ago there were not enough qualified radiographers, and we could not appoint qualified staff, so it was a massive help to be able to train assistants. Then there was an increase in the places at universities for radiographers so we suddenly had a glut. Now there is a shortage again. (3)*

When enrolment on one foundation degree became mandatory, this caused some concerns for new recruits.

Some of the early students hadn't realised when they were going through the recruitment process that they'd have to do the foundation degree, and so for some of them it was a concern, whereas now students are aware right from the offset. Some of the officers, who'd been out of education for some time. have concerns how would they would cope. (4)

8. Employers' involvement in finance and other support

The ways in which employers provided funding or other support for their staff varied hugely, and the implications for staff undertaking the qualification were substantial. There were concerns that staff would expect a higher rate of pay once qualified and the well-rehearsed fear that they might leave otherwise.

Employees can get funded at the moment to undertake the course, but I'm going to have all these members of staff with a foundation degree qualification, how am I going to pay for them? Because they're going to want a pay rise, or I might lose them. (1)

There had been problems with covering for staff when they were undertaking training.

We seconded people out on to the course, gave them the full salary, and there was no backfill in the early days, so the directorate was able to absorb so much of that and then we reached a point where we weren't able to absorb any more so that was one of the limiting factors. (3)

There were examples of funding that had once been available but was no longer available with the expectation that the employer would pay.

There has been funding provided by Youth Justice Board for staff who are employed in Youth Offending Teams. In the future it will be their employer who will be paying. (5)

Self-financing was also a common option, particularly for people who might be working in a volunteer capacity and through undertaking a foundation degree could expand their employment potential, though employers acknowledged that this was an expensive option for them.

The distance-learning modes are quite costly. I have got a young member of staff who can't make the financial commitment to do it. The student taking it on is still required to make a pretty hefty financial commitment. (8)

Volunteers who are not employed by Youth Offending Teams can take the modules and pay for them themselves; this could increase their chances of obtaining paid employment. (5)

There were some organisations that paid for the majority of the students' costs.

It is a condition of employment that employees undertake the foundation degree. They do not pay fees and they can apply for study leave, but there is an expectation that some work is done in their own time. (4)

Our readers and our ordinands have all their fees paid for them by the diocese. If they're open access then they have to pay but there is a 50 per cent grant administered by the Bradford Diocese, for local Church of England people. (7)

There were other organisations where there was no support for fees, with at the most some flexibility over hours.

The cost variant between in-house programmes and accredited courses had led one employer to conclude that it was expensive to offer validated courses.

It's far more expensive to deliver a foundation degree in partnership with a university, than it is to deliver in-house. So though we would like to say that professionalisation of the learning and development function and accreditation is important, it's only important as long as doesn't impact on budgets. (6)

This view was not held by other employers, who had been able to access HEFCE funding in one instance, and in the example below had changed academic partner.

The cost difference was significant, also, with more academic credits for less cost, so it is actually very good value for money. (5)

9. Employers' evaluation of the foundation degree's impact and benefits

Overall, the comments from employers were very positive about the benefits of a foundation degree and its impact on business.

There were examples of managers who were also students and were able cascade to others in their employment, thus enabling several people to benefit from what they were learning. They could see a direct application for what they were studying.

I've been coming back and cascading information and knowledge I've learned in to staff meetings so it has helped. It is raising the standards, so everybody ups their game. (1)

The knowledge that we're able to learn here, we can cascade it down to the girls in the nursery. So it's been an eye opener – it's frightening when you realise what you actually don't know. (2)

The course links very much with the nursery and working practices. The assignment that I'm doing at the minute is about inclusive practice. We have just had Ofsted round and they have highlighted inclusive practice as an area that we need to develop, so I've based the assignment all around how to improve inclusive practice. (2)

One of the key benefits that employers observed was the increase in confidence levels of staff who were undertaking the programme. More comments were related to this area than any other.

It enables you to feel like a professional; you can go in to situations and talk to people at all different levels. I mean answering parent's queries and being able to back your argument up with current thinking and current legislation. They look on you in a different light and they give you a lot more respect than they perhaps would have done. (2)

It gives you the confidence to be able to speak to parents – you're not just a nursery nurse anymore; you've got evidence to back it up. You know what you're doing is the correct thing and that will lead the nursery forward. (1)

The people who come on the course are usually on the older side – an average age is about 49 or 50 – and some people are quite a bit older than that. They are often in fear and trembling when they submit their first piece of work and then as they move on and their grades begin to improve and they get more confidence, verbally they start participating more. It's a real joy; it's the thing I like the most about the job. Seeing them grow and blossom. (7)

The course supported my first member of staff to really develop her confidence she has a very holistic approach. I think that it has helped her to feel her way through and work in multi-agency partnerships much more confidently, able to challenge other partners that are professionals and so on. (8)

Improved confidence is the most significant factor, in general day-to-day case working and in people's ability to record. It's very apparent from case files that confidence has increased over time. (10)

For some employers an important feature is the academic rigour and knowledge with an accredited course. This provided a standard that would be set for all.

The people who come out at the end, either after three or four years, they've been through a more rigorous form of training than previously, when we just used to do our own thing. It might have been good, it might have been rather poor, but working

now with an academic institution it does bring quality control and a certain rigour and support too. So I think we're providing a more consistent level of training and students are coming out with a greater sense of confidence that they've achieved something that's been externally validated. (7)

Nearly 5,000 staff have undertaken the Certificate in Effective Practice and we feel that this provides a really important standard for people. It has been a really significant improvement, giving a baseline that ensures everyone has as understanding of the principles of how you work with young people. (5)

There were comments on how student progress on the foundation degree showed a correlation with their attitude to work, and in some cases seemed to be having a positive effect on their work.

Whilst it is not surprising that some students fail some modules, what we have found is that there is some correlation between student's attitude to the foundation degree and their attitude on division and so we are finding that students who are repeatedly struggling and are not taking advice on offer from the university, for example, are also struggling with division for the same reasons. There is a correlation there. (4)

Not one of our officers that have been through this programme in the last two and a half years have actually come to the attention of professional standards which is pretty much un-heard of for new officers and that's why those things that don't usually get measured, is still very much a positive. (6)

This was also an example of how a foundation degree had been dually accredited.

The foundation degree is also dually accredited so when we put it together we mapped the 22 national occupational standards (NOS) for a police officer in to the programme. Within the work-based element of the programme they must achieve and demonstrate competence against those 22 NOS and they also receive NVQ level threes, or a level three and level four for that, but there is no duplication of assessment. (6)

One employer explained how the availability of the foundation degree supported work in performance review.

When we do our inspections and monitoring of Youth Offending Teams (YOT) performance we are able to comment on the link between staff training and the foundation degree, so if we had a YOT which never allowed any staff to do any training and their performance was poor we would then be looking at that very closely. (5)

There were general comments that showed how the programme was valued by employers and students.

We feel the foundation degree is a really important string to our bow – it just takes time to bed in and for us to continually monitor and evaluate and see how it develops. (5)

The attendance rate is very, very high and the feedback is good. Inevitably, when we introduced the course six years ago it was a new course, there were teething problems and some of the assignment strategy wasn't quite right, but we've learnt as we've gone along, we've improved things and tweaked things and the feedback has indicated a steadily increasing a satisfaction rate. (7)

They found it valuable having the experience of the degree as a background, but students who are new to the work will give a different starting point to their placement to someone who has a lot of experience. It gives them a grounding, it gives them some drug and alcohol knowledge that they wouldn't necessarily have had. If we were taking someone who was on a counselling course and had no drug and alcohol knowledge they would come with that bit missing. (9)

I've looked over some of the assignments and I think they've been very good. Some of the feedback I've had has been positive and the counselling focus has been good. (10)

Our police officers have a broader view on policing in partnership because they're now undertaking their training in partnership with another organisation and the syllabus now covers more of the community aspects and the social aspects of policing. (4)

10. Employers' views on progression

There were relatively few comments made by employers on the onward progression of students from a foundation degree on to an honours degree. In some cases students were taking the programme module by module so it was premature to look at post foundation degree progression.

Some people won't do anything more, they will just have that one module and won't continue with it but other people who haven't got a degree will then build on that and get the other three modules and potentially go on to the honours degree. (5)

Often the delivery mode was different with the top-up course only being available as a full-time programme, or only available by distance learning.

The university that validates the foundation degree only has full-time progression routes available. There is the possibility of part-time in the future. (4)

Some employers felt the support available to the student could be different.

Once we get to year three, it is not funded by the force: it is self-elective and self-funded. However, we designed a work-based learning model whereby the model was accredited, then we took the different areas of specialism and dropped them in to the accredited work-based model so that instead of having to design individual programmes for different areas and specialisms, with one flexible model we can tailor it to management/ leadership, territorial policing, investigative, etc. So that it is available for any of the officers that want to go on to year three. (6)

In some respects these changes are to be anticipated as the employer and their education partner will need to keep any top-up qualification viable and sustainable, so changing the mode of delivery may be necessary.

11. Hindsight and scope for change

The employers who were interviewed were asked how they might approach things differently if they were about to embark on developing a foundation degree. The following are some of their replies.

If I had the time again I would do far more research with the international partners that have gone through this. Since setting it all up I've been back to New South Wales a number of times and, though we did spend a week with them, some of the problems and the growing pains that we've gone through we could have prevented if we'd done a bit more research with them. I don't think that's so much about the university – that's more to do with the transition within the police service: the police service are going from a trade, a blue-collar type professional to a professionalised white-collar organisation. (6)

The sequence of designing the modules was driven by the existing certificate around which the foundation degree was based, but if starting again we would have offered a level one module first. (5)

Some of the assignments we're trying to make more visibly relevant and more practical so the students can see the direct links between what we're asking them to do from the university and policing. All of the links are there, as it's designed around the national occupational standards, but some of the links are a bit hazy and the students have trouble to see the relevance. (4)

It was interesting to note that some of the employers were setting up a number of strategies to help students familiarise themselves with the required modes of study or assessment methodologies.

We are just going to launch an interactive learning space which is an online learning resource for the Youth Justice System and that has a number of introductory courses to get people into the habit of distance learning and the electronic format used. A lot of professional development resources are on there as well and study materials so there is the opportunity for people to have an introduction to that way of learning. (5) In the autumn term when we have people with absolutely no experience joining us we've adapted the assessment strategy for that very first essay to be very straight forward. We are in the process now of devising a level 0 alternative. It will be worth 20 credits, and students will be able to take one of those level 0 modules on in to the foundation degree and they won't have to repeat it again at level one. So there will be a slightly different assessment strategy for the people who are very new, or it has been a long time since they've done any academic study. (7)

There were also plans to offer the foundation degree as a pre-employment distance-learning programme where at the moment it formed a part of the first 2 years of employment. As well as providing savings for the employer this would enable potential employees to test out their suitability for their chosen career.

Ours is very much a traditional taught programme, and in order to make the programme more accessible, we need to be looking at the more flexible approaches to distance learning with more flexibility in relation to the academic screening and application process. The police service does like to attract those that are mid-career, career change people rather than just focusing at the school leavers and we want to be able to start targeting a wider spectrum of people, groups and ages. If this was offered as an open programme with a qualification in policing obtained prior to employment they would be able to take on a foundation degree while not leaving their current occupation. (6)

One employer noted competition between the foundation degree and their own in-house training programmes, and gave indications of where they thought the foundation degree could be changed to be made more relevant.

We actually provide quite an intensive internal training programme for our staff. We're working towards national occupational standards, standardising all our training and also our professional development review programmes. We want something more specific to our workers and therefore our in-house training is much more preferred. (8)

In order to remain flexible and responsive, foundation degrees are likely to change more frequently than traditional degrees, and the thread of requiring regular changes ran through many comments from employers. It was more difficult for academic institutions to respond to these changing requirements where there were several employers involved in one degree who did not necessarily want the same changes.

As soon as you've set things up, things change. I wouldn't actually call it a counselling degree anymore, because that puts off people, because actually our work is less and less counsellor orientated, but more key working, advice giving and so on. As employers we're saying that it isn't counsellors we want, it's the people who are confident about alcohol and drugs work and have good motivational interviewing skills and interpersonal skills. We're getting much more focused on change and therefore we need a mixture of staff who've got a depth of counselling knowledge but also the majority of staff who are prepared to work in group interventions. Most of us are changing the titles of our workers so they don't include the word counsellor, so psychosocial workers, or key workers, or alcohol workers. This is change that the degree really needs to keep up with. (8)

I've provided feedback last year saying that I think there is more scope on the course for training around some of the therapies such as motivational interviewing etc and we've offered in-house training to all of our students on these therapies as well. (10)

12. Conclusions

This concluding section will look at both the common themes that have emerged from the 10 interviews conducted and also the diversity of experiences and views in some areas.

12.1 Common themes

1. The majority of employers learned about foundation degrees through being involved with them and did not start out with a well-developed level of knowledge.
2. One of the key benefits of a foundation degree observed by employers was the increase in confidence levels of staff/students.
3. The majority of employers reported a very positive experience of working with their academic partners. However, in some instances the communications systems were inadequate for good two-way communication and there were

references to 'culture clash' and the length of time it took to make curriculum changes.

4. There was a continual requirement for foundation degrees to be kept very up-to-date, meaning regular changes and updates were necessary if the degree was going to remain flexible and responsive to employers' needs.
5. Few employers had much involvement in marketing and publicity.
6. Employers were generally not particularly concerned about onward progression from foundation degrees to an honours qualification.

12.2 Diversity

1. There emerged a number of reasons why employers became involved in the development of a foundation degree:
 - a) As a means of accrediting existing 'in-house' training.
 - b) The introduction of legislation that required an employer (or their staff) to undertake training. This impetus was sometimes further boosted by the availability of funding.
 - c) Where there was a scarcity of qualified staff.
 - d) To enable career progression for existing staff, and for those wanting to enter a profession or change career.
 - e) To establish a standard that could be applied uniformly.
2. Employers engaged with foundation degrees in different ways varying from complete delivery by an academic institution to a partnership approach involving employer and college. In part this related to the size and type of the organisation and their capacity to undertake course development and deliver the curriculum. It was very clear that 'one size did not fit all' and that the pattern of employer engagement could vary widely and still be effective. Some smaller employers who were not involved in delivering training expressed an interest in becoming more involved and felt they would have something to offer.
3. The financial aspects of foundation degrees varied considerably. Some students were able to have their fees paid or part paid according to their circumstances, and others had to pay full fees. In most cases, if a student was employed by an organisation which saw it as part of their professional development, then there would be some support provided, such as fees paid or time off for study. It was not possible to judge how much self-financing impacted on student numbers. Employers were aware and concerned at their own costs, including the cost of covering for staff when they were studying, and there was a diversity of opinion over whether accredited courses were more or less costly than in-house programmes.
4. Employers cited many benefits of foundation degrees in addition to the common theme of increasing levels of confidence. Some employers who were

also students on a foundation degree could see a direct positive application of what they had learned on their business. Others felt that an accredited programme brought academic rigour and set professional standards that would be shared across organisations. Comments were generally very positive and agreed that foundation degrees improved work practice and attitudes to work.

13. What has been learned?

There had been what were described as 'teething problems' with some foundation degrees and there were a number of examples of areas that employers said they would approach differently if they were to do it again. The main recommendations are as follows.

1. Undertake more research first to see how other organisations are running a foundation degree and learn from their mistakes and experience.
2. When a foundation degree is under development, and will include some existing modules, it is advantageous to plan the whole sequence so that students can progress in a logical manner.
3. There were examples of disorganisation in the early stages between education partners delivering and validating foundation degrees that left students with a poor impression and lacking access to resources. It is important to establish clear guidelines for communication and access with all partners. In some cases this may mean introducing more points of contact between employers and academic partners on either a formal reporting basis, or more informal methods of communication.
4. Sometimes it was felt that the style of teaching was too lecture based, and assignments need to be more practical than had originally been devised and more directly related to work.
5. There is a need to create introductory modules that gently guide new recruits into what will be required on the foundation degree. This also extends to starting with a simple assessment strategy.
6. Wherever possible, increasing the flexibility of a programme is an advantage. For example, it is worth looking at flexible modes of delivery and including national occupational standards and/or professional qualifications where appropriate.
7. Some foundation degrees have a short 'shelf life'. This may occur, for example, when changing external circumstances such as employer codes of practice mean that a foundation degree is no longer viable. This needs to be factored into development costs.

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Successful foundation degrees: a study of the role of employers and other key factors

Employer focus

The following questions will form the basis of a face-to-face or telephone interview with employers who are involved with the foundation degrees.

The aim of the questions is to explore the role of the employer with the foundation degree and to identify how they have contributed to the success of the programme.

The questions have been left 'open' to allow scope for discussion and open-ended answers.

Section 1: Initial concept of the foundation degree

1.1 Was your organisation involved in the initial idea for a Foundation Degree in this programme area? How are training needs identified within your organisation?

1.2 Yes – Follow up with question on how this came about.

1.3 No – Follow up with question on when the employer became involved.

1.4 Had your organisation an existing knowledge of foundation degrees before becoming involved in this development?

1.5 What prompted your organisation to want to become involved in the development of this FD?

1.6 Had your organisation an existing relationship with the educational institution(s) developing the programme? Discuss nature and scope of relationship.

1.7 Does the FD developed form a career progression route from L1, L2, or L3 courses offered already?

Section 2: Design and development of the foundation degree

2.1 Was your organisation involved in the design of the course content for the programme being developed?

2.2. Yes – Follow up with question on extent and nature of involvement. Was this in an advisory capacity? Were any of your staff involved in writing content for modules? Quantify approximately the amount of staff time involved.

2.3 *No* – Follow up with question on whether there has been any subsequent involvement in FD design. Or whether the employer would like to become involved in FD design.

2.4 Was the design and content of the programme/course influenced by any of the following:-

- SSCs
- National Occupation Standards (NOS)
- CPD
- National requirements

Section 3: On-going involvement with the selected foundation degree

3.1 Is your organisation involved in any of the following? Discuss nature and scope of the involvement.

- Provision of work experience
- Shared delivery of the programme
- Delivery of work-based modules
- Marketing of the programme
- Fee subsidy for employees
- Assessment of students
- Provision of study release/time off for employees

3.2 Are there any additional ways in which your organisation is involved with the programme?

3.3 Has your involvement with the programme changed over time?

3.4 What is the process for raising any concerns about the programme? Do you feel that issues raised are dealt with satisfactorily?

Section 4: Employee involvement

4.1 Do you have, (or have you had) any knowledge of staff in your employ who are students on the selected foundation degree?

4.2 *Yes* – Follow up with questions on:-

- Number of students,
- Whether participation was initiated by employer or employee
- Was active employer encouragement was a significant factor.
- How successful have students been on the programme?
- What effect has taking the programme had to their subsequent career?
- Did the employee enjoy the course?
- Will you continue to support staff taking the programme?
- Were students studying full-time or part-time and what effect did this have on the business?
- To what extent was previous experience or training taken into account as part of the FD?
- Have students been able to apply what they have learnt on the course?

4.3 *No* – Follow up question of why not?

Section 5: Programme quality

- 5.1 Are you familiar with the content of the foundation degree?
- 5.2 Do you consider the skills and knowledge taught on the programme are relevant to your organisation? Discuss how the course content matches expectations.
- 5.3 How satisfactory is the integration of academic learning with work-based learning?
- 5.4 How has the FD impacted on your business? Answers to cover the following:
- Improving productivity and efficiency
 - Reducing the skills gap
 - Transforming ways of working
 - Staff development/continuing professional development
 - Improved partnership working
 - Other ways?
- 5.5 Have your original expectations been met?
Yes – how
No – why not
- 5.6 What would you like to see done differently?
- 5.7 Do you think that you have had value for money?
- 5.8 Would a greater involvement of your organisation be of benefit to the programme? How might this be developed?

Appendix 2 Employer interviews – key facts

	Interviewee	Organisation	Title of Foundation Degree	Course details	Student numbers
1	Manager	Kidaroo Childcare Ltd	FdA Children's and Young Peoples' Services	3 years part-time. Delivered by college, on college premises. Validated by university	N/A
2	Manager	St. Clements Day Nursery	FdA Children's and Young Peoples' Services	3 years part-time Delivered by college, on college premises. Validated by university	N/A
3	Superintendent Radiographer	Leicester General Hospital	FdSc Clinical Imaging	Delivered by jointly by college and employer, validated by university.	22 over 3 years
4	Training Manager	West Yorkshire Police	FdSc Police Studies	2 year work-based, full-time, compulsory for new recruits. 25% delivered on university premises, remainder in police training facilities. Course running for 3 ½ years	300 pa
5	Senior Strategy Adviser	Youth Justice Board for England and Wales	FdA Youth Justice	Modular structure Distance learning, validated and delivered by university. Designed for staff working in Youth Offending Teams, but also open to volunteers in Youth Justice	500 full fd award. 5000 module 1, 4,500 module 2

				System (10,000+) Course running for 5 years	
6	Training Manager	City of London Police	FdSc in Policing Practice	Validated by university. Jointly designed and delivered by university and police. 6 fixed cohorts pa with flexibility to add extra cohorts. Programme run over 52 wk year to be completed in 2 years, but weighted in first months. level 4 (1) units completed in 22 weeks then next 1/3 course over 12 weeks before students are 'on beat'.	Averaging 250pa, but set to increase to 350pa next year and potentially to 400pa.
7	Centre Tutor	Bradford Diocese	FdA Theology and Ministry	Validated by university, delivered in centres across several diocese. Modular structure, part-time usually over 4 years. Designed for training of 'readers', now training 'ordinands' , also open access students.	39 at Bradford Centre
8	Manager	Aquarius	FdA Drug and Alcohol counselling	Validated and delivered by university. Part-time modular programme usually over 4 years.	40/45 + 12 pa by DL
9	Manager	CAN – Drugs,	FdA Drug and	Validated and	40/45 +

		alcohol, homelessness	Alcohol counselling	delivered by university. Part-time modular programme usually over 4 years.	12 pa by DL
10	Manager	Leicester Youth Offending Service	FdA Drug and Alcohol counselling	Validated and delivered by university. Part-time modular programme usually over 4 years.	40/45 + 12 pa by DL

Bibliography

Benefer, R. (2007) 'Engaging with Employers in Work-based Learning: A Foundation Degree in Applied Technology', *Journal of Education and Training*, Vol. 49, Number 3, pp. 210-217.

Benyon, J., McKee, B. and Crewe, E. (2008) *Successful Foundation Degrees: A Study of the Role of Employers and Other Key Factors – Interim Report to fdf*, Leicester: Institute of Lifelong Learning.

Benyon, J., McKee, B., Crewe, E. and Morris, K. (2009) *Successful Foundation Degrees: A Study of the Role of Employers and Other Key Factors – Final Report*, Leicester: Institute of Lifelong Learning.

Bowers-Brown, T. and Berry, D. (2005) 'Building Pathways: Apprenticeships as a Route to Higher Education', *Journal of Education and Training*, Vol. 47, Number 4/5, pp. 270-282.

Brennan, L. and Gosling, D. (2004) *Making Foundation Degrees Work*, London: SEEC.

Challis, M. (2004-05) 'Challenging Issues for Foundation Degree Providers ... Flexible Delivery', *Forward – the fdf journal*, Issue 4, pp. 18-21.

CHERI/LSN (2008) *Report to Foundation Degree Forward on the Impact of Foundation Degrees on Students and the Workplace*, London: CHERI (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information)/LSN (Learning and Skills Network).

Coni, K. (2007). 'Building Informed Awareness of Foundation Degrees', *Forward – the fdf journal*, Issue 12, pp. 22-25.

DIUS (2007) *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*, Cm 7181, Norwich: The Stationery Office.

Doyle, M. and O'Doherty, E. (2006) 'Foundation Degrees and Widening Participation', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, Vol. 8, Number 1, pp. 4-13.

East Midlands Development Agency (2005) *Moving Forward with Foundation Degrees: Researching Employer Demand for Foundation Degrees in the East Midlands*, Loughborough: East Midlands Universities Association.

Edmond, N. (2004) 'The Foundation Degree as Evidence of a New Higher Education', *Higher Education Review*, Vol. 36, Number 3, pp. 33–54.

Foundation Direct (2008) *Impact of Foundation Degrees: The Student Experience*, Portsmouth: University of Portsmouth.

Gittus, B. and Hemsworth, D. (2006) *Engaging Employers in Foundation Degrees: A Guide for Universities and Colleges Developing and Delivering Foundation Degrees in the Active Leisure and Learning Sector*, Lichfield: Foundation Degree Forward and Skills Active.

Greenbank, P. (2007) 'From Foundation to Honours Degree: The Student Experience', *Journal of Education and Training*, Vol. 49, Number 2, pp. 91–102.

Hearsum, A. (2005) 'Reaching out to Employers', *Forward – the fdf journal*, Issue 4, pp. 9–14.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2007) *Foundation Degrees: Key Statistics 2001–02 to 2006–07*, publication 07/03, Bristol: HEFCE.

Johnson, L. and Lockley, E. (2007) 'Developing Foundation Degrees for the Cogent Industries: A Feasibility Study', *Forward – fdf journal*, Issue 12, pp. 45–47.

Kumar, A. (2007) 'Employer Engagement in Engineering Foundation Degrees', *Forward – the fdf journal*, Issue 13, pp. 12–15.

Leitch, Lord (2006) *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*, Leitch Review of Skills – Final Report, London: The Stationery Office.

Leitch, Lord (2005) *Skills in the UK: The Long-term Challenge*, Leitch Review of Skills – Interim Report, London: The Stationery Office.

Matthews, H., Maynard, M. and Krafti, P. (2007) *Sustainable Foundation Degrees: A Case Study of Northamptonshire*. Bristol: HEFCE.

Raddon, A. and Quinn, M. (2007) *Demand for Foundation Degrees and Engaging Employers in the East Midlands*, Bristol: HEFCE.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2005a) *Learning from Reviews of Foundation Degrees in England Carried Out in 2004–05*, Mansfield: Quality Assurance Agency.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2005b) *Report of a Survey to Follow up Foundation Degree Reviews carried out in 2002–03*, Mansfield: Quality Assurance Agency.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2004a) *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, Mansfield: Quality Assurance Agency.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2004b) *Handbook for the Review of Foundation Degrees in England 2004–05*, (QAA 053 09/04), Mansfield: Quality Assurance Agency.

Step Ahead Research (2004) *Foundation Degrees: Supply and Demand in North-East England*, Newcastle: OneNorthEast.

Stinton, J. et al. (2007) *Employer Engagement in the Design, Development and Delivery of Foundation Degrees in the Eastern Region*, Norwich: Research Centre.

Stinton, J. (2007) 'Employer Engagement in the Design, Development and Delivery of Foundation Degrees in the Eastern Region', *The Research and Development Bulletin*, Vol.5, Number 2, pp. 27–32.

Talbot. J (2007), 'Delivering Distance Education for Modern Government: The F4Gov Programme', *Journal of Education and Training*, Vol. 49, Number 3, pp. 250-260.

Trelfa, S. and Foyle, R. (2006) 'Bridgewater College's Strategy for Employer Engagement – A Joined-up Approach?', *Forward – fdf journal*, Issue 8, pp. 12-15.

UVAC (2005) *Higher Education for Hairdressing and Beauty Sector Professionals*, by A. Anderson and D. Hemsworth, Bolton: University Vocational Awards Council.

York Consulting (2004) *Evaluation of Foundation Degrees: Final Report*, London: Department for Education and Skills.

