Types of foundation degree: a case study approach

A report to the HEFCE by the Foundation Degree Support Team

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1   Executive summary

Purpose of the report

1.1   This report has been prepared by the Foundation Degree (FD) Support Team (led by PricewaterhouseCoopers) to capture the learning from the first year of the FD initiative. It provides an overview of the range of programmes developed, and identifies factors that contributed to their success and some that experience has shown still need to be addressed. The information is presented through a series of anonymised case studies representing the range of FD programmes and contexts. The report provides valuable information for both current FD providers, and for those who are considering developing, or contributing to the development of FD courses in the future.

Foundation degrees – the picture after one year

1.2   Two key elements are evident in the pattern of provision, combinations of which have led to the development of a taxonomy to describe the variety of FDs now available:

‣   *Market demand*: Varying combinations of local factors have resulted in a range of very different programmes to meet market demand. These factors include the size, sector and relative prosperity of the local employer base, and whether a strong tradition of supporting regional economic development already exists. There is also significant local variety in the extent to which employees are driving demand; and

‣   *Programme design and content*: There is a spectrum of provision ranging from bespoke courses developed in response to identified local need, through courses adapted from Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) to align them more closely with the core requirements of an FD, to those which amount to re-badging of existing provision. Some providers have worked particularly closely with employers, while a few have collaborated especially closely with their Regional Development Agency (RDA) and/or Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in the development of their courses.

1.3   Combinations of these two elements define the following taxonomy:

‣   Meeting a niche employment need;

‣   Meeting an essential employee need;

‣   Delivering sustainable regional collaboration;

‣   Adapters; and

‣   Re-badgers.

Amongst all existing FDs, there are more Adapters and Re-badgers than those falling into the first three taxonomic categories. However it is essential that all FDs should meet market demand whether it be employer, employee or more generally market-led. More generally all FDs should meet both the letter and the spirit of the core design features.

1.4   Other patterns that emerge including recruitment from different marketing strategies, differing consortia arrangements and different modes of study and student experiences:

> ▸   Recruitment to employer and to employee-need-led courses has generally been good. For the latter, progression opportunities are often a key motivator. Different marketing strategies were successful in different contexts, and included local and national press advertising, promotion by employers, NTOs and SSCs, and even drama presentations. Several providers have been particularly responsive to student feedback about content and delivery of courses during the year, making amendments as requested;

> ▸   The case studies demonstrate an interesting variety of collaborative relationships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs) in developing, quality-assuring, administering and teaching the FDs. Funding arrangements have been particularly contentious. Arrangements for the development and management of courses have varied in the extent to which HEIs have embedded them into their undergraduate provision. Post 1992 universities have tended to treat FDs as part of their undergraduate provision whilst pre 1992 universities have tended to place FDs in specialist units; and

> ▸   The case studies show that the learning experience for students is shaped by the extent to which study skills are explicitly addressed; the nature and extent of the work-based learning element of the programme; and the relative sophistication of distance learning and e-learning (eL) opportunities (with the most advanced offering chat room and e-mail facilities in addition to on-line or CD ROM course material).

Key messages for current or potential providers

1.5   Several key factors in the development of successful provision that is true to the ethos and original concept of FDs have emerged from the case studies. It is important to:

> ▸   Allow for development costs for the new curricula – this is crucial for creating the right conditions for the design of innovative learning materials and teaching methods;

‣ Understand the needs of and work with the local target market of both employers and employees to ensure recruitment of students – to a large extent problems with recruitment can be explained by HEIs and their further education (FE) partners failing to identify an appropriate niche market;

‣ Develop a flexible structure with progression and multiple exit points to maximise motivation – by giving students a series of options it makes HE more accessible;

‣ Ensure that all FD provision addresses fully the core design feature elements, whether through new or adapted material – in particular Adapters modifying existing provision should look to meet either employer or employee needs;

‣ Think ahead - sustainability for FDs will be achieved through close liaison with employers in developing and delivering courses – limited employer involvement will give FDs less credibility with that target market; and

‣ Increase effectiveness through close liaison with NTOs and/ or their successor SSCs – such a relationship not only improves the credibility of the FD but can prove beneficial financially as well.

2   Introduction

2.1   This document has been prepared by the FD Support Team, which is led by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

2.2   Professor Suzanne Robertson, one of our FD curriculum experts, has led the team undertaking this work-stream. Professor Robertson, an expert in learning and teaching based at the University of Sunderland, is a Board member of the Open Learning Foundation (OLF). The OLF works with the Open Learning Company, which has provided the curriculum group members for the Support Team, to develop and promote vocational, flexible and distance learning opportunities.

2.3   The first year of the FD Initiative is now completed, and some thirty-four prototype FD programmes and a broad range of other FD programmes funded through additional student numbers (ASNs) have been successfully launched. It is therefore timely to capture the breadth of learning that these first-round degree programmes have achieved, and in so doing present something that is of value both to current providers and those who may be planning to offer FDs in the future.

2.4   In the course of their work with the round one providers the Support Team have found it useful to develop a taxonomic framework of FDs, which presents the main types of FD that have been developed so far (and also, in all probability, which will be developed). If one were to attempt to plot these types of FDs on a graph then there would be two axes: the first is (the actual nature of) **market demand**, and the second relates to whether the FD provision uses **innovation in learning and teaching pedagogy,** or is based largely or substantially on courses (such as HNDs) currently on offer.

2.5   Our approach is **case-based**. It seeks to illustrate the different taxonomic types through a series of mini-studies, and to bring into the attendant discussion the way in which these two identified axes are indeed central to the FD taxonomy.

2.6   Whilst there is therefore an analytical aspect to this paper, the primary purpose is **practical**: our aim is to *provide both current and potential providers with a useful understanding of the lessons to be learned from the pioneering work of the first-round providers*. There have been many successes to celebrate, but providers have also been refreshingly open and willing to discuss problems and even mistakes from which they have learnt for the future. The document reflects this openness, and we are very grateful indeed to those who willingly agreed to provide the sites for our case studies. We are also grateful to the key contacts at each of the case study institutions for reviewing and signing off the content of this report.

2.7   In order to respect the openness of the FD community we have presented the case studies throughout in an anonymised form.

2.8   Following the introduction there are six further sections:

>   **Section three** puts FDs in context through an overview of why FDs were introduced and how local/ regional factors have impacted on the development of FDs;

>   **Section four** provides information on our approach and framework;

>   **Section five** demonstrates how each of the case studies illustrates the particular taxonomic grouping into which they fit;

>   **Section six** sets out the cross-cutting issues;

>   **Section seven** sums up the key messages that are emerging, and should therefore be of particular practical help to those planning FDs in the near future; and

>   **Section eight** provides a glossary of acronyms used in the report.

3   The social and economic context

Introduction

3.1   This section briefly considers the thinking behind the introduction of FDs in England last year, and then discusses the extent to which particular local and regional factors and the nature and type of employment available locally have influenced the way in which individual FDs have actually been designed and developed.   The discussion provides a context for the introduction of a taxonomy of FDs in the next section of the report.

The thinking behind the design feature

3.2   There were a number of different social, economic and political drivers for the introduction of FDs. Combined they constituted a powerful overall case for a new type of vocationally-centred degree. Key drivers were:

> ‣ *the identification of a significant skills gap* – highlighted in two successive reports of the National Skills Task Force, with a particular concern that there was a growing shortfall at the high technical and associate professional levels;

> ‣ *the renewed push from employers for graduates to be far more prepared for the world of work* – both in terms of generically relevant skills, and also more industry specific readiness for work;

> ‣ a heightened emphasis from Government on widening participation in higher education – as a central lever for social inclusion;

> ‣ *the development of a fresh approach to delivering regional economic development* – coupled with a perception of the role that a new type of graduate might play in this new way;

> ‣ *the Government's manifesto commitment to a major expansion of higher education, with a target that one in two under the age of 30 will have had an HE experience by 2010.*

3.3   The influence of these drivers is directly reflected in some of the design features for FDs, as specified in the *Foundation Degree Prospectus*, HEFCE 2000 and repeated (with permission) overleaf. These design features are referred to later in the report, as the core elements of a FD.

Employer involvement	▶	in the design and regular review of programmes
	▶	to achieve recognition from employer and professional bodies
	▶	with both local organisations and national sectoral bodies, to establish demand for FD programmes
The development of skills and knowledge	▶	technical and work specific skills, relevant to the sector
	▶	underpinned by rigorous and broad-based academic learning
	▶	key skills in communication, team working, problem solving, application of number, use of information technology and improving own learning and performance
	▶	generic skills, for instance, reasoning and work process management
	▶	should be recorded by a transcript, validated by the awarding HEI and underpinned by a personal development plan
Application of skills in the workplace	▶	students must demonstrate their skills in work relevant to the area of study
	▶	work experience should be sufficient to develop an understanding of the world of work and be validated, assessed and recorded
	▶	the awarding HEIs should award credits, with exemptions for students with relevant work experience
Credit accumulation and transfer	▶	FDs will attract a minimum of 240 credits
	▶	individual consortia should agree and apply credit accumulation and transfer arrangements
	▶	individual consortia should recognise appropriate prior and work-based learning through the award of credits
Progression - within work and/or to an honours degree	▶	there must be guaranteed articulation arrangements with at least one honours degree programme
	▶	programmes must clearly state subsequent arrangements for progression to honours degrees and to professional qualifications or higher-level NVQs
	▶	for those students wishing to progress to the honours degree, the time taken should not normally exceed 1.3 years for a full-time equivalent (FTE) student

Local and regional factors

3.4 The way in which individual consortia have developed their own FDs over the last year, against these design features, has been inevitably (and properly) very much influenced by a variety of local and regional factors, and has been responsive to the needs of particular employment sectors. Understanding what these factors are provides a context for the taxonomy of FDs developed by the FD Support Team.

3.5 We highlight five factors which, in our experience, have influenced the different ways in which FDs have been developed. We expect that all five will also prove relevant for future provision.

3.6 The factors we have identified as most critical encompass both the regional and employment sector dimensions:

‣ *the nature of the regional/ sub-regional employer base by size* – those regions and sub-regions where there are a number of large employers have, all other things being equal, provided different opportunities and challenges to those presented by regions with a preponderance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses;

‣ *the particular commercial/ industrial sectors presented* – some regions have a higher percentage of declining industries, *with often changing and ill-defined skills needs*, whilst others (including Greater London) have had crucial access to companies operating with developing or emerging technologies (such as digital broadcasting) which have identified specific and significant skills shortages;

‣ *the balance in the region/ sub-region between public and private sector employers* – a significant number (likely to grow further over the next few years) of successful FDs have been developed for public sector organisations, and again different regions have had widely varying access to large employers on the public sector side conveniently located within the region. London, for example, offers a particular richness of public sector organisations relatively conveniently situated to further and higher education institutions;

‣ *existing levels of cohesiveness in supporting regional economic development* – some regions have had a particularly strong tradition of supporting regional and sub-regional economic development, and have been able to use existing mechanisms and durable partnerships to support the introduction of FDs in a particularly effective way;

‣ *the overall level of economic prosperity in the region/ sub-region* – levels of employment/ unemployment in particular have almost certainly differentially influenced the respective appetites of employers and prospective students to engage with FDs.

3.7   Different factors have interacted to shape both the types of FDs that have emerged and the way in which these different types have been designed and developed. The former will be discussed in the next section.

4   Our approach and framework

Introduction

4.1   This section sets out the taxonomy of FD provision, which we have developed in order to identify key features and trends and in recognition of the diversity of provision. This section also includes the methodological framework we used to gather consistent data at each visit, along with details on the process.

Taxonomy

4.2   The taxonomy is set out in a table overleaf. The table provides a brief description of each type (under 'Descriptor') from which the main characteristics are extrapolated subsequently.

4.3   In accessing the taxonomy you should bear in mind that:

- ‣ the current taxonomy reflects the Support Team's findings in year one of the FD initiative, and will need to be reviewed over time – *it is an emerging taxonomy*;

- ‣ *it is a taxonomy of provision, not providers* – some providers are offering more than one FD programme, of different types (for example, *Meeting a niche employment need* and *Adapter*);

- ‣ *some of the types potentially cross-cut – they are not all mutually exclusive* – providers that fit into the *Meeting an essential employee need* can also fit the *Meeting a niche employment need* category thus demonstrating that there can be an increasingly close relationship between the two over time.   One of the case studies – FD III, details of which can be found in the next section – is a good example of this ; and

- ‣ *some of the qualities of the various types also overlap* – the fact that a particular type is mentioned as being very noticeably proactive in terms of bringing on new FDs for year two should not be read as implying that consortia belonging to other types are necessarily less active in this respect.

Emerging Taxonomy of FD Provision

NUMBER	TYPE	DESCRIPTOR
1	**Meeting a niche employment need**	This category is defined as a niche where there is a shortage of skilled workforce as identified by employers or by SSCs and the former NTOs.
2	**Meeting an essential employee need**	Groups of employees identified who previously had no or limited development and progression routes into HE.
3	**Delivering sustainable regional collaboration**	FDs offered by established consortia with a particular culture of co-operative working. Totally committed to FDs and to adopting a common approach to their implementation across the consortium through tight central co-ordination.
4	**Adapters**	FD provision developed by consortia migrating from existing HNDs but incorporating the essential vocational dimension of FDs.
5	**Re-badgers**	Provision currently based on a type of non-migrated, re-badged HND.

Characteristics of each type

Meeting a niche employment need

4.4 The key features of FDs in this category are that they fulfil the needs of a niche market and are characterised by a strong working relationship between employers and providers. Students tend to be strongly motivated by the employment or promotion prospects as well as the course content. Examples of FDs in this grouping include those which have developed successful relationships with micro businesses.

Meeting an essential employee need

4.5 FD programmes in this category tend to fall into either the public or voluntary sector rather than the private sector. Areas of particular success are community regeneration and education. This focus may well continue as future FDs are developed.

4.6 Typically in this type of FD, employees have been identified as working at a level or in a position where there has not been a tradition of employing graduates. Early indications are that FDs may well provide these employees with the opportunity to up-skill and achieve professional recognition. Students undertaking the FD feel their contribution to the employment sector is validated and employers obtain trained, fulfilled and motivated staff.

Delivering sustainable regional collaboration

4.7 Those that fall into this grouping are typically committed both to the concept of FDs and to implementing them across their consortium. These FDs achieve a consistent and common approach through tight central co-ordination. In the most successful examples of this type, there are plans to run over twenty new FDs in the next academic year. This is possible because such consortia tend to have captured their tacit knowledge centrally and through a resource such as an FD development officer, insist that any staff new to FDs undergo training and development before embarking on the establishment of a new FD. This operational emphasis is often underpinned by an initial strategic coherence, frequently itself based on a close association with the Strategic Plan developed for their region by the RDA.

Adapters

4.8 FD providers who fit this taxonomic grouping are typically players with a strong HND background. In some cases providers in this grouping are not yet fully won over to FDs or not yet clear about the right balance between HNDs and FDs for their particular institution/ consortium. They seem to be resistant to finding the significant outlay required to set up an FD.

Re-badgers

4.9 Typically those that fit into this category have understood the market opportunity that FDs represent but either have little appreciation of the work involved in setting up an FD or are unwilling to expend that level of effort.

Overview of the types

4.10 As a generalisation, the number of examples of provision for each type increases as we move down through the five types - there are, for instance, considerably more examples across the prototypes of *Adapters* than of the type *Meeting a niche employment need.*

4.11 A plausible explanation for this finding is that the level of direct employer involvement in the design and delivery of curricula, for example, tends to decrease the further down the taxonomy one goes. This is particularly notable in relation to the *Adapter* and the *Re-badger* category. In part this is due to the difficulty experienced in engaging employers who are not always clear about what their needs are or how to work in partnership with HE. Adapters and Re-badgers have seen these types of FDs – wrongly – as requiring less employer involvement.

4.12   However it is also due to the fact that FDs within the *Adapter* and *Re-badger categories* tend to be constructed through the use of existing resources and data. Many providers believe that the route of adapting existing provision is cheaper than creating new materials. In addition it is often the case that such providers undertake limited, if any market research to determine the viability for an FD because they make the assumption (ill-advisedly) that a successful HND will lead to an even more successful FD.

The framework

4.13   The appropriateness of the methodological framework for the case studies was tested by undertaking two pilot visits - after which we refined the criteria into the following list:

‣   consortia: origins, composition and working relationships;

‣   curriculum design;

‣   marketing and communication;

‣   employer relations, professional body and NTO relations; and

‣   the student experience.

5   Outline of the case studies by taxonomic grouping

Introduction

5.1   The common framework outlined in the previous section presents the structure for each of the case studies. We have included two further areas for discussion in this section – progression and work based learning (WBL). The same areas are covered for each FD but they are presented in the order that 'tells the story' most effectively.

5.2   Whilst the framework provides the structure, a focus on how each FD illustrates the individual characteristics of its particular taxonomic grouping(s) provides the analytical composition. The analysis follows the description of each FD.

5.3   The information around *consortia origins, composition and working relationships*, has been inserted into the next section. This is because it relates much more to the management of FDs and therefore fits better in the discussion of cross-cutting issues.

5.4   We chose three consortia as case studies because between them they cover four of the five taxonomic categories and cover the three regions as defined by the Support Team – the North, the Midlands and the South.

5.5   In the table below we show which of the case studies fall into which category and whether they are full-time or part-time.

NUMBER	TYPE	DESCRIPTOR	FDs	MODE
1	**Meeting a niche employment need**	This category is defined as a niche where there is a shortage of skilled workforce as identified by employers or by SSCs and the former NTOs.	FD 1	Part-time
2	**Meeting an essential employee need**	Groups of employees identified who previously had no or limited development and progression routes into higher education (HE).	FD II FD III	Part-time
3	**Delivering sustainable regional collaboration**	FDs offered by established consortia with a particular culture of co-operative working. Totally committed to FDs and to adopting a common approach to their implementation across the consortium through tight central co-ordination.	FD IV FD V	Full-time
4	**Adapters**	FD provision developed by consortia migrating from existing HND but incorporating the essential vocational dimension of FDs.	FD IV FD V	Full-time

5.6   It was felt that there was no merit in covering the *Re-badger* category in any depth, as it is not a taxonomic grouping that the FD support team would wish to promote since it does not meet the core characteristics as outlined in the FD prospectus.

5.7   The chosen consortia described in this section represent a total of five FDs. Rather than build the case studies around each consortium we have written them up around each FD - since as we pointed out in section three – the taxonomy is one of *provision* not *providers*. There is one exception and that is consortium III. It is offering two FDs in the first year but they were developed jointly by the HEIs and their FE partners and therefore there is no particular merit in separating out the FDs. The approach of both fits the *Developing sustainable regional collaboration* category so they are most revealingly reviewed in parallel.

5.8   A typical consortium consists of one or more HEIs, their partner FE colleges and employers or their representative bodies. For further information refer to the design features (the core elements of an FD) laid out in section three.

5.9   There follows, therefore, separate brief case studies of FDs I, II and III and a composite discussion of FDs IV and V to illustrate how the FD development teams have addressed market demand and to show whether they are developing new resources or building on existing materials. FDs I and II were developed by the same consortium but in very different ways, whereas consortium III (which also has two accrediting HEIs) produced its two FDs in a very integrated and collaborative process. Furthermore FDs II and III both fit the *essential employee need* grouping and we demonstrate how they have nevertheless developed very differently.

FD I

5.10   FD I is one of two FDs offered by a single consortium. It is interesting to note that FDs I and II have different validating institutions and that the design and structure of each FD is very distinctive.

5.11   It is the only example of a FD that fits the *Meeting a niche employer need* category in this review. However unlike most other FDs in this category, recruitment and retention has been lower than expected. This may have been due in part to internal issues discussed in paragraph 5.28 and in part due to an issue regarding the curriculum content, which is explored in greater depth later in this section.

5.12   It follows the pattern of most FDs in that it is offered in part-time mode only.

Professional body and employer involvement

5.13   The NTO identified the skills needed by employers in this employment sector and worked closely with the university's programme manager and WBL manager to develop the FD programme. The team found it difficult to secure a range of employer involvement beyond the consultation and design phases because of a reduction in the employment market locally during the development of the programme.

5.14   The NTO was in the process of becoming an SSC and was keen to ensure that the appropriate combination of knowledge and skills were defined for the FD. Their involvement was significant at the design stage of the FD and they assisted in marketing it to companies.

Curriculum design

5.15   This programme was designed to meet the need identified by both the NTO and that of a local, large employer. The curriculum was focused on delivering knowledge and skills specific to the industry combined with project management capability, which had been identified as a specific skill shortage by employers.

5.16   An individual in each of the colleges agreed to write the materials for each of the modules. Only two colleges recruited students - which proved challenging in terms of completing the development of the materials. In particular there were issues with obtaining some of the material for semester two on time from some colleges. This happened where colleges had failed to recruit students to the FD and staff had then lost the incentive to contribute. This occurred despite efforts by the lead organisation to continue to include them in every stage of the project.

5.17   The learning materials and exercises were released to the students week by week through one of the college's online environments.

The student experience

5.18   In an attempt to attract students to this area of obvious skill shortage, the team emphasised the elements of the curriculum which it thought would be most attractive to potential students. It avoided telling students about other elements of the FD which it (rightly) believed students would find less appealing. College staff reported that some students were disappointed by the actual content and suggested this as a reason for the significant number of students leaving the course.

5.19   One initial proposal suggested by FECs as a way to address this apparent mismatch between content needed by this industry and students' interest in another aspect of the subject was to develop two separate FDs. One programme would overtly meet the large employer's needs and a second would fit more closely with the expectations of those students who were disappointed (and a different employment market).

5.20   The employers that had originally been involved, the NTO and the university's academic staff, have since confirmed that the content of the FD is appropriate to the sector and have sought to develop the curriculum in a more holistic, accessible way. A major revalidation is planned which will lead to the rewriting of units in a more integrated fashion so that the more complex skills are incorporated into the other elements of the FD.

5.21   The consortium in general and the validating university in particular has reorganised the way in which this FD is developed and supported in the light of its experiences during the first year.

5.22   This particular taxonomic grouping, whilst most clearly able to demonstrate the core elements of FDs, faces a number of challenges in attracting students and developing their skills. This is particularly true if the skill set to be acquired is perceived as 'hard' and is generally decreasing in popularity nationally.

Work based learning

5.23   This is very much at the planning stage, as the accredited WBL unit will not run until the third year of the FD. The intention is that most students will undertake a suitable project in the work place. There will be a consultative process involving the project sponsor, the student and their tutor.

5.24   The academic team at the college where the student has enrolled will undertake assessment of the unit. It is envisaged that employers will be involved informally in this process by either providing a written or oral statement on how the student has performed.

Marketing

5.25   While the consortium did undertake some joint marketing of the two FDs, a majority of the promotion of FD I was as a single qualification. Since the FD was aimed at meeting skills shortages found in a wide range of companies there is not a discrete target audience. As one of the potential markets was within the companies themselves this aspect of marketing was conducted by the NTO.

5.26   An individual set of marketing materials in the form of leaflets and brochures with independent branding was designed for each FD within the consortium. This has now been reconsidered and there is a consensus that a consortium approach to marketing a *family of provision* would be more appropriate.

5.27   A social open evening was held with presentations on the nature of the new programme. This was felt by staff to have performed a filtering function as it allowed them to explain the nature of the commitment required for successful completion of the programme.

Progression

5.28   Due in part to the change in programme manager and the part-time nature of the FD, there has been little consideration about this next stage. The validation documents state that those students who successfully pass the FD will be able to convert their FD into an honours degree with a further fifteen months of study.

5.29   From the college perspective there would appear to be little commitment from the HEI to make this into a reality, with little evidence of planning to date. However the HEI has stated that in preparation for the forthcoming Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) review, it is planning to develop a clear progression route onto relevant degree courses for the FD students.

5.30   Initial discussions have been at the operational level but more recently senior staff have begun to consider this issue from a strategic perspective. They have agreed that one of the region's HEIs will provide students with the opportunity to progress.

Taxonomic fit

5.31   This FD fits within the category *Meeting employer needs.* It is a new provision and so fits neither the Adapter nor the Re-badger categories.

5.32   The specific needs of this taxonomic grouping often reflect the local employment profile. For this particular FD the NTO worked with the university to develop the curriculum to address knowledge and skills required by a group of local employers. The subsequent reduction of local employers may have affected recruitment.

5.33   The fact that a skills gap exists reflects that either study in this area is perceived as difficult and unattractive to students or that the communication between providers and employers needed to be improved.

5.34   This FD, bringing together providers, employers and the NTO, has designed appropriate provision. The course team is addressing how best to promote it to students.

FD II

5.35   This FD falls into the *Meeting the essential needs of employees* taxonomic grouping. Furthermore it is useful to consider the characteristics of this FD alongside those of FD I because they sit within the same consortium.

5.36   Like FD I, FD II is offered in part-time mode only. However unlike FD I, places were over-subscribed for the FD and it now has a waiting list.

Curriculum design

5.37 The first phase of curriculum design involved all interested parties in the process. Representatives from the university, colleges, professional bodies and potential students took part in an initial brainstorming session. The aim was to ensure ownership. Some who were engaged in the drafting of the modules had little or no experience of higher education and so found it difficult to participate effectively. Specific individuals took a lead and the larger group reviewed their progress; however some felt disassociated with the process and therefore dissatisfied. It was believed that ownership was not sufficiently engendered, so a different approach has been proposed and agreed for the production of the second level modules.

5.38 One major change that has taken place since the initial curriculum design is the way in which the team develops new material. Following the initial experiences, subsequent curricula design involved two individuals taking a lead on writing each module based on specifications agreed by the wider team. Their work was then evaluated by a wider group, which included the professional body and others, who would be responsible for the delivery of the material.

5.39 The unique feature of the curriculum design was the involvement of potential students, already working in roles at which the FD was targeted. They were able to critique the curriculum developments from a pragmatic perspective and to give feedback on its effectiveness in terms of meeting their needs.

Professional body and employer involvement

5.40 A clear example of professional body involvement can be seen in the preparation of modules, as a member of staff from the organisation has written two of the phase two modules. However employers chose not to be involved at the design stage.

5.41 The level of support from employers has varied considerably. Some have supported staff by either partly or completely funding their study or alternatively giving them time off in recognition of the demands of the qualification. In other instances, the employee has received no support. The team has encouraged employer involvement through the establishment of mentors. A meeting of mentors with the team to facilitate a common understanding of the parameters of their role took place in the second semester of the first year of the FD.

The student experience

5.42 Despite low employer involvement, the FD has proved very popular with employees in the sector and places are over-subscribed. This is due to the fact that the consortium has clearly addressed a previously unmet demand.

5.43   The consortium makes significant use of an asynchronous on-line discussion forum and the Support Team was able to use it. The majority of students appear to have gone through a steep learning curve and in particular have struggled with the online learning environment. However after they became familiar with the system many have appreciated its versatility as well as the additional support. Student feedback indicated that the order of some of the material did not fit with the structure of the rest of the course. The course team has responded to this issue by changing the structure of the course for the next cohort.

Progression

5.44   Progression was a prime motivation for enrolling on the FD, as students believe that it will provide an opportunity to gain professional recognition much more quickly than was possible beforehand. The course team had an expectation of significant progression rates if they were successful in securing professional accreditation. The nature of the professional accreditation will influence the content of bridging provision in this instance. There were sufficient student numbers and high progression prospects to merit a bespoke top up course. *In this sense, the FD has expanded participation in HE to a group that would have been unlikely to consider it otherwise.*

Work based learning

5.45   The FD is only offered in part-time mode and students are expected to hold a relevant job that fits within the parameters of the FD. With this ethos the work and integrated learning was designed so that responsibility lies with students to improve their work practice by implementing what they have learnt from the FD and by reflecting on their existing work practices and incorporating those reflections into their assignments. This offers an integrated approach to WBL providing students are prepared to engage in the process and reflect on their learning.

Marketing

5.46   There was limited marketing undertaken for this FD. A set of marketing materials in the form of brochures was designed. Since the initial marketing in 2001, the course team has reviewed what it did and reconsidered their position. There is consensus that a consortium approach to marketing a *family of provision* would be more appropriate.

5.47   Most of the marketing was via word of mouth through existing contacts with the sector, however open evenings were also held and an advertisement was placed in the local papers. The backing of the professional body provided credibility for the qualification.

Taxonomic fit

5.48   This FD fits within the *Meeting the essential employee need* category of the taxonomy. FDs that fit this category recruit well as people can see how the course will benefit them. Many have funded themselves, as they believe that the qualification will give them recognition and improve their promotional prospects.

5.49   With regard to the second dimension of the taxonomy, it is meeting market demand by identifying unmet demand amongst a group of non-graduate employees. The course team undertook this by designing completely new teaching methods that was relevant to the group of employees.

FD III

5.50   FD III also falls into the taxonomic group *Meeting the essential needs of employees*. It is a new provision, designed specifically to meet needs of employees in a particular sector that had not previously been addressed. Offering the FD in part-time mode fitted the needs of students better than studying full-time.

5.51   The FD is unusual in that it recruits students twice a year – recruitment and retention levels are buoyant.

Professional body and employer involvement

5.52   The NTO recognised the need of this group of employees from their training activities with companies and worked with the academic team at the university to develop the FD. The academic department has employer recognised expertise in the management aspects of this employment sector and an existing good working relationship with the NTO.

5.53   Both the NTO and employers were part of the steering group reviewing curriculum and making suggestions for content. An excellent working relationship exists to the real benefit of the students, the FD and the sector.

Curriculum development

5.54   The only FD developed by a bilateral partnership between an HEI and an NTO, this programme was designed to meet the needs of employees. The learners are mature, with an average age of over 35. Many are retraining for a second career. They have moved or wish to move from practitioner to manager within their field of employment. The only options available to them prior to this FD were generic management qualifications. Some learners had high academic qualifications and some had none - but all have the practical skills associated with the job.

5.55   The sector is shortly to be regulated and registration for qualified personnel is planned. The FD has anticipated this need and the consortium has worked with employers to ensure that the successful learners will meet the requirements for registration.

5.56   Learners working in the sector who were not graduates felt that their expertise and opinions were overlooked in strategic planning and decision making as a consequence of their lack of qualifications. Their career development was also blocked. The programme equips those completing the course with the skills to manage the people and the processes associated with this particular line of work.

5.57   A strong working relationship has developed with the NTO through robust discussions about the role of each partner. A balance between the NTO's expectations of a training programme and the university's requirement for a rigorous academic programme has resolved into a common understanding of the needs of the learners, the FD recruits.

5.58   Many of the learners are employed in the private sector and some travel extensively in their work. The consortium has developed a distance learning programme which means that once the course is established, learners will be able to study at a pace to suit themselves. At present the course is considered part time with time allocated for completion of assignments of one module before the release of the next one.

5.59   Learners use learning materials provided on CD ROMs with support from the course team via email or telephone. The university's existing distance learning provision is primarily at postgraduate level. This provision is a tutor supported model based on printed materials.

5.60   The proposal to produce the materials in an interactive CD format came from the NTO. They had experience of design, story-boarding and authoring materials for electronic delivery.

5.61   The partnership worked as follows:

   ‣   The academic staff wrote the materials as for print production;

   ‣   The steering group reviewed the content and fed back suggested changes which the team made;

   ‣   An independent contractor, with wide experience in producing materials for educational programmes, story-boarded the materials which went back to the team for checking; and

   ‣   The NTO authored the materials and produced the CD ROMs.

5.62   Feedback from learners has been very positive about all aspects: the content, navigation, design and usability. However the team are interested to see if this persists beyond the point at which any novelty of working with computer based materials wears off.

5.63   Residential elements of the course provide for peer interaction but they are not compulsory.   Therefore unless a group of learners works for the same employer, there is very limited opportunity for the sharing of knowledge and ideas.

Progression

5.64   The team developing this FD considered from the outset that the FD should be conceived as a self contained qualification in its own right. Their reasoning was:

‣   In an ideal world in which the FD qualification was recognised by both employers and the government, there would be no need for progression;

‣   The presence of examinations at honours level would deter those mature students who identified lack of examinations as a positive feature of FDs; and

‣   The standard reached by many students was so high that they would consider individuals for progression straight to masters level (sufficient evidence existed to support this position).

5.65   However, the team had developed good plans for honours level that included two existing modules from another department, two newly developed sector specific modules, and a project. They had identified from this the elements of appropriate bridging provision.

5.66   Furthermore the FD is so embedded in their philosophy that as they develop new undergraduate provision, the course team is seeking ways to offer more choice of progression routes to FD students.

Marketing

5.67   The consortium did produce brochures and flyers as marketing instruments and plugged into the existing marketing schedule of the lead institution. However initial circulation was maximised through the use of the NTO's database, which proved to be a good source of students amongst the first cohort.

5.68   The greatest response to an individual piece of marketing came after the placement of an advertisement in *The Mirror.* The consortium intends to use this marketing tool again.

5.69   Overall however the consortium has found that applicants have come through the strong alumni network based in the industry, many of whom are recommending the FD to their employees due to the reputation of the lead HEI.

Work based learning

5.70   This FD belongs to the taxonomic group that fits the *Essential employee needs* category. The team has taken the view that the responsibility should lie with students to improve their work practice by implementing what they have learnt from the FD and by reflecting on their existing work practices and incorporating those reflections into their assignments. The curriculum and assessment have been designed to achieve this - offering an integrated approach to WBL providing the student is prepared to engage in the process and reflect on their learning.

5.71   The vocational element and a direct relationship to work related tasks are central to the curriculum of FDs. Review by employers ensures relevance and topicality.

Taxonomic fit

5.72   This FD fits the *Meeting the essential needs of employees* category. It enables experienced individuals with no qualifications and graduates who are embarking on a second career to gain the knowledge and skills to progress within the management structure of their employment sector.

5.73   As with all FDs, employers will gain from having a skilled and motivated work force but it was the NTO that recognised the needs of the students in this instance.

5.74   This FD has very good prospects for recognition as the industry standard, combining as it does the application of theory to practice and the management of people and processes.

Consortium III - FDs IV and V

5.75   FDs IV and V are examples of the *Meeting the sustainable regional development needs* taxonomic group. They are also based on existing provision and therefore fall into the *Adapter* category when looking at the pattern of provision.

5.76   It is also interesting to note that the FD provision is unusual in that it is offered almost solely in full-time mode. This could be due to the regional economic variances, which indicate that limited employment is available unless it is through an SME.

5.77   Some colleges have recruited well for the two FDs and others have been less successful – depending on the regional economic factors mentioned above.

Curriculum development

5.78   The curriculum has been developed from existing material with some new material developed by teams from the colleges with university oversight to ensure that quality standards have been met. The senior staff at the HEIs have ensured that modules are equivalent to undergraduate provision so that students completing the FDs will be able to progress to honours provision.

5.79   The consortium reviewed all existing provision by appointing a researcher to evaluate all HND material relevant to the FDs, and then the consortium agreed on the core subjects for each FD. This was to ensure consistency in their offerings, though sufficient flexibility exists to allow for local variations.

5.80   The majority of the content for the two FDs has come from existing HNDs, and the team adopted an HND model developed by one of the HEI partners to design the FD curricula. This was possible since the original HNDs were already vocationally orientated. The principal difference between the former HNDs, which are still running in some colleges, and the FDs, is that the work placement element is compulsory for the latter. For this reason amongst others, the consortium can be seen to fit the Adapter rather than the Re-badger category. Flexibility has been designed into the process so that students can undertake the work placement in stages, or a block over an extensive period of time.

Professional body and employer involvement

5.81   This consortium met market demand by considering *Regional collaborative provision*. This led to the involvement of their RDA in the initial planning stages of the two FDs and the RDA also influenced the final decision over which FDs would be developed for the prototype phase. However there was relatively little evidence of direct employer involvement at either design or delivery stage for either of the two FDs - which may in part be explained by the fact that the region is largely made up of SMEs and micro businesses.

Work based learning

5.82   The approach taken to WBL within this FD was not overtly integrated. Students undertake two five-week work placements during the course of studying for the FD qualification. The onus is on the student to find a suitable work placement. Any new employer is visited and assessed by one of the FD team members for compliance with health and safety regulations. There is no formal assessment of the work placement - however students are expected to write up a reflective log and evaluate their experience. There is no learning agreement between the student and their academic institution and/ or the employer and some students had not realised what was expected of them.

5.83   The university produces a guidance handbook for placements in undergraduate programmes and intends to make it available for FD students. This approach may well exist because the FD is based on an existing HND model rather than new material for undergraduate provision.

Progression

5.84   In the consideration of progression, greater weight was given to ensuring that students could meet the academic criteria for progression rather than integrating the vocational learning into the curriculum. From very early on in the design of the FD, strong evidence exists of plans to ensure that students were prepared for progression.

5.85   Most staff we interviewed believed that the majority of students would progress onto honours, which is perhaps why they built it into the programme. However due to the variety of interpretations of the progression requirements in the FD prospectus, many staff are concerned about the future for their students. There is now a concern within the colleges that there may be additional entry requirements for progression, which was not the expectation at the outset of the project. A 'top up' course is being developed specifically for one of the programmes - to run in two partner colleges subject to a successful ASN bid.

The student experience

5.86   We saw a small group of students and they all represented one of the two FDs offered by the consortium. One view suggested that students were happy and considering progression. Concern was expressed over the relevance of the FD as one student already understood the fundamentals of the discipline and had been interested in the specialist areas of the FD written about in the promotional material. As explained in paragraph 5.91 the consortium has begun to address this issue.

Marketing

5.87   The most innovative approach was undertaken by consortium III, which in part can be explained by the strength of the regional collaboration from the outset. In February 2001 the marketing managers from all the partner institutions met and agreed that they needed to spend a percentage of the development money on a strategic marketing campaign. They undertook a tendering exercise to choose a public relations firm to design a marketing strategy for them and employed a web design company to produce a website. They received regular reports from the web design company covering issues such as how many hits the site has had.

Taxonomic fit

5.88   The FD meets the criteria for both the *Development of sustainable regional collaboration* and the *Adapter* categories of the taxonomy. In terms of the second dimension, the course team took the decision to build on existing material rather than design new elements.

5.89   An illustration of how the FD meets the *Sustainable regional development* criteria can be seen in the way that the HEIs collaborated across the region. Their relationship led to an agreement over the number of credits they would award across the consortium for each module - 20 credits. They also held a joint first stage validation event. Agreement on the awarding of credits is a rare achievement, not even managed by all consortia that sit within this taxonomic grouping.

5.90   One of the defining characteristics that show how the FDs fit the *Adapter* category is the consortium's approach to the WBL element. This follows the model already in operation for degree provision. Responsibility lies with students to find their own work placements outside of the timetable and write a reflective learning log afterwards. Assessment is of the learning log and not of the work undertaken - which with the regional SME base can be very variable.

5.91   The views of the students highlighted the fact that in many ways this consortium fitted within the Adapter category. A niche skill that was advertised in one of the FDs required the appointment of experienced staff in what is considered a highly specialised and cutting edge field. The consortium was in the process of appointing a course leader with the relevant background when this piece of research was undertaken.

6   Cross-cutting issues

Introduction

6.1   In the previous section we described how individual FDs embodied the characteristics of a particular taxonomic grouping within the context of market demand and new or existing provision. In this section we identify a series of interesting issues that cut across the range of FD provision and are not specifically related to any one taxonomic classification.

Pre and post 1992 universities

6.2   There appears currently to be a difference in approach and attitude to FDs between the pre and post 1992 universities. We have identified a pattern by reviewing the location and management of FDs by consortia.

Current situation within consortia

6.3   The second pilot visit was to a consortium led by a pre 1992 university. The researchers noted one salient factor on this visit that holds true for similar pre 1992 institutions: that some traditional universities consider FDs as a primary delivery mechanism to demonstrate their commitment to the widening participation agenda. This pre 1992 university has not met its widening participation benchmark and does not recruit well from low socio-economic groups. One of its college partners on the other hand, attracts 98% of those students going to university from low socio-economic groups and has 88% of its students from said groups in one particular area. Interestingly, in addition to the local target audience the FD has attracted students from better paid, more prestigious employment.

6.4   The first two FDs illustrated in the previous section belong to the same consortium which comprise one pre 1992 university, one post 1992 university and eight local colleges. The project was led by the pre 1992 university. Each university leads one FD with five of the colleges delivering one or both FDs. The pre 1992 institution used its own student numbers to recruit a cohort of learners whilst the post 1992 institution did not.

6.5   In addition the two universities had very different quality assurance (QA) requirements, which meant that the colleges had to work to two distinct systems. In the pre 1992 institution, the FD is located in a central unit but it does not appear integrated into the mainstream business of the university whereas in the post 1992 institution the FD is part of a faculty's sub-degree provision and subject to the same QA as all other provision. The college staff felt that the students studying with the pre 1992 institution were at a significant advantage in resource terms to those studying in the colleges.

6.6   In the second consortium there was only one pre 1992 university and no colleges. Located in a department the QA was overseen centrally and followed the normal undergraduate QA procedures. The university decided to develop and run the FD itself in the first instance to ensure that it met its quality standards before considering collaboration with colleges. A college that has proposed a partnership on a 'franchise' model, approached them recently. The college proposed that it would become a centre, providing support and facilities. The university is considering this proposal but at present cannot see any added value for the type of learner they have attracted. The complete flexibility for learners has been a major selling point for the FD.

6.7   The third consortium comprised three universities, with the one pre 1992 member having an evaluation role as their sole contribution. The two post 1992 universities both developed and accredit the two FDs. They deliver neither but held a joint validation event. Each of the colleges offered FDs credited by one university. Significant compromises had been made to bring the two structures and approval mechanisms together for this project. The FDs were part of mainstream faculty activity in both universities. Significant FD provision is planned for the coming year with a phasing out of Higher National (HN) provision. The colleges are keen to provide FDs to local students over this large rural area where travel to a university has made HE difficult to access by prospective students.

Summary points

❑   Post 1992 universities in particular, see the FD as a mainstream qualification that has major benefits over Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and HNDs

❑   Many are planning to introduce a significant number of new courses for September 2002 and some have taken a policy decision to adapt all their HN provision to the FD format

❑   FDs are generally located in departments or faculties alongside other provision in post 1992 universities

❑   In pre 1992 universities there has not been a strong tradition of sub degree provision and FDs are seen as more experimental and therefore tend to be found in specialist units

❑   Some are located centrally rather than in departments or faculties and are seen as very distinct from HNs

❑   Many pre 1992 universities have reservations about introducing additional FDs and those that are have been cautious until they see how well the concept is accepted by employers, professional bodies and learners and whether FDs will be funded by HEFCE through additional numbers for the future

Progression

6.8   Progression as a fundamental part of the FD concept was new to sub-degree provision. It was recognised in the FD Prospectus as noted previously in section three.

6.9   Most colleagues accept that the original concept that FDs would have transferability across the sector was ambitious. However progression routes to attract FD graduates may develop into an area of competition between HE institutions.

Current situation within consortia

6.10   Where existing professional recognition above that offered by the FD is dependent upon an honours degree, as in the case of FD II, evidence suggests that most students will wish to progress. In this particular case this was a significant attraction of the FD. Content of the bridging modules will be determined by the requirements for professional accreditation. In the case of FD II, there were sufficient student numbers and high progression prospects to merit a bespoke top up course.

6.11   The team developing FD III, while not believing that many students will progress, has devised a tailored honours programme and from that identified the content for bridging. Examination techniques and specific areas of content will be central to bridging.

6.12   FDs IV and V were designed with 160 credits available at level one, followed by 120 credits at level two. The additional 40 credits for skills were 'front loaded' so that students could match their level with traditional undergraduate students and be ready to progress after completion of the FD if they wished.

6.13   Colleges are concerned that from a position where many had expected progression to be a right, there has been some wavering to the extent that some universities are considering the introduction of additional criteria which had not been communicated to students at the outset.

Summary

❑   Consortia have very different approaches to progression

❑   If the qualification gains credibility in its own right there could be less demand for progression

❑   Bridging provision will need to meet different needs for different FD graduates

❑   Most prototypes regard progression as a right for those successfully completing an FD; however almost a fifth expect students to meet further requirements

❑   Progression is less likely to happen if there are no funded places for the honours year and for the bridging programmes

Distance Learning (DL) and e-Learning (eL) within curriculum design

6.14   In the design and delivery of curriculum all three consortia have considered either distance learning or eL. One similarity between those offering DL and eL is that both FD II and FD III run modules where there is no expectation of face to face student-tutor contact. Only students on FD II have access to a VLE (virtual learning environment).

Current situation within the case study consortia

6.15   The curriculum design for the first FD has limited eL elements. The basic module material can be accessed from one of the colleges rather than the university's VLE. The college hosting the VLE has decided to change their VLE because of the number of complaints from students about the chat rooms and email facility. Students tend to use the VLE to complete compulsory exercises only.

6.16   FD II includes an innovative approach to curriculum development in that the course team incorporated an online module, which students undertake for the duration of the first year. As it is situated within a VLE, students have benefited from the chat room discussions as well as the flexible delivery.

6.17   The innovative aspect of the FD offered by consortium II has proved to be the delivery of the whole course by DL with support provided by the team for learners using learning materials on CD ROMs. This existing provision is a tutor supported model based on printed materials.

6.18   This focus has meant that there is no student interface system and that students have no peer support - rather they rely on assistance from tutors alone. The FD provider was aware of this shortcoming but they had neither the resources nor the expertise to rectify it. Also as pioneers within their institution in respect of introducing learning materials via CD ROMs, they realised that they needed time to evaluate how effective that innovation was before introducing more.

6.19   It is clear that the institutions within the third consortium had established a good working relationship from the way that they designed the curricula in partnership. However although materials had been collected to allow access through a web interface, this has not been developed at the present time to the full web access that was envisaged.

Summary points

❑   Building on existing good working relationships leads to smooth collaboration

❑   Ownership by those charged with delivering is important

❑   Student induction to online or electronic delivery formats is crucial

❑   Student needs should be addressed with respect to delivery as well as content and context. Distance and flexible learning are well received by those in work and with a need to travel

Work based learning

6.20   There is a wide range of approaches to integrated work and learning within the prototype FDs - reflecting the diversity of courses and needs. The examples range from bolt on work placements to accredited learning within the work place.

Current situation in consortia

6.21   At one end of the spectrum students are expected to undertake two five-week work placements during the course. The student is expected to identify suitable work placements, which are subsequently reviewed for compliance with health and safety regulations. The outcome is assessed in the form of a learning log, which the students need to compile during their placement.

6.22   At the other end of the spectrum there is an example of accredited learning in the work place, which comes from a consortium not featured in the main case studies. Students undertake a project after they, the academic institution and the employer have agreed the learning outcomes. As part of the process the employer is charged with ensuring that the project will be of benefit to the business. At the end of the project the student has to produce a written report and give an oral presentation. Representatives from the employer body and the academic institution assess both pieces of work.

6.23   FD II and FD III can be found in the middle of the spectrum and are compared because they both sit within the *Meeting the employee need* taxonomic grouping. Their approach to WBL is different from both the previous examples. Students study part time and their employment is directly related to the FD. Responsibility lies with students to improve their work practice by implementing what they have learnt from the FD and by reflecting on their existing work practices and incorporating those reflections into their assignments. This offers an integrated approach to WBL providing the student is prepared to engage in the process and reflect on their learning.

Summary

❑   Few FDs have WBL where the activity is assessed

❑   Part time programmes that meet employee needs use work experiences as the basis for application of theory and reflection

❑   A properly constructed learning agreement for more informal work placement arrangements is essential if students are to understand the benefits and learning is to be captured

❑   There are a range of definitions of WBL in operation across the sector and agreed national definitions would be welcomed

Study skills

6.24   The development of study skills is an area of diverse practice within FDs which has evolved in response to students' experiences of their first year of study.

Current situation in consortia

6.25   FD II provides opportunities for the development of study skills outside of the curriculum. At induction students are introduced to the skills they will need, which includes remote access to library resources. They are then provided with further opportunities during study schools at the end of module six and the beginning of module twelve. While attendance at these events is strongly recommended about two thirds attend. Pastoral and academic support is available from students' tutors, however, when the research was undertaken there was no record of a request for the former.

6.26   There is a study skills module incorporated into year one of FD II. The module is designed to run throughout both semesters and the team has responded to student requests to restructure it to provide a better fit with the curriculum and assessment regime. The colleges are considering a proposal to offer students a 'taster' of HE that familiarises them with the online environment and basic study skills prior to the start of the course.

6.27   FDs IV and V are 'front-loaded' with a study skills module worth 40 credits. This has increased the number of level 1 credits from 120 to 160. It has meant that students have been introduced to the academic requirements of an HE course and had the opportunity to build up their confidence.

6.28   One consortium, not profiled as a main case study, reviewed the first year of its FD with students and employers, was unanimous in its concerns over the level of numerical methods required and the need to make their more general study support available to students particularly those who had no previous HE experience. The course team and employers decided that from September their students would be offered five additional study skills sessions on a day release basis in the five weeks prior to the beginning of the course. Employers agreed to cover the cost of these additional sessions.

Summary points

❑   Students appreciate that they need study skills

❑   Provision should be matched to the needs of both the programme and the students

❑   Rapid response to review of the effectiveness of study skills provision is necessary to ensure that topics are covered in line with the unfolding of the curriculum

❑   Involving employers in the review process can lead to their support for changes; even support for additional provision.

Marketing

6.29   Many different approaches have been taken to marketing this new qualification. Generic marketing was undertaken on a national scale and while some consortia marketed nationally a majority adopted local or regional strategies.

Current situation in consortia

6.30   Although the first consortium had two FDs they did not adopt a common approach to marketing. The limited marketing that was undertaken involved two different sets of materials in the form of brochures with independent branding designed for each FD. Future marketing will promote a *family of provision*.

6.31   Marketing of FD II was largely via word of mouth through existing contacts with the sector, however open evenings were also held and an advertisement was placed in the local papers. The backing of the professional body provided credibility for the qualification.

6.32   FD III undertook very little of their own marketing and their first cohort of students was obtained by advertising through the established network of the industry NTO. An advertisement in *The Mirror* was very successful but the strong effect of the alumni of the department recommending the programme to their employees, was the biggest asset of all.

6.33   A demonstrably successful approach to marketing was adopted by one consortium, which is not featured as one of the case studies. The team employed a theatre group to promote the FD within the framework of widening participation. The actors engaged the audience as they debated the issues of 'What is a FD?', 'Why would I want to do one?' and 'How can I find out more about them?' The consortium was able to quantify the returns on expenditure in terms of number of enquiries per £1000 spent. The drama option, although reaching a much smaller audience than for example press inserts, generated a much better return.

6.34   The marketing for FDs IV and V was well co-ordinated by a marketing group chaired by the Marketing Manager of one of the FE partners. The group decided to employ a company to design their campaign and engaged a web design company to create a marketing web site. The group was provided with regular information on web site hits and enquiries. The consortium continues to receive reports from the web design company.

Summary points

❑   There is a wide variety of approaches that can be successful

❑   The target for the marketing may well be different for each taxonomic group depending on whether the focus is on students or employers

❑   The marketing strategy needs to match the target audience

❑   These are non traditional programmes for non traditional students so non traditional marketing has its place

❑   NTOs (now SSCs) can be very effective partners in marketing

Collaboration and funding allocation

6.35   As has been described each consortium had a different combination of partners and issues arose over the ways in which both development and student funding were distributed. This happened in all cases except FD III which involved no other HEIs or FECs but was a bilateral arrangement with an NTO.

Current situation in consortia

6.36   A comparison of the different collaboration models used by consortium I (FDs I and II) and consortium III (FDs IV and V) is a useful learning point. Both consortia have two accrediting universities and two FDs. In consortium I each university accredited one FD. All FE partners within the consortium were invited to offer both FDs; however not all managed to recruit to both programmes. In consortium III, both universities accredited both FDs in a joint validation and the colleges worked with one or other of the HEIs and could offer both FDs.

6.37   At the time we undertook the research, there were no formal arrangements for the management of FD I as the project manager had resigned four and a half months earlier and the HEI had only just identified his successor. The university managing FD II however, had established a steering group and a management group. Many staff involved in the groups could no longer see a justification for continuing with two groups, so they were in the process of being contracted into one. It was felt that this would give greater clarity to management decisions.

6.38   The universities which offer FDs I and II controlled the finances of the project and there was a disagreement about what the funding split between the colleges and the universities should be. The latter believed that the value of their brand should be taken into consideration when determining what percentage the colleges should receive. The view of the colleges was different and the consortium had reached an impasse with respect to an agreed model for distributing the funds.

6.39   The allocation of the student funding caused great debate. The proportion accruing to the universities for quality assurance and accreditation was thought to be too high by the colleges and too low by the universities.

6.40   Consortium II comprised a single university and the relevant NTO. There were no funding issues in this context in that the NTO undertook work to support the development as part of its mainstream remit and the university kept all the project and student funding.

6.41   The concern for this institution was the actual cost of collaboration and associated communications if they were to work with colleges as study centres. The university had secured RDA funding to appoint a lifelong learning officer to develop other FDs in collaboration with local colleges but felt that FD development would not have progressed without the additional funding.

6.42   Consortium III did not appear to have issues over the student funding element but the colleges were concerned as to how the project funding had been distributed. The largest part of the development funding had been allocated to materials production and some colleges felt they had not been paid for what they had done while others felt that value for money had not been obtained. It appeared to the Support Team that transparency and communication were really at issue.

   Summary points

   ❑   Transparency in working relationships is essential, particularly within large consortia

   ❑   Sustainability should be planned into development projects which may run into difficulty if there is an expectation of further funding

   ❑   An agreed model for funding splits between colleges and universities for accreditation and QA services is essential

   Perceptions of managers, practitioners and students

6.43   FDs have been well received at all levels. In none of our discussions did we come across any suggestion that the pilots had been unsuccessful and should or would be discontinued. This sub-section evaluates the views of managers, frontline staff and students in each of the consortia.

Current situation in consortia

6.44 In the first consortium both universities fully supported the prototype project but management was devolved to a central unit and a faculty respectively. The colleges were represented at vice principal level. Senior management in the colleges felt that college staff could have contributed more but did not have the confidence to contradict university staff, in particular about learning and teaching methodologies for this particular type of learner. The university managers felt that the college staff had much to learn about the requirements of HE.

6.45 Both were working to correct misconceptions and were most complementary about the commitment of the other partner. All agreed it had been a steep learning curve but on the whole very successful.

6.46 Although it appeared that great effort had been made to promote clear communication it was evident that many of the teaching staff in the colleges felt that they had not be sufficiently involved in the development stage. The course team for FD II were addressing this in the production of new modules.

6.47 Whatever the local difficulties all staff agreed that the experience had been positive when taken as a whole and were keen to consider new FDs.

6.48 Students on the two FDs saw them very differently. Those on FD II had a low drop out rate and were of the opinion that the programme met their expectations and their needs. The researchers engaged in on line discussion with students on FD II. The students felt that they needed better preparation for engagement with the online materials and discussion that formed part of the programme. All agreed that once they had become proficient, the experience had had many benefits for them. However staff indicated that there were some students not engaging with the electronic system and since future modules required online interaction they could foresee significant failures at the end of the second semester if remedial action was not taken.

6.49 Staff reported that students studying for FD I did not think the course reflected that which had been promoted. This has led to poor retention. Staff had noted the tension between the subjects the students wanted to study and areas where employers had indicated that they had a skills shortage. Consideration had been given to breaking the FD into two FDs rather than continuing with a hybrid, which did not meet either stakeholder's requirements. However the final position was to modify the modules in such a way that they would be more appealing to students.

6.50 The course team for consortium II considered the programme to be of a significantly higher level than HNDs. The FD was designed to be a widening participation activity but the students attracted did not meet the 19 – 30 target group identified by the government.

6.51   Management concerns focused on future funding to develop new FD provision since a bid, by the lead HEI in FD III, for additional student numbers had failed. Although in the process of developing two new FDs, the university would not be taking numbers from current successful yet more traditional provision to run the new FDs. Therefore unless additional funding became available, FDs were unlikely to develop further.

6.52   Staff found the whole process positive due to the level of student motivation and achievement.

6.53   The Support Team did not have the opportunity to speak to students but we were provided with student profiles and case studies. The students appeared to be happy that the programme met their needs and the reports of their performance suggested very high achievement.

6.54   Managers in the third consortium were very supportive of FDs and in one case had taken a policy decision to adapt all HNs to the FD vocational format from September 2003. Neither university had student numbers available but the colleges had their own numbers, currently allocated to HNCs and HNDs, and were very keen to engage with the even more vocational FDs to meet local employment needs.

6.55   It was clear that the staff in both universities and all the colleges, offering FDs IV and V, were used to working together although usually as two consortia each associated with one FD. Whilst able to point to several areas for improvement they were again all supportive of both the concept and the project outcomes. It was felt that further development money would be needed to provide for more sophisticated online delivery options.

6.56   The Support Team were only able to talk to a small group of students in the third consortium and their experiences were very different. At one end of the spectrum, the FD met their needs and they were very happy. At the other extreme lack of staff qualified to teach highly specialised material meant that existing skills and achievements were being repeated and the new skills expected were not available. The consortium had taken steps to address this issue as they were in the process of appointing someone with the relevant skillset in May.

Summary points

❑   Senior management in those institutions which do not meet their benchmarks for widening participation view FDs as having the potential to make a significant contribution to these targets

❑   Some managers view FDs as HE provision to be provided through FE collaboration, others see them as programmes to be run in HEIs

❑   There is concern about maintaining the partnerships when the development funding ceases without the cost of collaboration being recognised

❑   Teaching staff in both universities and colleges were positive about the qualification

❑   Issues around roles and responsibilities, expectations and staff development needs persist

❑   A majority of students are very positive about FDs meeting their needs

❑   Concerns arose when content delivered did not meet student expectation based on promotional literature

❑   These are largely non traditional students and some expressed concern about fitting their studies around their work and other commitments

❑   Equally, however, early statistical returns have shown that FDs have worked as a widening participation tool because they have provided a crucial access route to many who would otherwise never have considered HE

❑   Where online delivery or support are an integral part of the programme induction of students is crucial to the extent that staff should ensure that students actually demonstrate that they can access systems before being left to work independently

7   Key messages

7.1   Our research with the case study consortia provided a wealth of information about the practical and philosophical implications of developing and implementing FDs. In the preceding sections we have drawn together the experiences of different providers to give an overarching picture of the range and diversity of FD provision after a year. However, it was evident from our discussions that there are several very pragmatic issues, the effective understanding of which will contribute significantly to the long-term success of the FD initiative. These key messages are aimed at those who are considering whether to develop FDs and existing FD providers.

✓   **Allow for development costs.** The case study consortia indicated that development funding had been crucial in terms of covering the cost of collaborative design of new curricula. FDs in the *Adapters* and *Re-badger categories* had compensated in part for this by building on existing provision.

✓   **Understand your target market.** This understanding will influence many aspects of the development and is a critical success factor. The five FDs illustrated in this report demonstrate this. One FD has a waiting list as the course is over-subscribed. Other course teams failed to recruit to target in part because their provision was not sufficiently focused on a particular market sector.

✓   **Integrate your FD into a flexible structure with progression and multiple exit points.** The clearest example of this is that of the institution that enables students to exit at whatever level they can achieve. This may mean that a student ends up with a certificate of HE at one end, an FD or at the other end, a Masters degree as described in FD III. Robust, achievable progression routes will motivate most FD students.

✓   **Ensure your FD addresses the core design elements.** FDs can be new provision designed specifically to meet the market demands, as in FDs I, II and III described here. Alternatively they may derive from existing provision, often at HN level, adapted to address the core elements of an FD as in the programmes described in case study IV. However if adapting existing provision, it is essential that providers meet employer or employee needs. Institutions looking to re-badge existing provision need to review it carefully to ensure that it addresses the core elements and the QAA benchmark statement. The QAA's benchmarking document can be downloaded from their website – www.qaa.ac.uk/public/publications.

✓   **Think through the sustainability of FDs**. As noted in the section which explained how the taxonomy works, there are many more FDs

which fit the *Adapter* and *Re-badger* categories than those that address a skills gap identified by employers. Evidence suggests that those attempting to design FDs by rebadging existing provision without employer involvement and full integration of the WBL element are less likely to sustain credibility with employers. FD III illustrates the powerful effect of employer alumni on recruitment and the likely sustainability of the FD.

✓   **Use your NTO or SSC effectively**. NTOs and now SSCs can be effective in many ways which include liaison with employers, design and development of curriculum, responsibility for marketing and leading materials production. All the case studies demonstrate this but FDs I and III in particular secured excellent support from their respective NTOs.

8   Glossary of acronyms

8.1   Please find a list of acronyms as a reference to those used throughout the paper

- ❑   ASN(s) – additional student number(s) *The framework for ASNs was set in 1997 and supports the key national priorities of widening access to higher education, increasing opportunities for students, increasing provision below honours degree level, and supporting expansion of high quality in learning and teaching*

- ❑   CD ROM - compact disc read only memory

- ❑   DL – distance learning

- ❑   eL – e-learning

- ❑   FD(s) – Foundation Degree(s)

- ❑   FE – further education

- ❑   FEC(s) – further education college(s)

- ❑   FTE – full-time equivalent

- ❑   HE – higher education

- ❑   HEI(s) – higher education institution(s)

- ❑   HN – Higher National

- ❑   HNC(s) – Higher National Certificate(s)

- ❑   HND(s) – Higher National Diploma(s)

- ❑   NVQ – national vocational qualification

- ❑   NTO(s) – National Training Organisation(s)

- ❑   OLF – Open Learning Foundation

- ❑   QA – quality assurance

- ❑   QAA – Quality Assurance Agency

- ❑   RDA – Regional Development Agency

- ❑   SME – Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

- ❑   SSC – Sector Skills Council

- ❑   VLE – virtual learning environment

- ❑   WBL – work based learning