



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**

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DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Evaluation of Foundation Degree Forward

Evaluation report – June 2011

Department for Employment and Learning

Higher Education Widening Participation Policy Branch

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SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 AIM OF THE EVALUATION

The Department for Employment and Learning has carried out an evaluation exercise to assess the effectiveness and value for money of the work that has been undertaken by Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) in supporting the development, delivery and promotion of Foundation Degrees in Northern Ireland in the period May 2007 to the end of March 2011 with a view to assessing the extent to which it fulfilled its objectives.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Foundation Degrees

The Foundation degree is a relatively new higher education qualification, the origins of which lie in the recommendations of the Dearing Committee's report, "Higher Education in the Learning Society". The Dearing report noted the decline in current qualifications at the intermediate level and argued for further expansion of higher education to be at this level. The Foundation degree was the Government's response to this recommendation.

Foundation degrees were piloted in Northern Ireland in academic year 2001-02, in the priority skills area of Information Communication Technology. In 2002-03, the pilot was extended to cover Construction & the Built Environment and Hospitality & Tourism. From academic year 2006-07, the Department invited proposals for Foundation degrees in any vocational discipline.

Foundation degrees are professional and technical higher education qualifications, delivered by FE colleges but awarded by Universities, which integrate academic and work related study. It is intended that Foundation

degrees should respond to the needs of employers and industry in order to increase the supply of highly skilled technicians and associate professionals. They are first and foremost a stand-alone higher education qualification in their own right but articulation to an honours degree is one option for successful students. There must be clearly stated arrangements for articulation to at least one Honours degree.

Foundation degrees aim to equip students with the combination of technical skills, academic knowledge and transferable skills that employers are increasingly demanding. A Foundation degree takes two years to complete full-time, but it can also be studied part-time, usually over three to four years. Entry requirements for a Foundation degree may be stated in terms of formal qualifications, such as “A levels” or Advanced Vocational Certificates in Education. Applicants without formal qualifications, who can demonstrate that they have the relevant skills and aptitudes, may also be considered.

In Northern Ireland, Foundation degrees are developed and delivered by consortia involving one of the Northern Ireland universities or the Open University, a Further Education College and employers. The university is the body with degree-awarding powers and has responsibility for ensuring standards; the employers ensure the curriculum will give students the skills employers need; and Further Education Colleges provide close-to-home delivery of Foundation degrees to a diverse student group.

In order to improve employer engagement in Foundation degree development, each new proposal has to meet all of the relevant criteria for a Foundation degree with clear evidence of:

- the involvement of the relevant Sector Skills Council, employer bodies and (in the case of an education based course) the Department of Education in the design and development of the Foundation degree curriculum; this is

- to ensure that the content and delivery of the course meets the needs of the industry;
- evidence of a wide consultation to ascertain the needs of a range of employers;
 - the specific employment opportunities that will be open to someone who holds the proposed Foundation degree; and
 - the specific Honours degree(s) to which a successful Foundation degree graduate will be able to progress.

Foundation degrees are seen as critical to a number of the Department's strategies including the Skills Strategy 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures', FE Means Business and Widening Participation. The Department has committed to the expansion of Foundation degrees and has given them a key role within the skills agenda with a view to establishing them as the dominant sub-degree provision within the Further Education sector.

The number and range of Foundation degrees available has increased year on year since their inception in Northern Ireland and, at the time of writing (May 2011), the number of Foundation degrees stands at 91, with 5 new courses in development. In recent years the largest number of courses has been in Construction followed by Hospitality and Tourism. The number of students enrolling on Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland has also increased year on year since their introduction but still represented just 14% of the total number of higher education in further education student enrolments in academic year 2009/10.

Foundation Degree Forward

Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) was established as a national body by the 2003 HE White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' with the aim of supporting higher education institutions, further education institutions and other bodies in their development and management of Foundation degrees. Staffordshire University has supported the operation of fdf and, in England, fdf has been

funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to support employer engagement across higher education programmes generally and in relation to Foundation degrees specifically.

fdf's primary objective was to support the development of high quality Foundation degrees. fdf worked in partnership with relevant agencies, institutions, organisations and interest groups to ensure that the development of Foundation degrees was driven by the needs of employers and students with a view to fulfilling their mission statement "to meet the demands of workforce development, business improvement and the knowledge economy, fdf will seek to stimulate, support and sustain employer partnerships with higher education."

The Department has engaged fdf since 2007 to assist with the development of a strategy for the expansion of Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland. The contract with fdf is due to end on 31 July 2011. Thérèse Rogan has held the post of fdf's Regional Development Manager for Northern Ireland for the duration of the Department's engagement with fdf and was supported by a one person administrative support team for much of the period. The national fdf organisation supported the work of fdf in Northern Ireland.

The Department and fdf had distinct but complementary functions in respect of Foundation degree development:

- The Department was responsible for developing policy and strategy on Foundation degrees, for funding programmes and for promoting good practice in Northern Ireland;
- fdf's role was as a national centre for Foundation degree expertise, liaising with Sector Skills Councils and professional bodies to draw up frameworks for Foundation degrees covering a wide range of skills, and employer engagement in Foundation degree provision.

The Department provided funding for fdf's work in Northern Ireland via Staffordshire University which was accountable for this funding. However, as already noted the vast majority of fdf's total funding as a national body came from the HEFCE. HEFCE announced in October 2010 that they would cease to provide mainstream funding for fdf by July 2011, although transitional funding would be available until October 2011 at which point fdf would cease to exist. This decision follows the achievement of the Government's national target of 100,000 Foundation degree students to be enrolled at any one time in England.

1.3 THE NEED FOR AN EVALUATION

Against the background outlined in section 1.2 this evaluation was prompted by the imminent end to the Department's contract with fdf at the end of July 2011. An assessment of the effectiveness and value for money of fdf activity was required in line with the Department's initial business case to engage fdf. Also, given that fdf will effectively cease to exist from the end of July 2011 it was appropriate to review its performance.

This evaluation was also designed to help provide a strong and robust evidence base with a view to recommending how the Foundation degree qualification might be developed and supported in the future in Northern Ireland and in doing so help to ensure that the Department makes the best and most effective use of its resources in support of its commitments and targets in relation to Foundation degrees specifically and more generally in relation to wider Departmental priorities.

fdf Northern Ireland provided a 'Final Exit Report' to the Department in June 2011 which provided a summary of their work and achievements and outlined their suggestions for the continued development of Foundation degrees following the closure of fdf. The report suggests that the Department continues to support a number of measures, including: the Employer Based Training Accreditation

(EBTA) scheme; a marketing strategy; and the Foundation degree Advisory Panel. The report also proposes that the Department considers taking forward a quality kite mark initiative (such as fdf's Endorsement Service which is likely to be managed by the Quality Assurance Agency post July 2011) that demonstrates to employers and SSCs that the Foundation degree meets industry requirements. The 'Final Exit Report' was considered along with the findings of this evaluation, in forming the recommendations of this report.

It is also worth noting the arrangements that are being put in place by fdf in England in preparation for the end of the organisation there. These include the development of a "Legacy" strategy which attempts to maximise a continuing value to be derived by others from fdf's assets, products and services after they cease to exist. With this in mind, fdf has reached agreement with different organisations that will commit to the maintenance of their most important assets and services, for instance: the Quality Assurance Agency has agreed in principle to take on the co-ordinating role to support the EBTA scheme; the Higher Education Authority is currently loading all of fdf's research and literature onto a website; University of London Computer Centre will continue to support the vast majority of fdf's existing e-learning materials developed to support the flexible delivery of Foundation degrees and other work-based learning programmes; and fdf England has also made a number of arrangements with various organisations in relation to the future maintenance and dissemination of their Access, Progression and Development Guidance related resources.

1.4 METHODOLOGY / REPORT STRUCTURE

Section 1 – Introduction

Section 1 of the report outlines: the aim of the evaluation exercise; the background to, and the need for, the evaluation exercise; the methodology; and the management of the evaluation / oversight arrangements.

Section 2 – Review of Foundation Degree Forward

The first stage of the evaluation considers and provides an assessment of fdf's performance to date. fdf's contractual objectives, as outlined in the Service Level Agreement with the Department, provided the key indicators against which the effectiveness of fdf's work would be assessed, namely that fdf would:

- support the Northern Ireland Regional Director in taking forward the development of Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland;
- contribute to the strategic direction of the Department's commitment to the expansion of Foundation degrees in NI;
- support the Department's strategy for promoting / marketing Foundation degrees among employers;
- contribute to developing employer engagement strategies in Foundation degrees in the region;
- stimulate the development of employer demand led Foundation degrees;
- work collectively with the Department to support and develop partnerships between Sector Skills Councils, employers, Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Colleges in the development and flexible delivery of Foundation degrees;
- provide advice to the Department on the allocation of funding to support the development of Foundation degrees;
- ensure that Foundation degrees are promoted and understood by employers and employer organisations as a qualification that can support the development of workforce training and education;
- develop case studies for publication and dissemination of good practice in Foundation degree development;
- undertake research into Foundation degree provision / issues as required by the Department;
- co-ordinate Foundation degree events in Northern Ireland; and
- promote the recognition of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) i.e. to encourage the universities to move away from setting

entrance requirements for Foundation degrees and towards a focus on the prior achievement of Foundation degree students.

A number of research methodologies, drawing on a range of information sources, were used to help inform this stage of the evaluation in an effort to provide different perspectives and insights into the effectiveness of the work of fdf, as detailed below.

Desk research / literature review and analysis

The desk research element of the evaluation comprised a review and analysis of a wide range of the relevant available information and literature relating to fdf and Foundation degrees. The literature reviewed included: strategy and policy documents; promotional and marketing material produced by fdf; evidence of engagement with key stakeholders and any associated feedback; case studies developed by fdf; and any other information identified as relevant to the aims of the evaluation. The Department also sought further documentation and information from fdf as necessary to help inform this desk research element.

Stakeholder Survey

A series of stakeholder questionnaire surveys and associated survey sampling methodology were developed by the Higher Education Widening Participation Branch (HEWPB) element of the Review Team in consultation with colleagues from the Department's Analytical Services team.

A number of key stakeholder groups were identified and tailored questionnaires were developed for each of these stakeholder groups. These stakeholder groups included: staff in Further Education Colleges who have had an involvement with fdf / Foundation degrees; University staff who have had an involvement with fdf / Foundation degrees; Employers and Employers' representative bodies including Sector Skills Councils who have engaged with fdf; and current and past Foundation degree students.

The questionnaires were intended to gather the views of the stakeholder groups identified above particularly in relation to their awareness and perception of Foundation degrees and the future support arrangements for the Foundation degree qualification.

With the exception of the Foundation degree student group the questionnaires also sought stakeholder's views in relation to their engagement and involvement with fdf and their perceptions about the effectiveness of fdf's work.

The stakeholder survey questionnaires were distributed to the relevant groups during March 2011 via a combination of email and post. The survey for Foundation degree students was disseminated with the help of the FE Colleges to current Foundation degree students as well as to past Foundation degree students who had enrolled from academic year 2005/06 onwards for whom a last known postal or email address was held. The number of stakeholder surveys distributed and the number of responses subsequently received back for each of the respective stakeholder survey groups were as follows:

Stakeholder Group	No. of questionnaires distributed	No. of questionnaires returned
Foundation degree students (from 2005-06 onwards)	Approx. 3000	245
Further Education Colleges	37	14
Universities	17	5
Employers / Employers bodies / Sector Skills Councils	50	7

It should however be noted that the Review Team was not in a position to consider a small number of questionnaires which were received a number of weeks after the formal deadline for responses.

It should also be noted that, in line with the Department's Confidentiality Statement in relation to the publication of statistical data, survey results with a frequency of under 5 have not been published in cases when an individual can be identified. As a result, some of the figures shown in the tables of this report have been combined in order to allow them to be displayed.

It should also be noted that, as a result of the percentage figures for the results of stakeholder survey in the tables of the report being rounded to the nearest whole percentage, the total percentage does not always sum 100%. Annex A provides detailed tables of results.

Annex A contains the detailed tables of results from the stakeholder survey which are referenced in section 2 of the report (the review of fdf). Annex B contains the detailed tables of results from the stakeholder survey and other relevant statistical evidence, as well as associated commentary, in relation to the Foundation degree qualification itself (as opposed to fdf).

Review of statistical data

A key aspect of the evaluation was a review and analysis of the available statistical data in relation to Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland. The Department's Analytical Services Branch played an integral part in the Review Team by identifying and extracting relevant available Foundation degree related statistics, such as enrolment, retention, and achievement data, as a means of assessing the impact of fdf's work and how the Foundation degree qualification itself has developed.

Section 3 – Value for money assessment of Foundation Degree Forward

This section considers the Value For Money of the work undertaken by fdf in Northern Ireland and provides a judgement in this respect. Annex B contains the detailed tables which are referenced in the VFM section of the report.

Section 4 – Foundation degrees – Review of Stakeholder survey findings and other relevant data

Section 4 provides an overview of the findings from the stakeholder survey and other relevant statistical evidence in relation to the Foundation degree qualification itself (rather than fdf activities) to help inform the conclusions of the evaluation exercise.

Section 5 - Future development and support for the foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland

Section 5 identifies and provides an assessment of the options for how the Foundation degree qualification might be best developed and supported by the Department in Northern Ireland in the future once fdf ceases to exist.

Section 6 – Overall conclusions. Recommendations and next steps

The final section draws on all of the evidence gathered from the evaluation and provides overarching conclusions in relation to the effectiveness of fdf's work and the Foundation degree qualification generally and provides recommendations in relation to future support arrangements for Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland.

1.5 MANAGEMENT OF THE EVALUATION / OVERSIGHT ARRANGEMENTS

Kieran Mannion, Head of the Department's HEWPB, had overall responsibility for managing the evaluation exercise. The evaluation was undertaken by a Review Team which was led by staff in HEWPB with assistance as appropriate from various members of the Department's Analytical Services Branch and

representatives from the Further Education Colleges. Daryl Young, Deputy Director in the Department's Further Education Division, undertook a quality assurance role to ensure that the evaluation delivered a report which achieved its stated aims. Therefore, while the evaluation exercise was conducted largely within the Department, Daryl's involvement and oversight role ensured that the evaluation exercise as a whole and the final report were considered and agreed independently of the Department's HEWPB and indeed the Department's Higher Education Division.

1.6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Review Team would like to thank all of those who played a part in the Review and contributed to the evaluation exercise. HEWPB acknowledges the time, input and contribution from key stakeholders as well as from officials within the Department particularly members of the Analytical Services Branch and the Department's Further Education division. We would also like to thank all of those representatives from the Further Education Colleges who helped facilitate the distribution of the stakeholder survey questionnaires to current and past pupils from their respective colleges and indeed to all of those stakeholders who took the time to complete and return the survey questionnaires. Finally HEWPB would like to thank fdf for their co-operation throughout the evaluation exercise.

SECTION 2 – REVIEW OF FOUNDATION DEGREE FORWARD

2.1 BACKGROUND

The Department initially engaged fdf in May 2007 to assist with the development of a strategy for the expansion of Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland. Following a full Economic Appraisal the Department's contract with fdf was subsequently extended from 1 August 2008 until 31 July 2011.

The purpose of this section of the report is to consider and provide an assessment of fdf's performance against each of their 12 contractual objectives as detailed in the SLA with the Department. The assessment against each of these objectives drew on the relevant information gathered through the range of methodologies outlined in section 1.4 (desk research / literature review and analysis, findings of the stakeholder surveys and a review of statistical data) with a view to establishing findings and conclusions in relation to the extent to which fdf succeeded in meeting its SLA objectives.

2.2 ASSESSMENT OF FOUNDATION DEGREE FORWARD'S PERFORMANCE AGAINST THEIR SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT COMMITMENTS

SLA 1 - Support the Northern Ireland Regional Director who will take forward the development of Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland

Background

Thérèse Rogan held the post of fdf's Regional Development Manager for Northern Ireland between 2007 and 2011 and was supported by a one person administrative support team for much of the period. Thérèse was therefore essentially the sole ambassador and representative for fdf in Northern Ireland and drew on the support and resources of fdf nationally.

The day to day role of the Regional Manager included the dissemination of good practice in the design, development and delivery of Foundation degrees and advising the Department on promotional issues. The Regional Manager worked with the Department to develop partnerships between Higher Education Institutions, the FE Regional Colleges, Sector Skills Councils, employers and employer bodies with a view to supporting the development of Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland.

Evidence and analysis

The fdf national organisation supported the work of the Northern Ireland Regional Manager in a number of ways, for instance; they provided speakers for fdf conferences held in Northern Ireland; they contributed and provided input for fdf NI literature; the design of the advertisements for the Foundation degree advertising campaign in NI was essentially taken from an existing campaign which fdf had organised successfully in England; senior fdf officials attended meetings in Northern Ireland on a number of occasions. Director of fdf attended meetings of working groups which considered the issues of Validation of Foundation Degrees, Articulation from a Foundation degree to an honours degree and the development of an effective process for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning as an entry route to Foundation degrees. Penny Blackie, an experienced practitioner in HE in FE issues was the initial Chair of the APEL Development Group on behalf of fdf. Also a number of fdf staff including Bop Dhillon, Associate Director of fdf, undertook research for fdf in Northern Ireland.

Assessment

Given the evidence outlined above, which illustrates that fdf nationally provided considerable and wide ranging support to the Northern Ireland Regional Director to help her take forward the development of Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland, it is considered that this SLA target was successfully achieved.

SLA 2 - Contribute to the strategic direction of the Department's commitment to the expansion of Foundation degrees in NI

Background

The further development and expansion of Foundation degrees is integral to the effective implementation of a number of Departmental strategies, particularly Success through Skills – Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland, FE Means Business, Widening Participation and the outcomes of the 2007's 'Higher Education in the Further Education sector, including Foundation degrees' consultation.

Skills Strategy

The Department's Skills Strategy states that the number of Foundation degrees in areas of priority skills should be increased significantly and that "the Department will work closely with industry, especially the Sector Skills Councils to ensure...Foundation degrees meet significantly the needs of employers and are industry led."¹

Skills Strategy - Evidence and Analysis

The enrolment numbers contained in table 1² show that, with the exception of the full-time enrolments for academic year 2008-09 when there was a very small decrease in the number of enrolments compared to the previous academic year, there has been a year on year increase in the number of both part-time and full-time Foundation degree enrolments since their introduction.

Although there was only a small increase in enrolment figures in 2008/09, the full impact of fdf's work can perhaps begin to be seen in the 2009/10 enrolment figures, the most recent year for which figures are available. The 2009/10

¹ During the writing of this evaluation report the Department launched a new Skills Strategy, "Success through Skills – Transforming Futures" which reiterated the Department's commitment to work "closely with industry and continue to expand Foundation Degrees in key skill priority areas.

² All tables referenced in this section are contained in Annex A

enrolments saw an increase of 340 from the 2008/09 figure which represented by far the highest recorded year on year increase during the qualification's existence.

Furthermore, although the official enrolment figures for academic year 2010-11 are not yet available, research carried across the colleges in October 2010 indicates that total enrolment figures had increased again by approximately 450 enrolments in comparison to the 2009/10 level. This would support the view that fdf's work has had a tangible impact on the uptake of Foundation degrees and that a correlation can be made between their work and the two years of record increases in enrolments. Part-time and Full-time Foundation degree enrolments have increased at a similar rate over the years and the proportions of Part-time and Full-time enrolments have remained fairly constant.

The Skills Strategy states that "the number of Foundation degrees in areas of priority skills will be increased significantly". The level of enrolments in STEM related subject areas as a proportion of overall Foundation degree enrolments varied between 40%-55% during the first three academic years of fdf's existence. This relatively high proportion of STEM related enrolments should however be treated with caution given the relatively small enrolment numbers during these initial years and because when Foundation degrees were initially introduced in Northern Ireland in academic year 2001-02 they were piloted in the priority skills of Information Communication Technology. Additionally, subject areas within which Foundation degrees could be offered continued to be restricted from 2002-03 to 2004-05. It was not until 2005-06 that the Department invited proposals for Foundation degrees in any vocational discipline.

Therefore, examining the figures for 2004-05 onwards, the table highlights that the level of enrolments in STEM related subject areas as a proportion of overall Foundation degree enrolments fell gradually year on year from a high of 26% in 2004-05 to 18% in 2007-08. However, following the establishment of fdf in

Northern Ireland, this trend was reversed with small increases in the proportion of STEM enrolments, to 19% in 2008-09 and then 21% in 2009-10. Therefore whilst the number of Foundation degrees in areas of priority skills did not increase “significantly” during the lifetime of fdf as envisaged in the Skills Strategy they did nevertheless increase.

Another key recommendation of the Skills Strategy was that “the Department will work closely with industry, especially the Sector Skills Councils to ensure...Foundation degrees meet significantly the needs of employers and are industry led.” The degree to which this stated aim has been met is more fully addressed through the evidence and consideration of SLA objectives elsewhere in this section (SLA 4, SLA 5, SLA 6 and SLA 8). fdf are adjudged to have been broadly effective in meeting those four SLA objectives and as such are considered to have successfully contributed to the Skills Strategy stated aim of working closely with industry, especially the Sector Skills Councils, to ensure Foundation degrees meet significantly the needs of employers and are industry led.

FE Means Business

The Department’s FE Means Business Strategy identified that FE Colleges are an important route into higher education and graduate skills. The strategy states that “the Department will work with the other stakeholders to ensure that Foundation degrees become the dominant sub-degree provision within the Further Education sector... and will, therefore, substitute over time the HND/HNC provisions”.

The strategy also declared that “colleges within the further education sector should collaborate more effectively, in the interests of employers and learners. The Department will work with other bodies and institutions to strengthen collaboration in the important interface areas. For example, it will work with, “...the universities to build upon the pilot experience of Foundation Degrees.

There is a strategic need for the further education sector to work more closely, at regional and local levels, with the universities....”

FE Means Business - Evidence and Analysis

In terms of the “FE Means Business” Strategy aim of ensuring that Foundation degrees become the dominant sub-degree provision within the Further Education sector, substituting HND/HNC provision over time, table 3 shows that the number of Foundation degree enrolments as a proportion of all sub-degree HE in FE enrolments has increased gradually over the years in comparison to the proportion of HN enrolments which have fallen gradually in the same period. The proportion of Foundation degree enrolments has risen year on year from 1% of the total sub-degree provision in 2001-02 to 14% in 2009-10. Over the same period the proportion of HN enrolments has fallen slightly from 56% in 2001-02 to 51% in 2009-10.

Since fdf was engaged in 2007, the proportion of Foundation degree enrolments has risen from 9% in 2006-07 to 14% in 2009-10. This compares to a slight fall in the proportion of HN qualifications over the same period. Therefore, whilst progress has been made year on year since Foundation degree’s were introduced, and has increased during fdf’s time, there is clearly still some way to go before the ambition to establish Foundation degrees as the dominant intermediate qualification can be said to have been achieved.

In this respect it should also be noted that there are still many more Higher National Diploma and Higher National Certificate courses being delivered than Foundation degrees and that the College Development Plans for Academic Year 2011/12 also showed that there are still as many new course proposals for HNDs as for Foundation degrees. Furthermore, there still remain a number of instances in which colleges are simultaneously delivering Foundation degrees and HNCs/HNDs in the same subject areas (this was the case in a total of 8 instances across the 6 Colleges as of March 2011). These instances of

Foundation degrees and HNDs/HNCs being delivered by colleges simultaneously in the same subject area is not only at odds with the Departmental policy that Foundation degree provision should substitute HND/HNC provision but also clearly represents an inefficient use of resources which needs to be addressed.

There may be a number of reasons contributing to the continued prevalence of HN qualifications. HNs are better known and recognised by employers across a number of industry sectors. Foundation degrees are generally more expensive and more difficult for colleges to develop and deliver than HNDs (due primarily to the need for Foundation degrees to include a compulsory “Work Based Learning element”). At the same time, difficulties have often arisen in relation to the length of time taken to validate Foundation degrees in comparison to HNDs. The recent Foundation degree promotion campaign was targeted at increasing awareness of the qualification, while the introduction of a Northern Ireland Framework for the Validation of Foundation degrees should go a long way to addressing the delays which have sometimes occurred during the validation process for Foundation degrees. In terms of the responses to the combined non student stakeholder survey questionnaires (ie. from university, college and employer/employer body/SSC sector respondents) in relation to how the Foundation degree qualification could be best supported and developed in the future, 8% of responses recommended the withdrawal of funding for the HN qualification as a way of ensuring that colleges grow their Foundation degree provision.

Another notable finding from the student survey responses (table 4) in relation to the Foundation degree/HN debate was that the vast majority (84%) of students enrolled on their first choice Foundation degree as opposed to having wanted to enrol on a different Foundation degree, an HNC/HND or an Honours Degree. This result would appear to dispel any suggestion that Foundation degrees are merely a ‘back-up’ choice for prospective students if they are unsuccessful in gaining a place on an Honours degree or indeed a HN course.

Widening Participation

The Department's vision for Widening Participation in Higher Education is that any qualified individual in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to higher education that is right for them, irrespective of their educational or social background or location of study.

The Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2008-2011, **Building a Better Future**, tasks the Department to, *"...by 2011, make progress, year on year, towards fair access to higher education"*. The achievement of this target is an essential element in the Department's attempts to meet the objective to *"...tackle the skills barriers to employment and employability"*.

In Northern Ireland 50% of 18-21 year olds now participate in higher education and Northern Ireland has the best higher education participation rates in the UK for those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In order to sustain this performance the Department is leading the development and implementation of a regional strategy to widen participation in higher education which is expected to be put in place in late 2011, following the outcome of a public consultation on the issue.

Widening Participation - Evidence and Analysis

The Foundation degree qualification has played an important role in helping the Department make progress towards its widening participation vision, particularly through its local delivery through the FE College network, the flexible models of delivery, the opportunity to undertake work-based learning and the option of articulation to an Honours degree programme for those graduates who wish to continue their higher education journey. The work of fdf in supporting and developing the expansion of Foundation degrees is explored in the following paragraphs.

The Foundation degree qualification allows successful graduates to progress through higher education by studying for an Honours Degree at University. Table 5 outlines the available data in relation to the recorded destinations of Foundation degree students following completion of their qualification in the period 2003/04 – 2007/08 and shows that 52% of those who provided details on their destination indicated that they had progressed into University Higher Education. The destination statistics for the period 2008-10, when fdf was engaged in Northern Ireland, show an increase in the recorded number of students articulating to University to 60%. It should, however, be noted that these figures are based on relatively low numbers of Foundation degree graduates who provided this destination information.

It is worth noting that the latest destination statistics for HN graduates (2009/10) are comparable to the Foundation degree statistics with 59% of HN graduates moving into Higher Education, whether it be part time or full time.

Higher Education in Further Education

In April 2008, the Minister approved the main recommendations of a 2007 public consultation on 'Higher Education in the Further Education sector, including Foundation degrees' Key recommendations approved by the Minister in relation to the Foundation degree themes included:

- Recruitment - Develop Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) as a key principle in Foundation degree recruitment.
- Promotion - Develop a strategy for the promotion of Foundation degrees particularly to those in industry.
- HE in FE Collaboration - Foundation degrees should be validated by the Northern Ireland universities and the Open University except where the HEIs are unwilling or unable to validate the Foundation degree.
- Funding - Main criteria to allocate funding for the development of Foundation degrees should include comprehensive engagement with the

relevant Sector Skills Council where the employment sector has identified a major skills gap and where the need is a priority skills area.

Higher Education in Further Education - Evidence and Analysis

Following the consultation on the Review of Higher Education in Further Education 2007, it was recognised that further progress was required in a number of key areas relating to Foundation degrees. A Foundation degree Strategy Group was formed comprising representatives from the Further Education Regional Colleges, the Universities and other key stakeholders including fdf.

fdf played a pivotal role in the Foundation Degree Strategy Group and within a number of sub-groups / working groups that were subsequently developed which addressed the Foundation degree issues arising from the consultation in relation to Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), Validation & Articulation, and Marketing & Promotion. fdf contributed to all of this work:

- it played a significant role on the Validation Working Group in the development of the Northern Ireland Framework for the Validation of Foundation degrees which was agreed in February 2011. The Framework provides all of the partners involved in the development and validation of Foundation degrees with a clear timetable for progression towards validation. fdf's '10-point checklist' document, developed as part of its Endorsement Service, was published along with the final Validation Framework document. The checklist acts as a guide for HE/FE institutions to demonstrate how their proposed Foundation degree maps against the appropriate Sector Skills Council Foundation Degree Sectoral Framework;
- fdf was responsible for Chairing the APEL Working Group and in doing so led the management and development of the "Northern Ireland Colleges and Universities APEL Scheme" for entry to Foundation degrees which was agreed in March 2011 (see Section 2 – SLA 12 for further details);

- fdf played a vital role on the Marketing and Promotion campaign for 2009-10 and 2010-11, which was subsequently implemented by fdf on behalf of the Department (see Section 2 – SLA 3 for further details).

It is therefore evident that fdf played a key part in ensuring that the issues arising from the 2007 Review of Higher Education in Further Education were successfully addressed.

Finally, table 6 outlines the survey views of stakeholders from the University, College and employer/employer body/SSC sectors which demonstrated a positive perception in relation to the effect fdf has had in developing and supporting the Foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland. Some 77% of respondents considered fdf to have been either ‘very effective’ or ‘quite effective’ at *“developing and supporting the Foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland”*. No respondents considered fdf to have been *“not effective at all”* in this respect.

Assessment

Based on the evidence outlined above fdf are judged to have made a significant contribution to the strategic direction of the Department’s commitment to the expansion of Foundation degrees in NI. In summary, the majority of the available evidence clearly shows improvements during this period:

- the level of enrolments in STEM subject areas as a proportion of overall Foundation degree enrolments showed increases since fdf’s establishment, reversing a trend of falling STEM enrolments in the previous three academic years;
- fdf played a significant role in taking forward the key issues arising from the Review of HE in FE which have all now been successfully addressed;
- the record year on year increases in enrolment figures in 2009/10 (and the indicative figures for October 2010 which suggest a further record year on year increase in enrolments)

- the level of Foundation degree enrolments as a proportion of all sub-degree enrolments rose from 9% in 2006-07 to 14% in 2009-10 compared to a fall in the proportion of HN qualifications over the same period, although there is still some way to go before Foundation degrees become the dominant sub-degree qualification within the HE in FE sector;
- in terms of widening participation the recorded destinations of Foundation degree students for the period 2008-10, showed an increase in the recorded number of students articulating to University than prior to 2008; and
- over three quarters of respondents to the stakeholder survey felt that fdf have been either “very” or “quite” effective in “developing and supporting the Foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland”.

On the above evidence fdf have successfully met this SLA objective by supporting the effective implementation of Departmental strategies including the Skills Strategy, FE Means Business, Widening Participation and the outcomes of the ‘Higher Education in the Further Education sector, including Foundation degrees’ review.

SLA 3 - Support the Department’s strategy for promoting / marketing Foundation degrees among employers

Background

One of the recommendations identified through the Department’s 2007 ‘Higher Education in the Further Education sector, including Foundation degrees’ public consultation was that a strategy should be developed for the promotion of Foundation degrees. The Department acknowledged that Foundation degrees had not expanded as had been anticipated to that point due in large part to the lack of a coherent strategy for promotion of the qualification.

A Marketing & Promotion sub-group was subsequently formed from the main Foundation Degree Strategy Group with the aim of ensuring the effective promotion of Foundation degrees, in particular to NI employers, and developing a strategy for expanding Foundation degree provision in NI. fdf played a key role in leading this group, which included representatives from the Further Education Regional Colleges, the Universities and other key stakeholders. It was recognised that there was a need to increase awareness of Foundation degrees; to encourage students and employees to take up the qualification and to encourage employers to support their employees who choose to study for a Foundation degree by highlighting the benefits for them. The outcome of the work of the sub-group helped to inform the Department's marketing and promotional work from that point forward, the vast majority of which was taken forward by fdf on the Department's behalf.

Evidence and analysis

As a consequence, a major component of the Department's funding of fdf since the renewal of the contract in 2008, and therefore a key part of fdf's work during this time, was the marketing of Foundation degrees particularly among employers, which has been done primarily through media/promotional campaigns. In 2008, fdf developed a '2008-11 Media Plan'³ which set out a broad range of not only media but also wider marketing activities, which they planned to take forward over that period and which helped inform their annual marketing campaigns over the following years. The key activities identified in the '2008-11 Media Plan' included:

- Advertise new courses with an aim of recruiting students and raising the profile with employers;

³ Many of the elements identified in the media plan are considered elsewhere in this section (eg. EBTA – SLA 4; Case studies – SLA 9; Foundation degree events – SLA11). Consideration of this SLA will therefore focus primarily on the media / promotional aspects of fdf's work.

- Advertising fdf's development plan for innovative workforce development in business press;
- Public Relations: promotion of Foundation degrees to employers and students;
- Develop case studies for dissemination;
- Promote the employer – provider toolkit;
- Promote and develop Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA);
- Develop web link and directory of programmes to be directed by DEL's Careers and Guidance for schools, (A similar service for adults can be provided by EGSA);
- Employer promotional material;
- Student promotional material;
- Promotional Events: Employers;
- Promotional Events: Students;
- Partnership Activity; and
- Engage Union Learn in the promotion of Foundation degrees to members.

fdf's promotional activity in 2008/09 included: media articles in business publications to promote Foundation degrees, participation in exhibitions at the LSDA Conference and the All Island Skills Conference; publication of Student Information Leaflets and Employer Information Leaflets; establishment of a Northern Ireland section on the fdf website; and information and Guidance Seminars which took place with the Careers Service. fdf's promotional activity in 2009/10 included: participation in NI regional conferences and exhibitions relating to skills development, career development and employment; and development of a section on the fdf website to help careers advisers' access routes into and through Higher Education, particularly on those where a Foundation degree is an option.

In consultation with the Department it was decided that one of the priority areas for fdf in 2010/11 should be a wide-ranging marketing campaign aimed at raising

the profile of Foundation degrees and at positioning Foundation degrees as the preferred qualification at levels 4 and 5 for employers, students and the wider community. The cost to the Department of the entire 2010/11 campaign was approximately £130,000 which constituted the majority of the Department's total 2010/11 spend on fdf's development work of approximately £167,000.

'Stakeholder Communications' a PR company was engaged by fdf to take forward the marketing campaign. The campaign used a variety of media and aimed to deliver the key Foundation degree messages to the main target audiences, particularly employers in sectors where skills gaps among employees could be addressed by Foundation degrees, as well as potential students and student influencers such as parents, careers advisers and teachers.

A major aspect of the promotion was an outdoor media campaign across Northern Ireland with the two main bursts of activity taking place in June 2010 and October /November 2010 and which included billboards and adshells, advertising on sides of buses and inside buses. The design of the advertisements for the outdoor campaign was taken from an existing campaign which fdf had organised successfully in England and amended as appropriate for Northern Ireland. A series of promotional flyers and posters, case studies and a newsletter were also designed and distributed and a number of advertisements were placed in the regional press. In addition, advertisements and advertorial articles relating to Foundation degrees were placed in Northern Ireland industry and business publications. Between March 2010 – March 2011, over 40 Foundation degree related articles / case studies appeared in publications across Northern Ireland. A 'talking heads' DVD, featuring interviews with students and employers, was also produced for fdf and college websites and a student focused DVD and an employer focused DVD were also produced. The contract with Stakeholder was extended until July 2011 to ensure continued promotion of Foundation degrees.

Table 13, (full details are included under consideration of SLA 8), details the views of university, college and employer/employer body/SSC sectors, expressed through the stakeholder survey, in relation to the effectiveness of the promotion of Foundation degrees among employers. The majority of respondents (65%) had a positive perception about the effectiveness of fdf's work in promoting / marketing Foundation degrees among employers to ensure they are understood by employers and employer organisations as a qualification that can support the development of workforce training and education.

Table 7 shows that all of those who responded to the relevant question in the employer/employer Body/SSC sector stakeholder survey felt that the level of knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among employers was 'quite low'. Although care must be taken as only 5 responses were provided to this question. While it can therefore not be considered as statistically sound, it nevertheless appears to indicate that more still needs to be done to promote Foundation degrees among employers.

Similarly, when the same group of respondents were asked how the Foundation degree qualification and employer-based learning could be best developed and supported in the future, the greatest number of responses (33%) related to the need for better promotion and awareness raising of the qualification. A similar picture also emerged from student responses with comments relating to the need to raise awareness of Foundation degrees constituting the most common suggestion in relation to future support arrangements (table 22) making up 45% of all responses.

Another general point worthy of note from the survey was the disappointingly low response rate to the survey from the Employers / Employers bodies / Sector Skills Councils stakeholder group which in itself indicates that there remains work to be done in raising awareness and buy-in from employers.

Whilst this SLA objective is particularly focused on fdf's work at promoting / marketing Foundation degrees among employers specifically, it also provides the most appropriate opportunity to assess the effectiveness of their promotional work in general. The awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among prospective students is a valuable indicator in terms of the effectiveness of the promotion of Foundation degrees and table 8 indicates that nearly two thirds of students first became aware of the qualification through a college prospectus or college website which fdf's promotional work could not be considered to have contributed to directly. Although many of the students replying to the survey had enrolled on their Foundation degree before fdf existed in Northern, this result suggests that more might be done to help colleges advertise, promote and engage with potential Foundation degree students at local level. Whilst each college would need to retain its own identity in terms of any future Foundation degree promotion (for example featuring specific Foundation degree success stories from within that particular region / college), promotional materials might be produced that follow an overall branded Foundation degree identity.

Table 9 suggests a mixed picture in relation to Foundation degree students' perceptions of the general level of knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among prospective students. Whilst the majority of respondents (57%) felt that the level of awareness was either "very high" or "quite high", a substantial proportion of respondents (43%) felt that the level of awareness was "quite low" or "very low".

Table 10 presents a more positive picture in terms of prospective Foundation degree students perceptions of the Foundation degree qualification with the greatest proportion of those students who responded (83%) indicating that they felt Foundation degrees were viewed in a "very positive" or "quite positive" manner by prospective students with only 17% of respondents indicating a "quite negative" or "very negative" perception of Foundation degrees among prospective students.

Additionally, when students were asked to suggest what they considered to be the least valuable characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification (see table 26 for full results) the most common survey response (28 responses or 21% of all known responses) related to the lack of recognition and awareness of the qualification, with some three quarters of those responses highlighting the lack of recognition and awareness of the qualification among employers specifically. Similarly, nearly a quarter of responses to the university, college and employer/employer body/ SSC survey also highlighted a lack of recognition and awareness of the Foundation degree as the qualification's least valuable characteristic.

Assessment

It is apparent that supporting the Department's strategy for promoting and marketing Foundation degrees, especially among employers, has been a core element of fdf's work over the last four years.

Given the wide ranging and comprehensive promotional work undertaken by fdf to promote Foundation degrees, particularly over the last year, it is considered that fdf has made a considerable contribution towards supporting the Department's strategy for promoting and marketing Foundation degrees in particular among employers.

However, despite this positive assessment it is difficult to gauge the full impact of this promotional work and although there has been progress, the evidence from the stakeholder surveys suggests more must still be done to raise awareness, recognition and buy-in of the qualification among employers. As a consequence there is still a continuing need to develop and implement an effective marketing and promotional campaign for the Foundation degree qualification. This will be essential to ensure that the focus and aims of this promotion are well thought through and that the most appropriate promotional methods are used to ensure

the greatest possible impact in raising awareness particularly among employers and subsequently translating this into increased employer engagement and ultimately increased enrolments. Also, it will be important at the outset of any future promotion campaign to try to ascertain if the lack of employer buy in to Foundation degrees is due to a lack of awareness or a more fundamental concern about the Foundation degree qualification.

SLA 4 - Contribute to developing employer engagement strategies in Foundation degrees in the region

Background

The Foundation degree qualification is designed to make a significant contribution towards achieving higher skills levels, particularly among those already in employment. Foundation degrees are designed to meet the higher technician/associate professional skills needs of a particular sector and, through part-time delivery models, can play a real part in raising the skills level of the existing workforce.

The Department is therefore keen that employers understand and value the benefits of Foundation degrees, both when recruiting staff and when considering the training and development needs of existing employees. The aim is also to get employers to become more involved in the development of new courses so that they can help ensure that the qualifications meet the needs of their sectors.

Without the engagement of employers in the identification of skills needs in the workforce, and in the design and development of Foundation degrees which meet those skills needs, the resulting qualifications will not meet employer requirements. Effective engagement with employers is therefore essential to an improved quality of Foundation degrees resulting in increased employer willingness to use HE in FE generally, and Foundation degrees in particular, to improve the skills levels in their workforce.

Evidence and analysis

fdf took a number of steps to encourage and develop employer engagement strategies for Foundation degrees. fdf engaged closely with the various Sector Skills Councils (SSC) in identifying the skills needs of the various sectors and in developing partnerships with the relevant education providers in order to establish the provision which is necessary to their future economic growth. fdf also worked closely with the SSCs and employers to scope the feasibility of developing Foundation degree qualifications relevant to their particular sectors.

fdf also worked closely with the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils (ASSC), to identify opportunities of mutual benefit and to provide models of best practice for the promotion and development of level 4 and level 5 skills in support of the SSA and SSQ frameworks. One of the University respondents to the stakeholder questionnaire acknowledged, *“the involvement of employers and the SSC in the design of the Foundation degrees helps to ensure that the appropriate knowledge and skills required by employers are embedded in the Foundation degree programme.”*

One of fdf’s key employer engagement measures was its Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA) programme which was designed and developed by fdf itself. EBTA is a professional service that provides employers seeking academic credit for internal training with the support and advice needed to raise the status of their in-house training. The EBTA service is therefore important in the development of work-based learning Foundation degrees as it ensures the involvement of employers and employees. EBTA gives employers the opportunity to have the training they provide recognised through awards by aligning employer training with university standards as part of creating a demand led skills initiative for Foundation degrees. fdf first piloted EBTA in Northern Ireland in January 2010 with the training of 4 local consultants in the EBTA process and has worked to raise the profile of the EBTA scheme in Northern Ireland.

Each EBTA consultant works with an employer in the respective sector to analyse their training and, then works with one of the local universities, to obtain accreditation for the training. Whilst the EBTA pilot has not progressed to the degree that might have been hoped for, it has nevertheless helped contribute to notable successes and there has been increased interest in the scheme from a number of high profile employers over the last few months. For example, FG Wilson's (on behalf of the Caterpillar Group) have fully engaged in the EBTA process and fdf Associates continue to pursue opportunities with Citi Bank, Henderson's / Spar Group and Cedar Foundation. Recent opportunities have been identified through the SSC Cogent regarding accreditation of higher level training at DuPont in Londonderry.

Through this work fdf have engaged employers in the EBTA scheme and have encouraged the University of Ulster to become a member of the EBTA Community of Practice. It will be important to consider how EBTA might be developed / expanded post-fdf in the context of the Department's new skills strategy "Success Through Skills – Transforming Futures" and the identified need to increase higher level skills in the workforce,.

Further evidence of fdf's success in developing employer engagement strategies is demonstrated by the central role that it played in developing Northern Ireland's first ever employer demand-led Foundation Degree. This is a Foundation degree in Retailing and is a two year part-time course delivered primarily through on-line learning and through a consortia arrangement involving the University of Ulster, all the FE Regional Colleges and major retail employers. Through such employer-led higher education consortia arrangements, fdf aimed to develop and support Foundation degrees to meet the specific higher level skills needs of a sector or group of employers by bringing together and supporting consortia partnerships between the colleges, SSCs, Universities and employers in the Foundation degree development process. Launched in January 2010, the

development of the Retail Foundation degree came through extensive consultation with major national and regional employers, such as Tesco, Henderson Group and Supervalu, that subsequently led to their full participation in the programme and enrolment by a number of their employees.

fdf also launched a Foundation degree Advisory Panel in November 2010. The Advisory Panel meets on a quarterly basis and is comprised of key members of Northern Ireland's business community. The panel was intended to provide fdf with an industry voice in relation to how Foundation degrees can further meet the higher level skills needs of employers. This employer perspective would in turn assist fdf in designing innovative approaches to the development of flexible work based Foundation degrees that are aimed at improving business performance. The Advisory Group was established with an initial membership comprised of Glynn Roberts, Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIRTA), Ciaran Sheehan, Partner of Clarendon Recruitment, and Oonagh O'Reilly, Business Development Director of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce (NICC).

Although the panel has only been in existence for a short period of time its establishment has resulted in the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce starting to promote the Leadership and Management Foundation degree to its members and the NITRA supporting the delivery of the Leadership and Management Foundation degree. The Panel has outlined its support for the development of a salary sacrifice scheme for employer led Foundation degrees and has provided an employer perspective to support the promotional campaign. The Department will need to consider how the work of the panel can support the development of Foundation degrees post fdf.

In 2009 fdf also introduced a strategic and co-ordinated programme aimed at increasing employer engagement in Foundation degree design and development in Northern Ireland. The programme was developed to provide a strategic, co-ordinated, standardised approach to employer engagement involving both

business solution staff and curriculum development managers in the FE Colleges and a collaborative approach to the management of employer engagement and curriculum development. The programme itself consisted of training sessions in each regional college and involved carrying out a self assessment exercise with senior management teams of the effectiveness of college employer engagement activities; training curriculum development and employer engagement staff in the use of an Employer Toolkit; and how to cascade the Employer Toolkit to all college staff. It was anticipated that the benefits accruing from the programme would include the development of a coherent employer engagement strategy across colleges; the identification of potential gaps in the market; support for strategic planning of workforce development; the identification of niche expertise; more effective use of resources; and a common approach to employers using standard documentation and processes to ensure comparability and consistency of treatment and reduced costs.

When respondents to the employer/employer Body/SSC sector stakeholder survey were asked to suggest how the Foundation degree qualification and employer based learning in general could be best developed and supported in the future, comments relating to the need for improved employer engagement constituted the second most common issue raised, constituting 19% of all responses to this question. Specific comments from respondents included: “better engagement with employers to identify requirements and secure support for development and delivery”; “more interaction between course administrators and employers”; “large number of small businesses in NI - large degree of support needed to support them in employer based learning”; “greater use of employer's forums”; and “need for greater engagement with SSCs”.

On a related topic, although based on a very small sample size of just 7 responses from the employer/employer body/SSC sector, it is noteworthy that all of those who had experience of direct engagement with fdf rated the experience as either “very positive” or “quite positive”. Consideration of SLA 6 provides

further details on the views of all relevant partners who had engaged with fdf, the vast majority of whom rated the experience positively.

Assessment

In light of their strategic and co-ordinated approach to employer engagement, fdf are considered to have fully met the SLA objective of contributing to the development of employer engagement strategies in Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland. This has been demonstrated by fdf's close working ties with the SSCs and their central role in consortia arrangements, as well as the innovative approaches which they have developed in terms of the EBTA Service and the establishment of a Foundation degree Advisory Panel which has produced some encouraging early results.

Although there was a recognition from the survey results that employer engagement still needed to be improved in relation to Foundation degrees, it is nevertheless worth acknowledging that all of those employer/employer body/SSC sector survey respondents who had experience of direct engagement with fdf rated the experience positively.

SLA 5 - Stimulate the development of demand-led Foundation degrees

Background

One of fdf's core strategic aims was to lead strategies, through collaborative partnerships, that advanced employer-led provision. With this in mind, fdf worked closely with the business community to ensure that the Foundation degrees developed were industry-led and met the needs of employers.

Evidence and analysis

fdf aimed to help stimulate the development of employer demand led Foundation degrees and to this end they carried out numerous scoping studies and worked

with local providers to examine the demand and support for employer led part-time Foundation degrees in a number of areas. This in turn led to the development of employer demand-led Foundation degrees in Retail Management, Financial Services, Leadership & Management and Engineering.

The Retail Foundation degree provides a good case study example to illustrate the role fdf has played in stimulating demand-led Foundation degrees. In May 2008, following feasibility study, fdf brought together Skillsmart Retail, Faculty Heads from the 6 NI FE Colleges, the University of Ulster and RSC-NI to establish the NI Provider/Employer Consortium. The aim of the consortium was to adapt the Foundation degree Retail running in England (which was developed by fdf & Retail Skills Academy) to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland market. The two year part-time model, which is targeted at existing or potential managers, was subsequently designed in consultation with a number of major national and regional employers including Tesco, Hendersons and Supervalu. The Retail Foundation degree was launched in January 2010 with Northern Regional College as the lead college.

Fdf also played an important role on a Validation Working Group. fdf brought expertise and experience of Foundation Degree validation in England, identified appropriate English validation models for consideration by the working group and arranged for validation managers from Staffordshire University to give a presentation to the group on the validation model used by them. The efforts of this working group recently resulted in the development of an agreed Northern Ireland Framework for the Validation of Foundation degrees. This validation framework will help streamline the validation process for Foundation degrees which it is widely recognised has sometimes been too slow in the past. The framework will help to contribute to a more efficient Foundation degree development and validation process and in doing ensure that the Foundation degree as a qualification is more responsive to the needs and demands of employers.

The consideration of SLAs 4, 6 and 8 elsewhere in this section provides further details of other relevant work which fdf have taken forward to facilitate and stimulate the development of demand led Foundation degrees including: employer engagement with SSCs, scoping / feasibility studies, the introduction of EBTA, supporting and developing partnerships between key stakeholders and the establishment of a Foundation degree Advisory Panel.

Table 11, summarises the views of stakeholders from the university, college and employer/employer Body/SSC sectors as generally positive in terms of their perceptions of the effectiveness of fdf's work in stimulating the development of demand led Foundation degrees. The results indicate that almost a third of respondents considered fdf to have been "very effective" at stimulating the development of demand led Foundation degrees while nearly three quarters (73%) of all respondents provided a positive assessment in this respect.

Assessment

The wide range of measures which fdf have put in place to stimulate the development of employer demand led Foundation degrees, particularly in terms of: the range of new Foundation degrees developed in consultation with industry; employer/SSC engagement; establishment of consortia arrangements; range of feasibility and scoping studies; and the introduction of EBTA, demonstrate that they have developed a number of informed strategies which are designed to help stimulate the development of demand-led Foundation degrees. In view of fdf's contribution to the development of employer led Foundation degrees in Retail Management, Financial Services, Leadership & Management and Engineering and in light of the available evidence in relation to the various strategies which fdf has taken forward, alongside the generally positive perception of stakeholders, fdf is judged to have been successful in stimulating the development of demand led Foundation degrees.

SLA 6 - Work collectively with the Department to support and develop partnerships between Sector Skills Councils, employers, Higher Education Institutions, Institutions of Further & Higher Education in the development and flexible delivery of Foundation degrees

Background

As already highlighted, Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland are developed in partnership by one of the Northern Ireland universities or the Open University, the Further Education colleges and employers / employer organisations. Each of these partners have specific responsibilities in the development process. The university influences the curriculum design and development, quality assures the programme and awards the Foundation degree qualification to students who successfully complete the programme. The FE Colleges have overall responsibility for the delivery of taught modules and liaise with employers and the university regarding course content, delivery and any other relevant issues. While the employers (usually through the relevant Sector Skills Council) ensure that the programme matches current industrial needs by directly inputting to curriculum design, development and delivery, including provision of substantial work placements and work based learning, which forms an essential part of the programme.

Evidence and analysis

Against this background, fdf worked to support the development of sustainable partnerships between the Universities, Further Education Colleges, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other employer bodies and professional bodies, to ensure that high quality Foundation degrees which meet the needs of industry are developed.

In the design and development of the Foundation degrees in Retail and Financial Services, fdf brought together and supported partnerships by facilitating the development of consortia between the colleges, SSCs, universities and employers into a collaborative Foundation degree development process. (It should be noted that fdf are however not involved in the development of all new Foundation degree programmes). fdf nationally also produced guidance that drew on the experience of working in consortia to identify some of the issues that need to be resolved and some of the solutions that were implemented.

fdf also worked to ensure that Foundation degrees delivered the new skills required for helping business grow in a flexible way. In particular, fdf worked with colleges to develop flexible and blended learning modules for growth industry sectors and priority skills areas. The blended learning model takes advantage of e-learning resources and appeals to employers who seek to enhance the technical skills of their workforce. This is also attractive to employees who have no formal qualifications and for apprentices seeking to increase career opportunities.

fdf in England also developed an Employer Engagement Toolkit which has been used by fdf in Northern Ireland. The toolkit acts as a framework for FE Colleges to meet the challenge of employer engagement. The toolkit aims to help develop a co-ordinated, strategic approach to employer engagement that is consistent and links business solutions and curriculum development with the further development of Foundation degrees. fdf hosted “Strengthening Employer Engagement Partnerships with NI Colleges” workshops for regional college staff in March 2010. The workshops were designed and delivered by specialist fdf personnel using materials and resources developed through their experience across the UK including the Employer Engagement Toolkit. The workshops were intended to provide an opportunity for college staff to examine the opportunities and challenges in employer engagement and recent government initiatives and placed particular emphasis on strengthening employer engagement and the

enhancement of workforce development. The workshops were well attended and feedback from participants was positive with recognition that the event had helped them to identify areas for improvement in their personal and departmental practice which would support innovation and strengthen employer partnerships.

fdf's work in leading the Working Group which developed the "Northern Ireland Colleges and Universities APEL Scheme" for entry to Foundation degrees also provides a tangible example of how they facilitated collaborative working arrangements to support the Department's aims and objectives.

The view of stakeholders from the University, College and Employer Body / SSC sectors, expressed through the stakeholder survey, shows a generally positive response in terms of their perceptions of fdfs's effectiveness at "supporting and developing partnerships between Sector Skills Councils, employers, Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Regional Colleges in the development and flexible delivery of Foundation degrees" (Table 12) with 72% of respondents indicating that they considered fdf to have been either "very effective" or "quite effective" in this respect.

The vast majority of respondents to the University, College and Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys stated that they had direct engagement with fdf, mainly during the process of developing a Foundation degree qualification. These respondents were asked to rate the general experience of any engagement with fdf. The result was overwhelmingly positive with 48% of respondents rating their experience of engagement with fdf as being "very positive" and a further 48% rating their experience as being "quite positive". Additional comments from respondents in relation to their engagement with fdf were almost universally praiseworthy in their nature, including: "Always positive and helpful. Has made a difference in NI on Foundation degree development" (Employer Body / SSC); "The experience has been excellent, and without fdf, or an equally well-funded and energetic alternative, the new part-time, employer based, e-learning Foundation degrees could not have been delivered to the market place"

(College); "Excellent support from fdf" (College); and "Professional and open exchanges with fdf" (University); "Professional, polished approach to working"; and "fdf was invaluable during the development stages and is still very supportive - I cannot praise them enough".

One University respondent, whilst rating the experience of their engagement with fdf as "quite positive" did qualify this by stating: "Positive in the sense that the individuals were approachable and knowledgeable, but limited in the sense that ...did not get a sense of what the over arching strategic vision of the fdf is, or how the organisation could benefit us...fdf are another 'layer' of administration that is not 'essential' to effective relationships as [our organisation] already has these effective external links."

Assessment

It is apparent from the available body of evidence, and is supported by the views and experiences expressed through the stakeholder survey, that fdf have implemented and/or contributed to a range of activities and initiatives which have had a positive impact in supporting and developing significant relationships and brokering partnerships amongst key stakeholders. fdf are therefore considered to have successfully met the SLA objective relating to working collectively with the Department to support and develop partnerships between Sector Skills Councils, employers, Higher Education Institutions, FE Regional Colleges in the development and flexible delivery of Foundation degrees.

SLA 7 - Provide advice to the Department on the allocation of funding to support the development of Foundation degrees

Background

The Department provided an annual budget to fdf to fund their work supporting and developing Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland. Prior to 2009-2010 the

Department controlled the allocation of this budget by providing funding to support the work of fdf on a case by case basis. Since 2009-10 the Department has given fdf a greater degree of flexibility and responsibility in terms of controlling and working within their own annual budget to support the development, delivery and promotion of Foundation degrees.

Evidence and analysis

Since 2009-10, fdf has produced an annual Business Plan which outlined the various measures that they intended to take to support the development of Foundation degrees. fdf also advised the Department on the proposed spend in relation to each measure and the Department then approved the Business Plan and associated projected spend. fdf then liaised with the Department as necessary thereafter by providing advice and updates on an ongoing basis in relation to the actual spend and any significant proposed revisions to the Business Plan activities and/or spend.

fdf also provided regular ongoing advice, guidance and relevant research to the Department to support and guide the rationale for the allocation of funding for Foundation degrees. fdf liaised closely with the Department on operational matters and built up a closing working relationship with the Department which led to an open exchange, discussion and sharing of relevant information through both ad hoc communications and more formal regular meetings. This ongoing dialogue and exchange of ideas also helped to inform the Department's views in relation to how funding should be best utilised to support the development of Foundation degrees.

Assessment

fdf are considered to have successfully met the SLA objective of providing advice to the Department on the allocation of funding to support the development of Foundation degrees through their production of an annual Business Plan and

associated costs and subsequent ongoing liaison and discussions with the Department in this respect.

SLA 8 - Ensure that Foundation degrees are promoted and understood by employers and employer organisations as a qualification that can support the development of workforce training and education

Background

The Foundation degree qualification aims to promote high level employability skills, either through the up-skilling of existing employees or by providing new recruits with the skills employers need. The Foundation degree does this by combining academic and work-related learning which transfers easily into the workplace. Foundation degrees can be delivered to employees on a part-time basis using flexible delivery methods including on-line and distance learning which can be timed to fit in with existing work patterns and enable the employees to study towards the qualification without disrupting their work commitments.

Foundation degrees are therefore designed to deliver significant practical benefits for employers, to enhance business performance and provide businesses with the opportunity to maximise the talents of their employees and provide greater value to their customers. The importance of the benefits offered by Foundation degrees is further highlighted by the fact that around two thirds of those currently in work will still be in active employment by 2020. The Department is therefore committed to increasing the proportion of the population qualified to Level 4 and above, focusing on workforce development and increased employer engagement, particularly through more opportunities for part-time vocational courses such as Foundation degrees.

Against this background, fdf aimed to promote employer understanding of Foundation degrees in terms of how they can support the development of workforce training and education primarily with a view to encouraging them to

support their employees to undertake Foundation degrees but also with a view to them providing work placements for students on Foundation degree programmes; joining Foundation degree consortium and getting involved in curriculum design; and mentoring and assessing students.

Evidence and analysis

The consideration of SLAs 3, 5 and 6 in this section outlines a number of measures which fdf have undertaken to help ensure that employers and employer organisations are aware of how the Foundation degree qualification can support the development of workforce training and education, namely:

- wide ranging media / promotional campaigns which have specifically focused on employers as a key target audience (particularly in terms of the Foundation degree Employer Information Leaflet, promotional flyers, case studies, newsletter and advertorial articles in industry and business publications);
- engagement with the Sector Skills Councils and Alliance of Sector Skills Councils (ASSC), to represent, promote and support the work of the Sector Skills Councils to promote Foundation degrees;
- the roll out and promotion of the Employer Based Training Accreditation (EBTA) service for employers which aims to stimulate enhancement and accreditation of employer-driven workplace training;
- the launch of a Foundation degree Advisory Panel; and development of a comprehensive web-based information, advice and guidance materials for work-based learners and their advisors that outlines all of the qualifications options that are available particularly Foundation degrees.

In addition to the measures outlined above, fdf also organised a number of employer related events. These include “**Transforming Your Workforce - A Conference for Employers**” in 2008 and the “**Delivering Higher Education at Work – Learning while Earning**” conference in 2009 (see SLA 11 for details of other events). Also in June 2010 fdf nationally launched an online suite of

resources designed to both support those advising people at work about HE, as well as those engaged in workplace study which included resources to help people in the work-place assess their readiness and prepare for HE and resources for workplace mentors to help supporting workplace study.

The views of stakeholders from the university, college and employer/employer Body / SSC sectors expressed through the stakeholder survey shows a mixed response in terms of the perceptions of the effectiveness of fdf's work in promoting / marketing Foundation degrees (Table 13) among employers as a qualification that can support the development of workforce training and education. It is encouraging that approximately two thirds of respondents consider fdf to have been "very effective" or "quite effective" in this respect.

Tables 14 and 15 highlight the opinions of respondents to the employer / employer Body / SSC stakeholder survey in relation to the general level of knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among employers and employer-bodies. Although the results should be viewed with considerable caution given the very small sample size involved, they are nevertheless worthy of note given the trends which they imply. All respondents who expressed a view considered the general level of knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among employers to be 'quite low'. However, conversely, commenting on behalf of their own organisations, all respondents indicated that they had either a 'very positive' or 'quite positive' view of the Foundation degree qualification. These two results support the earlier observation that, although awareness of Foundation degrees still needs to increase further among employers, those employers who actually do have an awareness of Foundation degrees view them in a positive fashion.

Additionally, as already indicated in the consideration of SLA 2, student responses to the survey highlighted a lack of recognition and awareness about Foundation degrees as the qualifications least valuable characteristic and three

quarters of those responses pinpointed a lack of recognition and awareness of the qualification among employers specifically. The lack of recognition and awareness of the Foundation degree also constituted almost a quarter of the responses in relation to the qualification's least valuable characteristic among university, college and employer/employer body/ SSC respondents to the survey.

Assessment

It is evident from the responses to the stakeholder surveys that whilst fdf undertook wide ranging promotional activities, and there was progress in understanding by employers and employer organisations, much more still needs to be done in this respect. In addition the low response rate to the survey from the Employers / Employers bodies / Sector Skills Councils stakeholder group provides further evidence to support the assertion that more must still be done to raising awareness and buy-in from employers.

On balance, it is considered that fdf partially met this SLA in terms of ensuring that Foundation degrees are promoted and understood by employers and employer organisations as a qualification that can support the development of workforce training and education.

SLA 9 - Develop case studies for publication and dissemination of good practice in Foundation degree development

Background

The use of case study examples, which provide details of the histories of Foundation degree students or employers' experience of the qualification, can act as an effective tool to illustrate the benefits of Foundation degree to target audiences, particularly to prospective students.

Evidence and analysis

Fdf developed a portfolio of case studies focused primarily on Foundation degree students which highlighted the successful development of Foundation degrees and the benefits for employers and students. They used these case studies in a wide variety of promotional material particularly leaflets, press releases, advertisements and advertorial articles. fdf also produced a 'talking heads' DVD for their own and FE College websites which included 'case study' interviews with students.

In terms of the dissemination of good practice generally, fdf nationally produced a vast range of comprehensive and valuable information and resources, particularly in terms of online resources relating to the development of Foundation degrees. fdf in Northern Ireland were pro-active in ensuring that these resources, and information on where they could be found, were made available through a wide range of channels including the fdf, DEL and NI Direct Websites, training events, information events, conferences, seminars and publications. All of these resources are available on fdf's website.

Assessment

fdf are considered to have successfully met this SLA objective having developed a good range of case studies for publication and having ensured dissemination of a vast range of good practice information and resources in Foundation degree development. The continued accessibility of these resource materials after Fdf ceases to exist is an issue that will need to be considered.

SLA 10 - Undertake research into Foundation degree provision / issues as required by the Department

Background

Another key part of fdf's work in Northern Ireland was the completion of research to help support the development of the Foundation degree qualification. This

often took the form of scoping exercises to investigate and establish the need and demand for a Foundation degree in a particular sector.

Evidence and analysis

Following their initial engagement with the Department in May 2007, fdf commenced a piece of research to gather relevant statistical data in order to establish a baseline understanding of the situation at that time with regard to the provision of Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland. The resultant 'Research Report on Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland', which was published in February 2008, identified a number of skills gaps and provided an evidence base for fdf to use in planning targeted future support and identifying a strategic growth plan for Northern Ireland.

fdf also commissioned a number of feasibility studies and research reports into the development of Foundation degrees including a number of studies in priority skills areas, such as:

- 'Feasibility study examining demand, support design and delivery for a Technology Assisted Foundation degree in Retail Management in Northern Ireland';
- 'Operational Guidelines – Provider Consortium for the retails sector' (June 2008);
- 'Feasibility Study – Exploring Employers views on the potential for a Leadership and Management Foundation degree in Northern Ireland for FDF' (July 2008);
- Research report for a Foundation degree in Financial Services in NI – the purpose of which was to articulate employer demand into a design process (August 2008); and
- Research report for a Foundation degree into Engineering and in Engineering and Operations management in NI (November 2009).

Assessment

The pieces of research highlighted above illustrate the types of research work which fdf carried out to investigate the feasibility of developing and delivering employer based Foundation degrees in these areas. Research studies were therefore invaluable in helping to inform decisions on the feasibility of taking forward Foundation degrees in particular areas and as such have ultimately provided the foundation for the launch of a number of successful programmes. It is therefore considered that fdf successfully met this SLA given the value and effectiveness of fdf's research work in establishing Foundation degree provision.

SLA 11 - Co-ordinate Foundation degree events in Northern Ireland

Background

The organisation and co-ordination of Foundation degree related events by fdf in Northern Ireland played an important role in supporting the development of Foundation degrees and helped contribute to ensuring that fdf's other SLA objectives were met, particularly those relating to: the promotion and marketing of Foundation degrees among employers; ensuring that Foundation degrees were promoted and understood by employers and employer organisations as a qualification that can support the development of workforce training and education; and working collectively with the Department to support and develop partnerships between Sector Skills Councils, employers, Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Colleges in the development and flexible delivery of Foundation degrees.

Evidence and analysis

Since May 2007, fdf organised four employer engagement seminars and two stakeholder workshops to promote Foundation degree frameworks as well as two major employer engagement conferences. The fdf Employer Engagement Conference held in Belfast in March 2008, entitled "Transforming Your Workforce - A Conference for Employers" aimed to promote the benefits of engaging in

Foundation degrees to employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors by sending out positive messages about the Government's commitment to promote Foundation degrees and in particular, as a vehicle for meeting the associate professional, higher technician skills needs of employers in priority skills areas.

fdf also initiated and organised a "Delivering Higher Education Skills @ Work - Learning While Earning" conference which took place in Antrim in March 2009. The aim of the Conference was to bring together employers, Sector Skills Councils and education providers to explore and encourage the development of effective work-based qualifications in line with the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Conference highlighted areas such as the economic benefits of delivering higher skills in the workplace, the benefits of Work Based Learning to businesses and the EBTA process as a means of reinforcing the need for a highly skilled, well educated Northern Ireland workforce to compete in the global economy. It also attempted to raise the profile of Foundation degrees amongst employers as a qualification which can equip their employees with a combination of technical skills, academic knowledge and transferable skills. Both of these major fdf conferences included addresses by respected and expert speakers as well as a series of round table discussion sessions which addressed relevant issues.

An example of one of the seminars organised by fdf was the Employer Provider Partnership Project development seminar. The seminar was organised in response to the need of providers (identified through other fdf workshops and feedback from the fdf conference) and was attended by 15 college representatives who had direct interface with employers. The seminar provided guidance and information on the fdf Employer/Provider Toolkit and the approach to the development of Foundation degrees that are demand led in their design. Feedback from delegates who attended the seminar was very favourable.

During the 2007-2011 period fdf also participated and had a presence at a wide range of exhibitions, conferences and events including; Learning and Skills Network conference 2008-09; the Department for Employment and Learning's All – Island Skills Conference in October 2008; and Institute of Career Guidance Conference and Exhibition in November 2010.

Assessment

It is considered that fdf have fully achieved this SLA objective. The Foundation degree events organised by fdf helped to promote and raise the profile of Foundation degrees amongst a wider audience, and particularly amongst employers with a view to exploring and encouraging the development of effective work-based qualifications in line with the skills strategy for Northern Ireland.

Most of the fdf events attempted to focus specifically on engaging with employers who wanted to improve their businesses by developing Foundation degrees that satisfied both their business needs and the needs of their employees. In doing so the events have contributed to ensuring that Foundation degrees were promoted and understood by employers and employer organisations as a qualification that can support the development of workforce training and education. The events organised by fdf attempted to convey the key messages and benefits that appropriately designed Foundation degree programmes can provide by integrating learning and workplace performance improvement.

SLA 12 - Promoting the recognition of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning for entry to Foundation degrees

Background

The Department is committed to the principle that higher education, and Foundation degrees in particular, should be open to all those who have the ability, including those students who have few, if any, formal academic qualifications but who have relevant work based learning. Accreditation of Prior

Experiential Learning (APEL) is an important part of the Foundation degree ethos. The underpinning principle of APEL is that prospective students, and in particular existing employees, may already have valuable skills and experience on which to build but which may not have been recognised by a formal qualification. APEL allows these individuals to draw on their experience and achievement to gain entry to a higher education programme, in this case, a Foundation degree.

The responses to the 2007 **Review of Higher Education in Further Education, including Foundation degrees** consultation endorsed the Department's view that academic qualifications should not be a pre-requisite for entry to Foundation degree courses and that APEL be promoted as a key principle of the Foundation degree philosophy. Whilst many colleges already had various types of APEL processes in place, there was a widespread acknowledgement that APEL could often be too complex, time consuming and cumbersome in its implementation.

Against this background the Department recommended that stakeholders should be encouraged to develop an effective streamlined APEL process and established an APEL Development Group, led by Fdf, was to develop a more streamlined and effective APEL process for Northern Ireland as a whole.

Previous APEL systems across the UK have tended to be bureaucratic and labour-intensive and as a result frequently fell into disuse. In the context of Northern Ireland it was deemed desirable to have a common system that would encourage the constructive use of APEL to meet the needs of mature students who had been in employment for some time and could bring their experience to bear upon a higher education experience.

Evidence and analysis

To this end a working group was convened with a membership comprising of representatives from: the six Further Education Regional Colleges, Queen's

University, University of Ulster, Open University, the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and the Department's HE Widening Participation Branch. This Group was chaired by fdf and met between October 2009 and January 2011 to design and pilot an approach to the implementation of APEL that would meet the needs of both institutions and potential students. The Group was initially chaired by Penny Blackie on behalf of fdf and subsequently by fdf's Northern Ireland Regional Manager Thérèse Rogan.

The work of fdf included: chairing the regular meetings of the APEL Development Group; leading the development of the draft APEL scheme, which was informed by the existing APEL systems already used in Northern Ireland combined with examples of best practice from across the United Kingdom; developing and providing training to the relevant individuals within the institutions; managing a pilot of the APEL scheme with the colleges during academic year 2010/11; and producing an evaluation report on the pilot.

Following the successful pilot, the "Northern Ireland Colleges and Universities APEL Framework" for entry to Foundation degrees was subsequently agreed by all key stakeholders in January 2011. The agreed framework defined the underlying principles and key stages that might be involved in any APEL process rather than acting as a prescriptive 'scheme' to be followed precisely. The framework and its use will be extended for entry to a wider range of Foundation degree qualifications in academic year 2011/12.

Assessment

Given the key involvement of fdf in leading the work which resulted in the recently agreed "Northern Ireland Colleges and Universities APEL Framework" it is clear that the SLA objective to promote the recognition of APEL for entry to Foundation degrees has been fully met. The leading role played by fdf in the development of the framework, and indeed the importance of the framework

itself, cannot be understated given that it represents the first regionally agreed APEL protocol of its kind in the UK. As such the framework may also act as an exemplar for other jurisdictions intending to establish similar APEL frameworks for entry to Foundation degrees as well as for APEL schemes for entry to other qualifications in Northern Ireland institutions.

2.3 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS – SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the available evidence, fdf are judged to have successfully met 11 out of its 12 SLA commitments while the remaining one has been partially met. It is therefore concluded that, on the whole, the work of fdf effectively supported the development, delivery and promotion of Foundation Degrees in Northern Ireland.

The majority of the available evidence demonstrates improvements during fdf's time in Northern Ireland, as shown by a number of findings gathered through the desk research review of relevant information and literature, the review and analysis of relevant statistical data and the results of the stakeholder questionnaire surveys (whilst acknowledging the relatively low number of survey responses from the non-student stakeholder groups). The review highlighted a number of headline indicators and areas which illustrate the effectiveness of the work of fdf in Northern Ireland, namely:

- By May 2011 the number of Foundation degrees available in Northern Ireland stood at 91, with a further 5 new courses in development. This was an increase from the November 2007 figure of 39 available Foundation degrees with a further 16 in development;
- fdf's work made a significant contribution to the strategic direction of the Department's commitment to the expansion of Foundation degrees in NI and the Department's strategic priorities generally;
- fdf continued the year on year increase in total Foundation degree enrolments which had taken place prior to their existence in Northern Ireland, including an increase of 340 enrolments in 2009-10, the most recent year for which figures are available, which represented by far the

- highest year on year recorded increase since Foundation degree's inception in Northern Ireland. The indicative figures for October 2010 gathered suggest a further record year on year increase in enrolments;
- Small increases in the proportion of STEM enrolments, to 19% in 2008-09 and then 21% in 2009-10, reversing the downward trend of the previous three years;
 - Positive work to develop sustainable partnerships with the Universities, Further Education Colleges, SSCs and other employer bodies and professional bodies, particularly through the development of consortia arrangements, as witnessed by the central role in the development and design of the Foundation degrees in Retail and Financial Services;
 - Increase during fdf's lifetime in the level of Foundation degree enrolments as a proportion of the total sub-degree provision, rising from 9% in 2006-07 to 14% in 2009-10 compared to slight fall in the proportion of HN qualifications over the same period;
 - Over three quarters of respondents considered fdf to have been either 'very effective' or 'quite effective' at "developing and supporting the Foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland" and no respondents considered fdf to have been "not effective at all" effective in this respect;
 - Provision of a major marketing campaign aimed at positioning Foundation degrees as the preferred qualification at levels 4 and 5 for employers, students and the wider community;
 - A number of initiatives to encourage and develop employer engagement strategies for Foundation degrees including the roll out of the EBTA scheme and the establishment of a Foundation degree Advisory Panel;
 - Nearly three quarters (73%) of Stakeholders from the university, college and employer/employer Body/SSC sectors expressed through the stakeholder survey displayed a positive view in terms of their perceptions of the effectiveness of fdf's work in stimulating the development of demand led Foundation degrees;

- fdf's work in leading the Working Group which developed the "Northern Ireland Colleges and Universities APEL Scheme" for entry to Foundation degrees also provides a tangible example of collaborative working arrangements for the betterment of the Foundation degree qualification;
- 72% of respondents indicated that they considered fdf to have been either "very effective" or "quite effective" in "supporting and developing partnerships between Sector Skills Councils, employers, Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Regional Colleges in the development and flexible delivery of Foundation degrees"; and
- 96% of University, College and Employer Body / SSC survey respondents who had direct engagement with fdf indicated that it had been a positive experience.

The SLA which fdf were judged to have partially achieved related to the promotion of Foundation degrees in particular among employers / employer bodies. Also, while fdf were considered to have provided extensive support in terms of the promotion of Foundation degrees generally (SLA 3), there was still a recognition that the effect of this promotion was not as great as might have been hoped. The available evidence therefore makes it clear that despite progress more must still be done to raise awareness, recognition and buy-in of the qualification among employers. The low response rate to the survey from the Employers / Employer bodies / Sector Skills Councils stakeholder group appears to support this finding.

SECTION 3 - VALUE FOR MONEY

ASSESSMENT OF FOUNDATION DEGREE

FORWARD

3.1 BACKGROUND

This section considers the Value For Money (VFM) of the work undertaken by fdf in Northern Ireland and provides a judgement in this respect. A number of elements were considered to provide the evidence base necessary to make an assessment in relation to whether the outcomes achieved by fdf in Northern Ireland represent VFM, including:

- a review of fdf's annual costs / spend;
- fdf's effectiveness in achieving their SLA objectives;
- the satisfaction of stakeholders / beneficiaries of fdf's work;
- a cost analysis / cost per output comparison with another organisation;
- consideration of the counterfactual case, that is the extent to which any improvements might have happened anyway in the absence of fdf's presence.

It should be acknowledged that the relatively short period covered by the Department's engagement with fdf makes it difficult to measure the impact and outputs of their work and heavily qualifies judgements related to VFM.

3.2 VALUE FOR MONEY ASSESSMENT

Review of fdf's annual costs

The Department allocated an annual budget to fund fdf's work in Northern Ireland. The budget was comprised of two elements: the first element of the funding provided to fdf by the Department is the 'Regional Development Work' budget which covered fdf's development work supporting and developing Foundation degrees in Northern Ireland. The second element of the funding

provided to fdf related to the 'Regional Development Manager' budget which covered the fdf's staff costs, and other general operating costs, such as accommodation costs.

As table 16 (Annex B) shows there has been a gradual year on year increase in fdf's 'Regional Development Manager' (staffing, accommodation etc) spend during the course of the contract. Analysis indicates that salaries and wages in Northern Ireland rose in line with fdf UK but that the bulk of the increase related to the rise in admin support hours as the volume of work increased.

There has also been a year on year increase in the level of spend on the development work. However, fdf was considerably underspent in its development budget until a particularly marked increase in 2010/11 financial year (FY) when the total spend amounted to nearly £170,000 compared to just over £42,000 in the previous year. This significant increase can be attributed to the comprehensive marketing campaign which accounted for approximately £130,000 of the total development work spend in 2010/11.

Effectiveness of fdf and satisfaction of stakeholders / beneficiaries with the work of fdf

In order to make an assessment in relation to whether fdf provided VFM it was necessary to consider how effective they had been at achieving their aims as articulated in the SLAs, as well as assessing the satisfaction of key stakeholders with fdf's work.

As outlined in section 2, fdf was considered to have fully achieved 11 of its 12 SLA objectives and to have partially met the other. The results of the employer/employer body/SSC, college and university survey results in relation to the effectiveness of fdf in realising the core purpose of their work, "developing and supporting the Foundation Degree Qualification in Northern Ireland", although based on a small sample size, provided a good indicator of both the

satisfaction of key stakeholder groups with fdf's work and the stakeholder perception of fdf's effectiveness. Over three quarters of respondents rated fdf as having been "very effective" or "quite effective" in developing and supporting the Foundation Degree Qualification in Northern Ireland.

There were also very high levels of satisfaction recorded for those University, College and Employer/ Employer body / SSC sector survey respondents who had engaged directly with fdf with an almost universally positive assessment of the engagement experience.

The majority of students would not have had any direct contact with fdf and it was therefore not appropriate for them to provide a direct assessment of their effectiveness or of their satisfaction with fdf. It is nevertheless worth noting the general satisfaction level of students with the Foundation degree qualification as they can ultimately be considered to be one of the key beneficiaries of fdf's work to support and develop Foundation degrees in that they are the end 'consumers' of the Foundation degree qualification.

Cost analysis / cost per output relative to a comparable organisation

A further measure of VFM provided by fdf in Northern Ireland can be gained by carrying out a cost analysis of the cost per outcome relative to another comparable organisation which carried out similar work. Given the very specific nature of the work carried out by fdf in Northern Ireland it was decided that the only organisation with which a direct and meaningful comparison could be made was fdf in England.

Fdf has been funded in England by HEFCE since 2003, initially to develop innovative approaches to the creation of Foundation degrees. From 2003-05 the work of Fdf in England was focused very clearly on establishing employer engagement in Foundation degree development. In 2006 HEFCE broadened the fdf remit beyond the Foundation degree qualification to embrace an emphasis

upon establishing and sustaining employer demand for appropriate higher education provision in general. The remit and focus of fdf's work in England is therefore broadly comparable to that of fdf in Northern Ireland, albeit on a much larger scale. However, this is a reasonable benchmark to make a direct and meaningful comparison against the work of fdf in Northern Ireland, whilst recognising the limitations of any such comparison given the difference in the scale of the operations between the two regions.

A number of factors and indicators were considered in order to make the comparison between fdf in Northern Ireland (fdf NI) and fdf in England based on the total spend for each region for 2007-10. Table 17 provides a comparison of costs based on the number of institutions (HEIs and FECs) involved with Foundation degree provision in both jurisdictions., and indicates that fdf NI has a higher spend (£62,796 per institution) compared with England (£42,301 per institution). Table 18 shows that when student enrolments are compared to total spend over the period, the cost per enrolment in Northern Ireland equated to £95, compared to a cost of £49 per enrolment in England. Finally, table 19 indicates that the increase in enrolments in Northern Ireland over the period 2007-10 equated to a cost of £952 per additional enrolment generated in relation to the overall spend, compared to a cost of £462 per additional enrolment generated in England.

A further, albeit indirect, comparison can be made between England's level of Foundation degree enrolments and Northern Ireland. fdf England had a target of 100,000 students enrolled on Foundation degrees, which they achieved in the 2010/11 enrolment figures. A target of 100,000 Foundation degree enrolments in England would, pro-rata, convert to a target of around 2,780 in Northern Ireland. The 2009-10 Foundation degree enrolments in Northern Ireland stood at 1472.

It is clear from the results of the comparative measures outlined above that fdf England has been more cost-effective at generating Foundation degree

enrolments, and at increasing student enrolments, in comparison to fdf in Northern Ireland. fdf England can also be seen to have achieved these results with a comparatively smaller budget in terms of the spend per institution.

There are, however, a number of caveats in making a comparison between fdf NI and fdf England that should be taken into account. Comparison figures for the two organisations were only available for 2007-10. However, fdf was quite well established as an organisation in England by 2007 and was also well advanced with regard to its work, particularly in terms of progressing employer engagement in Foundation degree development. By comparison, fdf in Northern Ireland was in a start up phase in 2007 with all the usual attendant costs. Fdf NI was also starting its local work to promote Foundation degrees from a much lower base. Comparison with the GB operation during its early years (2003 to 2007) would have been more appropriate but the relevant figures were not readily available by fdf England.

fdf in England also operated with a greater scope for economies of scale than in Northern Ireland where there is a much larger potential student and employer base and a wider network of Universities and Colleges with which to work. Consequently the scope which fdf in England had to develop and grow the Foundation Degree qualification was much greater.

Counterfactual Case

The review also considered the counterfactual case, that is, the extent to which any development might have happened anyway in the absence of fdf.

During the 2001-2007 period (ie. prior to the existence of fdf NI) there had been year on year increases in the number of Foundation degree enrolments and also a year on year increase in the number of Foundation degree enrolments as a proportion of all sub-degree HE enrolments. In addition, fdf have not been involved in the development of all new Foundation degree programmes.

Therefore, it could be argued that the developments which have taken place from 2007 onwards are merely a continuation of a trend and may have taken place whether fdf had existed or not.

However, there is some considerable evidence to suggest that the advances during fdf's engagement with the Department would not have occurred, or at least not within the same timeframe or to the extent that they have, had fdf not existed. For instance:

- the number of Foundation degree enrolments increased at a faster rate during the three years of fdf's existence in Northern Ireland (2007/08 – 2009/10) than they did for any comparable three year period prior to fdf's existence;
- more than three quarters of responses to the employer / employer body / SSC, University and College survey provided a positive assessment in relation to fdf's effectiveness in meeting their core aim of developing and supporting the Foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland;
- in November 2007, there were 39 Foundation Degrees available in Northern Ireland with a further 16 in development. As of May 2011 the number of Foundation degrees available in Northern Ireland stood at 91, with a further 5 new courses in development. The development of a number of these new Foundation degrees was driven primarily by fdf and in many of these cases the new programmes which were developed would almost definitely not have been developed in fdf's absence;
- a number of comments by stakeholders provided through the survey supported the assertion that the progress which has been made would not have been made in the absence of fdf and similarly that the imminent end of fdf's work will mean that the advances to date may not be sustained going forward. For instance one of the respondents to the college questionnaire stated that, "...without fdf, or an equally well-funded and energetic alternative, the new Foundation degrees could not have been delivered to the market place", whilst another college respondent stated that, "in absence of fdf there will be no mechanism for consortia development of Foundation degrees in

NI". One of the employer body/ SSC respondents also posed the question, "if fdf disappear in NI, how will Foundation degrees continue and the work that has been done to date continue and not be lost?".

Given the clear contribution of fdf to the development of Foundation degrees during its lifetime in Northern Ireland, as evidenced in section 2 of this evaluation, it is considered that fdf contributed significantly to a number of positive impacts and outputs which would not have happened in its absence.

3.3 VALUE FOR MONEY - CONCLUSIONS

In a direct unit cost comparison fdf NI was more expensive and delivered less when compared to fdf GB over the 2007-2010 period. However, as acknowledged, there are a number of caveats and limitations in relation to this comparison. In particular, the relatively short time period over which fdf have had a presence in Northern Ireland compared to the much longer period of fdf's existence in England in which it has had time to develop and refine its operations.

However, in light of fdf's effectiveness in relation to the other three main elements of the VFM assessment (effectiveness in achieving SLA objectives, satisfaction of stakeholders / beneficiaries, and the counterfactual case), fdf is considered to have provided VFM in terms of the outcomes achieved in Northern Ireland especially taking account of the relatively short period covered by the engagement and the various other limitations outlined previously.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Foundation degree enrolments in Northern Ireland are yet to reach a level proportionate to the level realised in England.

Notwithstanding the extra time that fdf England had to reach this level of enrolments, the lower enrolments in NI support the assertion that more must be done to support the Foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland if

Foundation degrees are to become the dominant sub-degree qualification within the Further Education sector.

SECTION 4 – FOUNDATION DEGREES – OVERVIEW OF STAKEHOLDER SURVEY KEY FINDINGS AND OTHER RELEVANT DATA

4.1 BACKGROUND

This section provides an overview of the findings from the stakeholder survey and other relevant statistical evidence in relation to the Foundation degree qualification itself (as opposed to fdf). This information will help to inform the conclusions of the evaluation exercise as a whole and also to inform the assessment of options and subsequent recommendations in relation to how the Foundation degree qualification might be best developed and supported in Northern Ireland in the future. The full survey findings and data tables in relation to the Foundation degree qualification, as well as associated commentary, are included in Annex B.

4.2 OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

The stakeholder survey findings suggest that, in general, the Foundation degree qualification itself is viewed in a positive manner among all stakeholders as illustrated by the findings that 92% of Foundation degree graduates who responded to the student survey indicated that completing the Foundation degree had been “very worthwhile” or “quite worthwhile”. There were more than double the number of responses to the stakeholder surveys which related to the positive characteristics of the Foundation degree in comparison to the number of responses in relation to the qualification’s negative characteristics - this again suggests that the qualification is generally held in a positive view.

The responses of all groups of respondents highlighted the same four broad characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification adjudged to be the most valuable, namely:

- the articulation route and the good preparation for university which the qualification provides – this accounted for 18% of students responses and 17% of non-student (ie. university, college, employer/employer Body/SSC sector) responses;
- the flexible delivery options provided by Foundation degrees, in terms of the opportunity they offer students to study part time, close to home and while working, which was considered as a valuable characteristic in 16% of students responses and 27% of non-student responses;
- 12% of student responses and 17% of non-student responses cited comments relating to the relevant industry and vocational knowledge and practical skills provided by Foundation degrees; and
- 11% of student responses and 10% of non-student responses highlighted the work placement element of Foundation degrees as a valuable characteristic.

The stakeholder survey results also suggest that the Foundation degree qualification appears to be conferring the key benefits to graduates which it was designed to deliver with high completion rates (90% among respondents to the student survey) and the vast majority of Foundation degree graduates surveyed, with some 80% progressing to either another higher education course, training, promotion or new employment following completion of their Foundation degree.

The survey results and Departmental statistics indicate that around half of Foundation degree graduates articulate to an Honours degree course at University and the great majority of graduates (90%) indicated that they considered that the Foundation degree qualification had prepared them well for this progression to University. Also, the vast majority of Foundation degree graduates who entered new employment following completion of their Foundation

degree indicated that their employment was directly or somewhat related to the Foundation degree subject area in which they studied.

However, whilst the qualification itself is now well established and is viewed in a mainly positive manner, a key recurring theme which arose from all of the stakeholder survey responses was that awareness and promotion of Foundation degrees needs to be increased, particularly among employers. Comments relating to a lack of recognition and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification constituted the most frequent response among students and the second most frequent response among the non-student respondent group (ie. university, college, employer/employer Body/SSC sector) when asked to suggest what they considered to be the least valuable characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification. Similarly when respondents were asked to provide suggestions in relation to how the Foundation degree qualification and employer based learning might be best developed and supported in Northern Ireland in the future, the need for more promotion and awareness raising of the qualification attracted the highest proportion of responses among both students and the non-student group

The other key issues which emerged when respondents were asked about the least valuable characteristics of the qualification and what future support arrangements should be put in place for Foundation degrees related to:

- Articulation issues (from a student perspective these issues generally related to the limited articulation options available and the inability to articulate to an Honours degree at college whilst the non-student responses related primarily to the fact that the link to a particular Honours degree can in many ways actually be limiting and restrictive);
- the need for improved employer engagement; and
- the need for an improved and wider range of work placements.

SECTION 5 – OVERALL CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

5.1 EVALUATION SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In terms of the effectiveness of their work, fdf were judged to have fully achieved 11 out of 12 SLA commitments, with the remaining SLA being partially achieved, and in doing so were therefore considered to have effectively supported the development, delivery and promotion of Foundation Degrees in Northern Ireland. This positive assessment is particularly noteworthy given the limited time during which fdf was in existence and the relatively small budget with which they were working.

On the balance of the available evidence, fdf were also considered to have provided VFM in terms the outcomes achieved in Northern Ireland, especially given their short lifespan in Northern Ireland and the relative levels of spend involved.

The period of fdf's engagement witnessed a significant increase in the number of Foundation degrees available and increases in total Foundation degree enrolments including a record year on year increase in the most recent year for which enrolment figures are available. There were also small year on year increases in the proportion of STEM Foundation degree enrolments during fdf's existence, reversing a downward trend in the 3 year period prior to fdf's engagement in Northern Ireland. There was also an increase during fdf's lifetime in the level of Foundation degree enrolments as a proportion of the total sub-degree provision, rising from 9% in 2006-07 to 14% in 2009-10 compared to slight fall in the proportion of HN qualifications over the same period.

The feedback of survey respondents in relation to their engagement with fdf was also extremely positive as were their perceptions in relation to fdf's effectiveness

at stimulating the development of demand-led Foundation degrees, supporting and developing partnerships among key stakeholders and at the effectiveness of the work of fdf in developing and supporting the Foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland.

The Foundation degree qualification itself is also generally viewed in a positive manner among all stakeholders with 9 out of 10 Foundation degree graduates who responded to the student survey indicating that completing the Foundation degree had been “very worthwhile” or “quite worthwhile”. The four key perceived most valuable characteristics of Foundation degree’s highlighted by respondents to the survey related to the benefits provided by the qualification in terms of: the articulation route and preparation for University; the flexible delivery options available; the relevant industry and practical knowledge; and the work placement experience.

The Foundation degree qualification appears to be conferring the key benefits to graduates which it was designed for with the survey results indicating that 8 out of 10 Foundation degree graduates progress to further education, training, promotion or new employment following completion of their Foundation degree. The survey also indicated that around half of Foundation degree graduates articulate to an Honours degree course at University and all of those respondents considered that the Foundation degree qualification prepared them well for that progression. Of those Foundation degree graduates who enter new employment, their employment was related to the Foundation degree subject area in which they had studied.

Another key theme which arose from the evaluation was the need to continue to increase awareness, recognition and buy-in of the qualification, particularly among employers. Whilst fdf was judged to have made positive strides by taking forward an extensive range of promotional work and to have made some progress in increasing the level of awareness of Foundation degrees, this was

nevertheless the area in which they were considered to have been least effective. In terms of the other issues that were raised by stakeholder in which they wanted to see improvements, aside from articulation issues, the issues of the need for improved employer engagement and the need for an improved and wider range of work placements can both be closely linked to the need for increased of promotion, awareness raising and buy-in among employers. The need for ongoing support is further supported by the comparisons highlighted through the VFM comparison with fdf England which showed that proportionately enrolments in Northern Ireland are yet to reach the levels realised in England.

5.2 EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Taking account of all of the findings and conclusions of the evaluation, the following recommendations in relation to how the Foundation degree qualification might be best developed and supported in the future in Northern Ireland post-Fdf with a view to ensuring that the Department makes the best and most effective use of its resources in support of meeting its commitments and targets in relation to Foundation degrees.

Recommendation 1 - Funding in support of Foundation degrees should be continued on a more targeted basis.

In view of length of the time Foundation degrees have been in existence in Northern Ireland and considering the high regard in which the qualification is held by those who are familiar with it, it is considered that the current level of funding and support for the Foundation degree qualification cannot be justified going forward.

However, it is obvious that considerable progress still needs to be made to establish the Foundation degree as the primary intermediate qualification in higher education. The Department introduced Foundation degrees to Northern Ireland and has a continuing duty to support its value and to maintain its currency

for local graduates. Northern Ireland is still a long way short of its pro-rata proportion of national enrolments and it is clear that employers have not yet understood its full value of this work based qualification. This review recommends that funding support for the promotion of Foundation degrees should continue on a targeted basis.

Recommendation 2 - A promotional campaign for Foundation degrees should be put place in order to raise awareness of the qualification, particularly among employers

Given the overwhelming message emerging from the evaluation in relation to the need for continued promotion of Foundation degrees, particularly among employers, it is recommended that a coordinated promotional campaign should constitute the main element of any future support for Foundation degrees.

Given the lack of resources and relevant expertise it is likely that the work associated with the promotional campaign will be outsourced by the Department to a specialist marketing / communications agency with assistance from the Government Advertising Unit (subject to completion and approval of a Business Case).

Any promotional campaign should be aimed at gaining increased employer Foundation degree buy in. An increased level of awareness and buy-in from employers should result in more employers encouraging their employees to undertake Foundation degrees, providing work placements for students on Foundation degree programmes and getting involved in curriculum design.

Many of the detailed findings from the evaluation provide a useful insight into the motivations for why students chose Foundation degrees and will help to inform and formulate the content or focus of the promotional campaign in terms of its focus, objectives and direction.

Recommendation 3 – The continuation of other non-promotional related work in support for Foundation degrees – EBTA, Advisory Panel, Endorsement

As acknowledged previously, fdf in England has already developed a legacy strategy and agreed with different organisations that will commit to the maintenance of their many of their existing assets and services, particularly in respect of the various information resources which they have developed. In many of these cases the Department and relevant Foundation degree stakeholders in Northern Ireland will be also be able to continue to access these resources.

In light of the findings of this evaluation the following recommendations are put forward in relation to other areas outside the remit of promotional work that the Department might continue to support:

EBTA

Much has been done by fdf over the last year to raise the profile of the EBTA service and to raise its profile among employers and progress has been made with a number of employers. It is considered that the EBTA service has the potential to increase employer engagement in the development of higher level skills generally. This is an area identified for improvement through this evaluation, and given the positive progress to date, it is recommended that DEL Skills Division should investigate how the EBTA service could be used to support the development of higher level skills in the workplace.

Foundation degree Advisory Panel

fdf's 'Final Exit report' strongly advocated the continuation of the recently established Foundation degree Advisory panel arguing for the continuation and strengthening of the panel as a means of providing 'new thinking' in the design and funding of Foundation degrees.

One of the key issues that has emerged through this evaluation is the need to raise awareness of Foundation degrees among employers. The Advisory Panel might contribute an employer viewpoint to support the promotional campaign. The Panel might also assist with the development of a salary sacrifice scheme for employer led Foundation degrees and contribute to work relating to a quality mark for Foundation degrees that demonstrates to employers that the qualification meet industry needs. Indeed, it could be argued that the Advisory Panel would provide an ongoing channel for the Department to engage with employers specifically in relation to Foundation degrees in the absence of fdf. Conversely, it is unlikely that the Department would have the budgetary or staffing capacity to manage and support an independent panel, especially given the current financial restrictions. It would also be difficult to justify the creation of yet another independent advisory body given the number of other forums which the Department already uses to engage with employers, for example the Workforce Development Forums.

On balance, it is recommended that the Advisory Panel's future role should focus solely on providing an employer viewpoint to support the promotional campaign.

Endorsement

fdf's 'Final Exit report' also recommends that the Department considers taking forward a quality kite mark initiative (such as fdf's Endorsement Service which is likely to be managed by the Quality Assurance Agency post July 2011) which will demonstrate to employers and SSCs that the Foundation degree meets industry requirements.

It is recommended that the Department should consider participation in the programme to be taken forward by QAA.

ANNEX A – DATA TABLES REFERENCED IN

SECTIONS 2 AND 3

Table 1 – Foundation degree enrolments at Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges 2001–2010 – By mode of attendance

Academic Year	Foundation degree enrolments			Increase (+) or decrease (-) from previous academic year		
	F/T (% of total Foundation degree enrolments)	P/T (% of total Foundation degree enrolments)	Total (% of total Foundation degree enrolments)	F/T	P/T	Total
2001-02	47 (62%)	29 (38%)	76	N/A	N/A	N/A
2002-03	145 (68%)	67 (32%)	212	+ 98	+38	+136
2003-04	278 (66%)	140 (34%)	418	+133	+67	+206
2004-05	322 (61%)	209 (39%)	531	+113	+69	+113
2005-06	442 (62%)	275 (38%)	717	+186	+66	+186
2006-07	537 (59%)	375 (41%)	912	+95	+100	+195
2007-08	685 (62%)	416 (38%)	1,101	+148	+41	+189
2008/09	683 (60%)	449 (40%)	1,132	-2	+33	+31
2009/10	851 (58%)	621 (42%)	1,472	+168	+172	+340

Source: DEL

Table 2 – Foundation degree enrolments at Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges 2001–2010 - By STEM subject area

Academic Year	Total Foundation degree enrolments		STEM FOUNDATION DEGREE enrolments as proportion of total FOUNDATION DEGREE enrolments
	STEM subject areas	Non STEM areas	
2001-02	39	37	51%
2002-03	116	96	55%
2003-04	172	246	41%
2004-05	136	395	26%
2005-06	159	558	22%
2006-07	190	722	21%
2007-08	196	905	18%
2008/09	210	922	19%
2009/10	316	1,156	21%

Source: DEL

Table 3 – Foundation degree and Higher National qualification enrolments as a proportion of all Sub degree enrolments at Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges

Academic Year	Total Sub-degree level enrolments	Foundation degree Enrolments (% of total sub-degree level enrolments)	Higher National Enrolments (% of total sub-degree level enrolments)
2001-02	12,489	76 (1%)	6,974 (56%)
2002-03	12,155	212 (2%)	6,513 (54%)
2003-04	12,108	418 (3%)	6,371 (53%)
2004-05	10,736	531 (5%)	5,412 (59%)
2005-06	11,606	717 (6%)	5,613 (48%)
2006-07	10,413	912 (9%)	5,403 (52%)
2007-08	9,156	1,101 (12%)	4,932 (54%)
2008/09	9,116	1,132 (12%)	4,620 (51%)
2009/10	10,168	1,472 (14%)	5,108 (51%)

Source: DEL. Note: Aside from Foundation degrees and HN qualifications other sub-degree qualifications delivered in FE Colleges include Diplomas and Certificates of Higher Education, professional qualifications at undergraduate level, foundation courses at HE level, NVQ/ levels 5 and 4, diplomas and certificates at undergraduate level and other formal HE qualifications of less than degree standard.

Table 4 – Students first choice of qualification

Respondents to the student survey were asked if the Foundation degree that they enrolled on was their first choice.

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
Yes, Foundation degree I enrolled on was my first choice	205	84%
No, I wanted to study for an Honours Degree	24	10%
No, I wanted to study for an HND/HNC or for a Foundation degree in another object	9	4%
Other	7	3%
Don't Know / Nil Response	0	
Total respondents	245	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Table 5 – Destination of those students who obtained a Foundation degree: Totals for period 2003-04 – 2006-07

	2003-2007 Respondents (% of total responses)	2008-10 Respondents (% of total responses)
Higher Education – Full time and part-time	146 (52%)	119 (60%)
Total respondents	281	198

Source: DEL

Table 6 Assessment of the effectiveness of the work of Fdf in developing and supporting the Foundation degree Qualification in Northern Ireland

Respondents to the University, College and Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to indicate the descriptor which best described their opinion in relation to “how effective Fdf have been at developing and supporting the Foundation degree qualification in Northern Ireland”

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
Very Effective	9	41%
Quite Effective	8	36%
Not particularly Effective	5	23%
Not Effective at all	0	0
Don't Know / Nil Response	4	
Total respondents	26	

Source: Foundation degree stakeholder survey

Table 7 - Opinion of the knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among employers

Respondents to the Employer / Employer Body SCC surveys were asked to indicate their opinion of the general level of knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among employers

Descriptor	Number of known respondents
Very high	0
Quite high	0
Quite low	5
Very low	0

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Table 8 – Students first awareness of the Foundation degree qualification

Respondents to the student survey were asked how they first became aware of the Foundation degree qualification.

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
College Prospectus or website	149	61%
Newspaper / advertising	22	9%
Other / Foundation Degree Forward	20	8%
School	19	8%
Careers Office	15	6%
Employer	11	5%
Don't recall	9	4%
Total respondents	245	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder survey

Table 9 – Awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among prospective college students

Respondents to the student survey were asked to rate what they considered to be the general level of knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree among prospective students

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
“Very high”	21	10%
“Quite High”	98	47%
“Quite Low”	78	37%
“Very Low”	13	6%
Don’t Know / Nil Response	35	
Total respondents	245	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder survey

Table 10 – Perception of the Foundation degree qualification among prospective college students

Respondents to the student survey were asked to rate what they considered to be the perception of the Foundation degree among prospective students

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
“Very Positive”	24	12%
“Quite Positive”	142	71%
“Quite Negative” or “Very Negative”	33	17%
Don’t Know / Nil Response	46	
Total respondents	245	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder survey

Table 11 - Assessment of the effectiveness of the work of Fdf in stimulating the development of demand led Foundation degrees

Respondents to the University, College and Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to indicate the descriptor which best described their opinion in relation to “how effective Fdf have been at stimulating the development of demand led Foundation degrees”

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
“Very Effective”	7	32%
“Quite Effective”	9	41%
“Not particularly Effective” or “Not Effective at all”	6	27%
Total respondents	22	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder survey

Table 12 Assessment of the effectiveness of the work of Fdf in supporting and developing partnership working

Respondents to the University, College and Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to indicate the descriptor which best described their opinion in relation to “how effective Fdf have been at supporting and developing partnerships between Sector Skills Councils, employers, Higher Education Institutions and Further Education Regional Colleges in the development and flexible delivery of Foundation degrees”

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
“Very Effective”	9	43%
“Quite Effective”	6	29%
“Not particularly Effective” or “Not Effective at all”	6	29%
Total respondents	21	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder survey

Table 13 - Assessment of the effectiveness of the work of Fdf in promoting and marketing Foundation degrees

Respondents to the University, College and employer / Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to indicate the descriptor which best described their opinion in relation to “how effective Fdf have been at promoting / marketing Foundation degrees among employers to ensure they are understood by employers and employer organisations as a qualification that can support the development of workforce training and education”

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
“Very Effective” or “Quite Effective”	15	65%
“Not particularly Effective” or “Not Effective at all”	8	35%
Total respondents	23	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder survey

Table 14 - Opinion of the knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among employers

Respondents to the employer/ Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to indicate their opinion of the general level of knowledge and awareness of the Foundation degree qualification among employers

Descriptor	Number of Respondents
Very high	0
Quite high	0
Quite low	5
Very low	0
Total respondents	5

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder survey

Table 15 - General perception of the Foundation degree qualification among employers / employer bodies / SSCs

Respondents to the employer / employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to indicate their own organisation's general perception of the Foundation degree qualification

Descriptor	Number of Respondents
"Very positive" or "Quite Positive"	7
"Quite Negative" or "Very Negative"	0
Total respondents	7

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder survey

Table 16 – Annual Departmental Fdf outturn / spend

Financial Year	FDF Regional Development Work Funding Outturn	FDF Regional Development Manager Outturn	Total Outturn
2007/08	£10,050	£74,288	£84,338
2008/09	£34,353	£93,102	£127,455
2009/10	£42,109	£99,174	£141,283
2010/11	£169,476	£105,399	£274,875
Total	£255,988	£371,963	£627,951

Table 17 – Fdf spend in Northern Ireland V Fdf spend in England / per Institution involved with Foundation degree provision

	Fdf Northern Ireland	Fdf England
Total spend FY 2007-11	£627,951	£15,609,306
Total spend 2007-11 / per institution	£62,795 per institution *	£ 42,301 per institution **

* NI total number of institutions based on Departmentally funded Further Education colleges (6) and Local universities (2) plus CAFRE and OU = 10 FECs / HEIs

** England total of institutions - Based on most recent available figures from HEFCE – 369 Institutions involved with Foundation degree provision (2006/07)

Table 18 – Cost benefit output comparison – Foundation degree Enrolments

	Fdf Northern Ireland	Fdf England
Total spend - FY 2007-10	£353,076	£12,704,526
Total Foundation degree enrolments AY 2007-10	3705	258,500
Cost per Foundation degree enrolment 2007-10	£95 per enrolled student	£49 per enrolled student

Table 19 – Cost benefit output comparison – Increase in Foundation degree enrolments

	Total Spend FY 07-08 – 09-10	Increase in enrolments AY 07-08 – 09-10	Cost per additional enrolment generated
Fdf NI	£353,076	+371	£952
Fdf England	£12,704,526	+27475	£462

Table 20 – Level of NI Foundation degree enrolments Vs England

Fdf England	Total Spend FY 07/08 – 09/10 = £12,704,526	2009/10 total enrolments = 99,475
Fdf NI	Total Spend FY 07/08 – 09/10 = £353,076	2009/10 total enrolments = 1,472
Pro-rata	Fdf NI spend as a proportion of Fdf England = 2.78%	Fdf NI projected pro-rata enrolments V Fdf England = 2,780 enrolments

ANNEX B –DATA TABLES REFERENCED IN

SECTION 4

This annex provides a detailed overview of the findings from the stakeholder survey and other relevant statistical evidence, as well as associated commentary, in relation to the Foundation degree qualification itself (as opposed to fdf). Many of the questions for which findings are presented in this section relate to open questions. Open questions allow the respondent to answer more fully and freely in their own way as opposed to a closed question (most of the results in the main body of this evaluation report related to closed questions) where the respondent is given a number of alternative answers to choose from. The responses to the open questions were then analysed and related responses categorised into related themes. Given their nature, open questions tend to result in a much greater range of responses than closed questions.

SURVEY FINDINGS AND STATISICAL DATA

Table 21 summarises the key themes identified by stakeholders (from the university, college and employer / employer body / SSC survey responses) in terms of how the Foundation degree qualification and employer based learning might be best developed and supported in Northern Ireland in the future. As already alluded to in the evaluation of fdf, one third of responses related to the need to raise awareness and improve promotion of Foundation degrees, particularly among employers. As also referred to previously the next most cited reason related to the need for improved employer engagement which constituted 19% of comments. A number of comments (13% of responses) also referred directly to the work placement element of the Foundation degrees mainly in terms of the need to increase the number of relevant work placements available

Table 21 Future Support Arrangements for Foundation degrees (University, College, Employer / Employer Body / SSC)

Respondents to the University, College and Employer / Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to provide suggestions in relation to how the Foundation degree qualification and employer based learning might be best developed and supported in Northern Ireland in the future

Theme	Example responses	Number of responses	% of known responses
Better promotion of Foundation degrees / awareness raising	Raise awareness through schools, careers office, teachers etc; Improved profiling and marketing to wider public - little support for local and regional promotion; Networking with employers to raise awareness of Foundation degrees; Need to increase awareness of Foundation degree as a standalone intermediate qualification in its own right; an employer based organisation needs to own and endorse promotion / developing case studies; sell the advantages of Foundation degrees more to employers - can you afford not to develop your staff in a recession; recognise that employer based Foundation degrees succeed by recruiting employers rather than individuals	16	33%
Improved employer engagement	Better Engagement with employers to identify requirements and secure support for development and delivery; encourage employers to sponsor students More interaction between course administrators and employers; need agreed mechanism to recognise which Foundation degrees are required by each group of employers rather than reinvent process each time; more support for developing links with employers; greater use of employer's forums; need for greater engagement with Sector Skills Councils; ensure employers are consulted via SSC	9	19%
Work placement issues	More relevant work placements - current economic climate is making the garnering of real-industry workplaces very difficult; more and relevant work placements - database of work placement opportunities for each subject area across NI; networking with employers to help raise placement opportunities; encouragement of employers to engage in facilitating work placements- make them realise that it could benefit them in the future; recognition of funding for students who have undertaken unpaid placement	6	13%
Other	Foundation degrees students shouldn't have to do 2nd year of Honours By recognising very large development costs, either through funding mechanism or special support at initial development; link to apprenticeship programmes as well as HE; collaborative model is a good model but can be expensive - we would ask for a continuing subsidy whilst this relatively new qualification beds in; develop case studies as evidence base	5	10%
Withdrawal of HNDs		<5	-

Retention of Fdf or similar organisation	Fdf was a great model - disappointed that this has been discontinued; maintain an Fdf presence in NI NI is small region, no need for lots of Foundation degrees - need for an organisation to provide Foundation degree overview, identify gaps, work with employer to identify needs and support academia	<5	-
Flexible delivery / learning	More blended learning or part time provision for those in work already or who wish to change career progression; ensure flexible delivery methods Clear and efficient mechanism for online learning	<5	-
Focus on Employability	Key is to ensure needs and skills required by employers are met by available qualifications; focus on employability after course	<5	-
		48	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Table 22 summarises the key themes raised by respondents to the student survey in terms of how the Foundation degree qualification and employer based learning might be best developed and supported in Northern Ireland in the future. The responses from students raised similar themes as those raised by the responses to the non-stakeholder surveys with 45% of student respondents highlighting the need for better promotion and raised awareness of Foundation degrees and a further 24% highlighting the need for more relevant work placement opportunities. Other key issues raised related to articulation issues, particularly in terms of the need for more articulation options and/or the ability to articulate to an Honours degree at a further education college, and the need for a greater variety of Foundation degrees to be available.

Table 22 Future Support Arrangements for Foundation degrees (Students)

Respondents to the student surveys were asked to provide suggestions in relation to how the Foundation degree qualification and employer based learning might be best developed and supported in Northern Ireland in the future

Theme	Example responses	Number of responses	% of known responses
Better promotion of Foundation degrees / awareness raising	Need to raise awareness of Foundation degrees especially among employers; Need to raise awareness of Foundation degrees among prospective students	37	45%
Work placement opportunities	More relevant placement opportunities needed More employers need to be involved in taking placement students	20	24%
Articulation Issues	Ability to articulate / complete Honours degree at same college; lack of articulation route; Better choice of Honours courses to articulate to.	13	16%
Greater variety of Foundation degrees		12	15%
Better Funding for students	Money back for those articulating to Honours to cover extra year for Foundation degree	8	5%
Increased Industry / employer focus	Close work with employers to ensure Foundation degrees meet skills needs; Maintain and improve industry links; Should be focused on meeting local employer needs	7	5%
More jobs / improved prospects	More support for graduate, More links to industry for a possible job post graduation, sponsorship from firms to take students once graduated	7	5%
More employer support – study time, fees	Employer should give recognition in their payscales to people with Foundation degree level qualifications, Give incentives to employers to encourage staff to enrol	6	4%
Work Placement improvements	more work placement support, Pay for work placement, there should be no classes during work placements	6	4%
Better learning support		<5	-
Better lecturers		<5	-
Course content / arrangements	There is currently no merit recognition for high achieving students pass or fail, more practical classes needed	<5	-
Reduce length of course		<5	
Miscellaneous	Need to minimise / rationalise other qualifications available, Contract with students to attend class etc, Scrap them and let colleges offer honours instead, More indication of how intense it will be in advance	16	
Total known responses		148	100%
Total responses (‘Don’t know’/‘Nil response’= 102 responses)		250	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey.

Table 23 Most Valuable Characteristics of Foundation degree Qualification (University, College, Employer / Employer Body / SSC)

Respondents to the University, College and Employer / Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to suggest what they considered to be the most valuable characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification.

Theme	Example responses	Number of responses	% of known responses
Equips students with relevant Industry related vocational knowledge / Practical skills		13	27%
Flexible delivery	Can be studied while working; allows study near to home; flexibility and integration of FT and PT provision; flexibility of delivery - including online; ability to study locally	8	17%
Articulation route to University / good preparation for University		8	17%
Work placement experience	Students who secure an excellent work placement learn so much	5	10%
Employer benefits	Can address training needs as a standalone work based qualification; employer based so will be of use to employer; for PT students, it's related to their work so benefits them and employers; tailored to employer needs	<5	-
Recognised Higher Education qualification		<5	-
Miscellaneous	Cheaper than honours; variety of Foundation degrees available; one to one learning; widens participation; good base to start from; the use of the term 'degree'; cheaper to complete than an Honours Degree; good preparation for work; aids career progression	8	17%
Total known responses		49	100%
Total responses (Nil response' = 1 response)		50	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Table 24 Most Valuable Characteristics of Foundation degree Qualification (Students)

Respondents to the Student survey were asked to suggest what they considered to be the most valuable characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification.

Theme	Example responses	Number of responses	% of known responses
Articulation route to University / good preparation for University		48	18%
Flexible delivery	Flexibility to study while working flexible delivery - part time study; flexible delivery - suited family commitments; local learning; allows study near to home	41	16%
Equips students with relevant Industry related vocational knowledge / Practical skills		31	12%
Work placement experience		29	11%
Recognised Higher Education qualification		19	7%
Wide variety within the course / varied course curriculum		17	6%
Aids career progression		13	5%
Quality of teaching / tutors	Good tutors; high standard of teaching; tutors with practical / industry experience	11	4%
Cheaper to complete than a Honours Degree		9	3%
Suitable for adult returners		9	3%
Quicker to complete than an Honours degree		8	3%
Miscellaneous	Smaller classes than degree; variety of Foundation degrees on offer; quality of course content; indepth; all valuable; Provides level of qualification to work needed to work within chosen field (without need to complete full degree)	25	10%
Total known responses		263	100%
Total responses (‘Nil response’ / ‘No valuable characteristics’ = 35 responses)		298	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Respondents to the stakeholder survey were asked to suggest what they considered to be the most valuable characteristic(s) of the Foundation degree qualification. Tables 23 and 24 summarise the key themes highlighted by stakeholders from the university, college, employer/employer Body/SSC sector and from students respectively in terms of their perceptions of the most valuable characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification. The responses of both groups of respondents highlighted the same four broad characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification adjudged to be the most valuable: comments relating to the articulation route to university and the good preparation for university provided by the qualification accounted for 18% of students responses and 17% of non-student (ie. university, college, employer/employer Body/SSC sector) responses; the flexible delivery options provided by Foundation degrees, in terms of the opportunity it offers students to study part time, close to home and while working, was considered as valuable characteristic in 16% of students responses and 27% of non-student responses; 12% of students responses and 17% of non-student responses cited comments relating to the relevant industry and vocational knowledge and practical skills provided by Foundation degrees, and 11% of students responses and 10% of non-student responses highlighted the work placement element of Foundation degrees as a valuable characteristic.

Table 25 Least Valuable Characteristics of Foundation degree Qualification (University, College, Employer Body / SSC)

Respondents to the University, College and Employer Body / SSC stakeholder surveys were asked to suggest what they considered to be the least valuable characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification.

Theme	Example responses	Number of responses	% of known responses
Articulation issues	Requirement for an automatic articulation to a relevant Honours degree programme on successful completion of the Foundation degree can often prove to be difficult; Articulating into full-time study for an Honours is likely to have limited appeal for those in employment; small numbers of full-time and part-time students wishing to articulate means that it is not viable for the University to offer programmes tailored to the relevant Foundation degree; insistence that all Foundation degrees must have articulation route sometimes makes them unnecessarily academic; link to a degree in NI can be restrictive; restriction of having to progress to an existing honours degree	6	27%
Lack of recognition	Need to raise awareness especially among employers and prospective students; lack of recognition from employer as a standalone qualification; can be perceived only as an access route to University without any value in its own right	5	23%
Miscellaneous	Cost / extra debt; too much focus on process and assessment rather than content -leads to less key transferable skills; tutors need to manage learner expectations; less academic content than Honours - students may be less well prepared for employment; takes too long; work placements are difficult to source; name is confusing - employers think its 1st year of Honours; need more employer friendly delivery methods - flexible/part time; sometimes lack of commitment by employers in supporting their staff and not seeing how it can benefit their organisation; too costly for employers	11	50%
Total known responses		22	100%
Total responses (‘Nil response’ / ‘No least valuable characteristics’ = 10 responses)		32	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Table 26 Least Valuable Characteristics of Foundation degree (Students)

Respondents to Student survey were asked to suggest what they considered to be the least valuable characteristics of the Foundation degree qualification.

Theme	Example responses	Number of responses	% of known responses
Lack of recognition	Lack of recognition among employers; lack of awareness about level of qualification; lack of awareness of Foundation degrees and what it is among employer and public	28	21%
Regarded as inferior qualification to honours degree		16	12%
Articulation issues	Unable to articulate Honours degree at same college; should be option to articulate to Part-time degree; Honours degree not related to Foundation degree; difficult to get place in university; lack of suitable honours course to articulate to; lack of local articulation route	13	10%
Makes Honours degree route longer than go directly to university		13	10%
Takes too long		10	8%
Too intense	Challenging to work and study at same time; difficult to study part time	10	8%
Course content	Some aspects of Foundation degrees not in enough depth; some modules too long / not focused; some modules not work focused; modules aren't work related / practical ; need less exams / more coursework	9	7%
Miscellaneous	Travelling distance to campus; waste of time; aimless visits to University; modules not marked equally / fairly; only of value if work in that field already	6	5%
More work experience opportunities needed	More work experience opportunities needed more work placement support	5	4%
Poor tutors / marking	Not enough encouragement from lecturers to excel; not happy with marking - had to leave course; need more tutor contact	5	4%
Facilities / resources	Lack of materials / resources; Lack of facilities	<5	
Cost / extra debt		<5	
Lack of jobs - doesn't guarantee employment		<5	
Too slow a pace / complete course more quickly		<5	
Not a good foundation for proceeding to degree		<5	
Work experience Work based learning		<5	
Pass or fail - no merit recognition for high achieving students		<5	
Total known responses		132	100%
Total responses (‘Nil response’ / ‘No valuable characteristics’ = 117 responses)		249	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Tables 25 and 26 detail the responses to the stakeholder survey in relation to the least valuable characteristic(s) of the Foundation degree qualification. The first point to note is the much lower number of responses provided for this question in comparison to the number of responses provided relating to the most valuable characteristic – between the student and non – student surveys, more than twice as many “most valuable” characteristics were suggested by respondents in comparison to the number of “least valuable” characteristics suggested. Similarly nearly half of all respondents did not offer any suggestions in relation to the least valuable characteristics of the qualification. The disparity in the response rates to these two questions is a good indicator that the Foundation degree qualification is perceived in a generally positive manner with stakeholders having perceiving many more positive characteristics than negative ones.

In terms of the least valuable characteristics which were suggested, both the student and non student stakeholders highlighted articulation issues (10% of student responses and 27% of non-student responses) as one of the least valuable characteristics of the Foundation degree. From a student perspective these issues generally related to the limited articulation options available and the inability to articulate to an Honours degree at college. The non-student responses related primarily to the fact that the link to a particular Honours degree can in many ways actually be limiting and be restrictive.

A lack of recognition and awareness about the qualification, particularly among employers, was also raised by both groups of respondents (21% of student responses and 23% of non-student responses). This again relates back to the findings which have already been highlighted in relation to the need to raise awareness and increase promotion. Also closely linked to this is the further 12% of student responses which indicated that Foundation degrees are regarded as an inferior qualification to honours degree.

The other key theme which emerged from the student responses related to the perception that it takes too long to complete an Foundation degree (8% of responses) and the fact that taking a Foundation degree and then articulating to a Honours Degree takes longer than the traditional route of entering university directly to complete an Honours degree (10% of responses).

Table 27 – Reasons for choosing a Foundation degree

Respondents to the student survey were asked to indicate the reasons which best described why they originally choose to enrol on a Foundation degree

Reason	Number of Responses	% of known responses
To continue my education	197	32%
To get a job	80	13%
Out of interest	62	10%
To help me change career direction	60	10%
To allow me study near to where I live	58	9%
To allow me to study in a flexible way	55	9%
To help me do my current job better	38	6%
To help increase my chances of promotion with my current employer	30	5%
To help me find a better job in the same field with another employer	32	5%
Total responses	612	100%

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey. Note: There were also a small number of “other” responses which are not included in the total above.

Students were asked to indicate the reason(s) which best described why they originally choose to enrol on a Foundation degree with ‘To continue my education’ being overwhelmingly the most popular reason cited by respondents making up some 32% of all responses, far in excess of the next most popular reasons “to get a job“(13%), “out of interest (10%)“ and “to help me change career direction” (10%). This result suggests that for many students enrolling on Foundation degrees they primarily see the qualification as the next step in the educational journey. This result provides an interesting insight into the students’

motivation for choosing the Foundation degree qualification and will be helpful in informing any future possible promotion and marketing of Foundation degrees.

Table 28 - Student Survey respondents – Successful Completion of Foundation degree studies

Respondents to the student surveys who were no longer enrolled on a Foundation degree were asked to indicate if they had successfully completed their Foundation degree

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
Successfully completed Foundation degree	162	90%
Did not complete Foundation degree	18	10%
Total respondents	180	

The student survey questionnaires were distributed to current students and past students who had enrolled from 2005-06 onwards and, of the 245 students who responded to the survey in total, 64 respondents (26%) were current Foundation degree students. Of the remaining 182 past student respondents who had enrolled on Foundation degrees, some 90% had successfully completed their course. This represents an encouragingly high completion rate.

Table 29 - Foundation degree graduates - Students next steps following completion of Foundation degree qualification

Respondents to the student surveys who had successfully completed their Foundation degree were asked to indicate their next step following their Foundation degree studies.

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
Progressed to University to an Honours degree course	75	42%
Entered new employment	47	26%
Continued at same level in existing employment	25	14%
Got promoted with existing employer	13	7%
Other	10	6%
Progressed to further training / a professional qualification	8	5%
Total known responses	178	100%
Total respondents ('Nil response' = 67 responses)	245	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

A key feature of the Foundation degree qualification is the facility it offers successful students to articulate to university to complete an Honours degree. Table 29 indicates that of those respondents to the student survey who had successfully completed their Foundation degree, some 42% indicated that they progressed to an Honours degree course at University as their next step. In addition, many of the remaining respondents had either entered new employment (26%), got promoted with their existing employer (7%) following completion of their Foundation degree or progressed to further training / a professional qualification (5%). It is therefore notable that, in total, 80% of Foundation degree graduates had progressed to further education, training, promotion or new employment as next step.

Table 30 - Preparedness of Foundation degree students for progression to University (University and College respondents)

Respondents to the University and College were asked to indicate how well the Foundation degree qualification prepares students for the progression to university to complete and Honours Degree.

Descriptor	No. of Respondents – Universities and colleges	% of known responses
“Very Well” or “Quite well”	15	100%
“Not very well” or “Not at all well”	0	0%
Total respondents	15	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

In terms of how well an Foundation degree actually prepares students for the progression to university table 30 shows that all of those who responded from the University and College sectors felt that the Foundation degree qualification prepares students either “quite well” or “very well” for the progression, although caution should again be exercised given the small sample sizes involved.

Table 31 - Preparedness of Foundation degree students for progression to University (Student respondents)

Respondents to the student questionnaire who had progressed from a Foundation degree directly to a Honours Degree were asked to indicate how well the Foundation degree qualification prepares students for the progression to university to complete and Honours Degree.

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
"Very Well"	33	49%
"Quite Well"	28	41%
"Not very well" or "Not at all well"	7	10%
Total known responses	68	100%
Total responses (“Nil response” or “Don’t Know” = 177 responses)		

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Table 31 shows that there was a similarly positive response for those students who had successfully graduated from a Foundation degree to an Honours Degree with 90% of those respondents indicating that the Foundation degree had prepared them “very well” or “quite well” for the progression.

Table 32 - Foundation degree graduates – Employment following Graduation

Respondents to the student surveys who successfully completed their Foundation degree and indicated that they entered new employment after graduation were asked if the type of employment they entered was related to the Foundation degree subject that they studied

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
Yes, employment directly related to subject studied	23	43%
Yes, employment related to subject studied to some extent	18	33%
No, employment not related to subject studied	13	24%
Total known responses	54	100%
Total respondents (“Nil response” = 191 response)	245	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

Those respondents who had entered new employment as their next step following completion of their Foundation degree were asked if the type of employment they entered was related to the Foundation degree subject that they studied. It is again encouraging to note that some 43% entered new employment that was directly related to the Foundation degree subject area in which they studied with a further 33% entering education that was related to the Foundation degree subject area in which they studied to some extent.

Table 33 – Destination of those students who obtained a Foundation degree: Totals for period 2003-04 – 2009-10

Destination	No. of students	%
Higher Education – Full time	248	52%
Employment – Full time	163	34%
Employment – Part time	35	7%
Higher Education – Part time	12	3%
YTP/Jobskills/Other training	6	1%
Other (not seeking work)	5	1%
Unemployed	5	1%
Total no. of students	474	

Source: DEL – Cell values of less than 5 are masked

Table 33 details the available data for the period 2003-04 – 2009-10 in relation to the destination of those Foundation degree graduates who provided this information when surveyed after completing their Foundation degree. The data shows that a total of 55% of Foundation degree graduates had advanced to study in full time or part time Higher Education which is broadly comparable to the 42% suggested by the survey results shown in table 5. The table above also shows that 41% of students were in employment after completing their Foundation degree – again this is broadly comparable to the results of the student which suggested that 47% graduates were in some form of employment following their Foundation degree studies.

Table 34 - Foundation degree graduates – Value of Foundation degree

Foundation degree graduate respondents to the student survey were asked to indicate how worthwhile they considered their Foundation degree to have been to them personally

Descriptor	Number of Respondents	% of known responses
Very worthwhile	92	57%
Quite Worthwhile	57	35%
Not very worthwhile	8	5%
Not at all worthwhile	5	3%
Total known responses	162	100%
Total respondents (“Nil response” = 83 responses)	245	

Source: Foundation degree Stakeholder Survey

All of those students who had successfully completed their Foundation degree were also asked to indicate how worthwhile they considered their Foundation degree to have been to them personally. Once again the responses were generally very positive with some 57% indicating that the Foundation degree had been “very worthwhile” and a further 35% indicating that it had been “quite worthwhile” – in other words, a total of 9 out of every 10 Foundation degree students felt that the Foundation degree was worthwhile.