

# Progression from Vocational and Applied Learning to Higher Education across the UK

A comparative study by the University Vocational  
Awards Council

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

There are many benefits to attaining higher level skills, both for individuals in terms of higher pay and rewards, more responsibility and greater job satisfaction, and for the economy in terms of increased productivity. Whilst the route from A Levels and Highers to full-time degree programmes is one that is well defined and well respected in the UK, the route from vocational<sup>1</sup> and applied<sup>2</sup> qualifications, including Apprenticeships, is less clear and one that far fewer individuals follow.

There are two reasons why we should be concerned about this. The first is economic – we recently published the first *National Strategic Skills Audit* for England which shows that the greatest expansion in jobs has been, and is forecast to be, predominantly in high skill areas. The development and effective deployment of higher level skills is essential to the UK's recovery from recession and to sustaining our international competitiveness. Given that over three-quarters of the 2020 workforce is already of working age, it is crucial we support the current stock of individuals in work to gain higher level skills.

The second reason is that encouraging vocational progression to higher level learning is fundamental to social mobility. In recent years the expansion of higher education has disproportionately benefited those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Vocational qualifications and programmes, in contrast, are followed disproportionately by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Better support for individuals on vocational pathways who have the aspiration and ability to achieve higher level skills should have a positive impact on social mobility.

Because of this the UK Commission asked the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) to build on work their Chair, Professor Joy Carter, carried out for the Westminster government looking at progression routes to higher level skills provision in England for those with applied and vocational qualifications. We asked UVAC to extend its work to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and present a picture of progression for the whole of the UK. The purpose of this study is to provide examples of good practice, to contrast policy and operational approaches, to identify issues that could be considered on a UK basis and to make recommendations to maximise progression opportunities for applied and vocational learners.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Vocational' learning programmes and qualifications are those designed primarily to provide entry to, or advancement in, a specific sector of employment. They include BTECs, NVQs/SVQs, apprenticeship programmes, HNCs/HNDs, Foundation degrees and postgraduate professional qualifications.

<sup>2</sup> 'Applied' programmes and qualifications combine general or 'academic' learning with practical learning by situating it in a work-related context. The programmes are designed to provide progression to higher learning or to employment with training. They include Applied A Levels, Scottish Highers in work-related subjects, the new Advanced Diplomas in England and the Welsh Baccaulaureate.

## What is the challenge?

In all four nations, progression from applied provision to higher education is relatively straightforward. The programmes provide clear routes and higher education institutions have incorporated them into entry requirements.

The situation is not as positive for vocational progression. It is difficult to find data to show how many people progress from vocational provision, particularly for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The data for England however show that only six per cent of people on Apprenticeships progress to higher education, and the information we do have from the devolved administrations indicates that the proportion progressing is no higher than this. So there is an issue both with the availability of data and with the rate of progression.

## What needs to be changed?

The overall vision is for a system where individuals following vocational programmes who wish to, and have the ability to, are able to progress smoothly to higher level learning.

This will not be achieved by looking at particular parts of the system in isolation. It is not enough for example for higher education institutions to be more responsive to the needs of work-based learners if the funding methodology does not support this. It is important that the problem is approached from different angles and the report contains recommendations for a range of organisations. Outlined below is a summary of the key recommendations and the changes these should bring about.

Individuals on vocational programmes may often not consider higher education as a progression option. This is partly because the progression routes may not be clear, may not be clearly communicated, or because individuals lack confidence. In order to support individuals to progress we recommend:

- **Information advice and guidance** provides accurate information about vocational options as well as academic options and raises the ambitions of vocational learners who might not have considered higher level skills.
- Governments and higher education institutions highlight the vocational nature of a substantial proportion of higher education provision and the **high status of vocational learning** in the professions (law, medicine etc.) to make vocational education an attractive option for the most able.

People progressing from vocational provision, particularly work-based programmes, are unlikely to find the option of a full-time degree programme attractive. The term 'higher education' still means 'full-time degree' to many people. We need to embrace a broader concept of 'higher level skills' – provision that supports people to develop economically valuable higher level skills in a way that suits their aspirations and practical requirements. We therefore recommend:

- Higher level skills provision is **not just focused on delivery of full-time degree programmes** but goes beyond this and encompasses professional qualifications, vocational qualifications including NVQs/SVQs, Higher Apprenticeships and smaller, bespoke flexible qualifications as well as accredited learning accumulated over time. This will make higher level provision more relevant and accessible to a wider range of people.
- **More options for different modes of study are provided** including part-time, work-based and distance learning to broaden the options for people for whom full-time provision is not a feasible or attractive option.
- Level 3 vocational provision signposts **clearer progression opportunities and routes** to higher level skills to make progression more seamless.
- Effective use is made of **unitised and credit-based approaches** to develop coherent routes that individuals can progress through in a way that suits their needs.
- The **Higher Apprenticeship model** is expanded in existing sectors and extended to new sectors to provide a work-based option for a higher number of people.
- **Vocational qualifications are explicitly and transparently included in entry requirements and in prospectuses**, and **admissions tutors in higher education institutions have more comprehensive knowledge** of different vocational programmes and understand how they form entry points to higher level learning.
- More coherent and consistent use is made of **existing and new methods to take account of prior learning** so that progress is seamless and learning is not duplicated.
- **Higher education institutions respond more effectively to the needs of employers** so that individuals in work can access higher level skills provision that is relevant to their progression through work with the support of their employers.

To underpin this we recommend:

- The strategies, policies and activities of governments, funding organisations and other stakeholders adopt **the wider concept of higher education** (i.e. as ‘higher level skills’ – not just full-time degrees but a much wider range of programmes) as a starting point.
- **Policy and funding methodologies incentivise higher education institutions to support people studying in non-traditional modes**, for example part-time students on work-based programmes as well as people on full-time degree programmes.
- **Employers invest in the development of the higher level skills of their workforce** and public policy encourages this. If the UK is to remain internationally competitive, the demand from employers for higher level skills needs to be increased.
- **More robust information is made available about how many and what types of learners progress from vocational provision to higher level skills** and this information is used to plan provision. This should build on the data collection mechanisms that already exist.



# Acronyms used in this report

<b>AAT</b>	Association of Accounting Technicians
<b>ALPS</b>	Aimhigher Learning Pathways System
<b>APEL</b>	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
<b>ASL</b>	Additional Specialist Learning
<b>ASSC</b>	Alliance of Sector Skills Councils
<b>BIS</b>	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
<b>CCEA</b>	Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment
<b>CIHE</b>	Council for Industry and Higher Education
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>CQFW</b>	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales
<b>CRLI</b>	Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning
<b>DA</b>	Devolved administration
<b>DCELLS</b>	Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Wales)
<b>DCSF</b>	Department for Children, Schools and Families
<b>DEL(NI)</b>	Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland)
<b>EHEA</b>	(Framework for Qualifications of the) European Higher Education Area (commonly known as the Bologna Framework)
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>Fd</b>	Foundation degree
<b>fdf</b>	Foundation Degree Forward
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>FEC</b>	Further Education College
<b>FHEQ</b>	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
<b>FLU</b>	Funded Learning Unit
<b>FTE</b>	Full-Time Equivalent
<b>GCU</b>	Glasgow Caledonian University
<b>GGAP</b>	Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership
<b>GMSA</b>	Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance
<b>H(E)A</b>	Higher (Engineering) Apprenticeship
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education

<b>HEFCE</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for England
<b>HEFCW</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HESA</b>	Higher Education Statistics Agency
<b>HN(Q)</b>	Higher National (Qualification)
<b>HNC</b>	Higher National Certificate
<b>HND</b>	Higher National Diploma
<b>IAG</b>	Information, Advice and Guidance
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>ILM</b>	Institute of Leadership and Management
<b>LLN</b>	Lifelong Learning Network
<b>LSC</b>	Learning and Skills Council
<b>MAG</b>	Modern Apprenticeship Group
<b>MaSN</b>	Maximum Student Number
<b>MBA</b>	Master of Business Administration
<b>NAS</b>	National Apprenticeship Service
<b>NDAQ</b>	National Database of Accredited Qualifications
<b>NOS</b>	National Occupational Standards
<b>NPA</b>	National Progression Award
<b>NPHE</b>	Non-Prescribed Higher Education
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>NVQ</b>	National Vocational Qualification
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>Ofqual</b>	Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>OU</b>	Open University
<b>PDA</b>	Professional Development Award
<b>QAA</b>	Quality Assurance Agency
<b>QCF</b>	Qualifications and Credit Framework
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SCQF</b>	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

<b>SDS</b>	Skills Development Scotland
<b>SFC</b>	Scottish Funding Council
<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
<b>SPA</b>	Supporting Professionalism in Admissions
<b>SQA</b>	Scottish Qualifications Authority
<b>SSC</b>	Sector Skills Council
<b>SSDA</b>	Sector Skills Development Agency
<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
<b>SVQ</b>	Scottish Vocational Qualification
<b>SWAP</b>	Scottish Wider Access Programme
<b>UCAS</b>	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
<b>UDC</b>	University of Derby Corporate
<b>UK Commission</b>	UK Commission for Employment and Skills
<b>UVAC</b>	University Vocational Awards Council
<b>UWIC</b>	University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
<b>VQ</b>	Vocational Qualification
<b>VRQ</b>	Vocationally-Related Qualification
<b>WAG</b>	Welsh Assembly Government

# 1. Introduction

This report outlines a study undertaken by UVAC and commissioned by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to analyse the progression of vocational and applied learners to higher education and higher level learning programmes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and to draw comparisons with approaches adopted in England.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify and outline good practice in approaches to supporting vocational progression in the UK nations.
- Contrast policy and operational approaches (e.g. funding, qualification and programme design, delivery, assessment and validation, recruitment and marketing) that support vocational progression in UK nations.
- Identify issues that could be considered on a UK basis (e.g. vocational and applied qualifications in the UCAS tariff and approaches to working with employers operating throughout the UK).
- Outline and recommend how progression opportunities for vocational and applied learners could be maximised in each devolved nation for employer and individual benefit, and to enhance social mobility and business performance.

This study and analysis of the devolved nations of the UK builds on a review undertaken by Professor Joy Carter, Chair of UVAC and Vice Chancellor of the University of Winchester for Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Minister of State for Higher and Further Education in the Westminster government. Professor Carter's review focused on learner progression from vocational and applied qualifications to higher education in England and was commissioned to inform the Westminster Government's higher education (HE) strategy framework, *Higher Ambitions – The future of universities in a knowledge economy*, the skills strategy, *Skills for Growth*, and to support ambitions to raise skill levels and improve social mobility. Professor Carter's review was published by UVAC in March 2010; the recommendations outlined in this review are reproduced in Appendix 1.

## Definitions

Throughout the report, 'higher level skills', 'higher level learning' and 'higher education' denote learning and qualifications at level 4 and above of the qualifications frameworks of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and level 7 and above on the Scottish framework. For reference, the frameworks are reproduced side by side in Figure 1, including examples of major qualifications positioned within the frameworks. In Chapter 2, (Figure 2, page 18), the levels are referenced against the European Qualifications Framework. Higher level learning may be delivered by a variety of recognised learning providers – universities, colleges, professional bodies, employers and private training providers.

‘Progression’ is used to denote advancement to any programme of accredited higher learning that meets the needs of individuals and/or their employers – to small programmes and short awards as well as ‘full’ HE qualifications; to ‘non-prescribed’<sup>3</sup> higher learning achievements such as professional qualifications and higher level National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs) as well as HE certificates, diplomas and degrees; and to any HE level, be it higher, equal or lower than prior HE attainment. A customised progression programme might include learning at a variety of levels.

‘Vocational’ learning programmes and qualifications are those designed primarily to provide entry to, or advancement in, a specific sector of employment. They include BTECs, NVQs/SVQs, apprenticeship programmes, HNCs/HNDs, Foundation degrees and postgraduate professional qualifications. Many vocational qualifications (VQs) incorporate National Occupational Standards (NOS), which are officially-recognised, UK-wide standards of competence developed and maintained by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs).

‘Applied’ programmes and qualifications combine general or ‘academic’ learning with practical learning by situating it in a work-related context. The programmes are designed to provide progression to higher learning or to employment with training. They include Applied A Levels, Scottish Highers in work-related subjects, the new Advanced Diplomas in England and the Welsh Baccalaureate. Access programmes (SWAP in Scotland – Scottish Wider Access Programmes) in work-related subjects have some of the characteristics of applied programmes but are not regarded as applied qualifications as such. They are therefore regarded as outside the scope of this report.

## Methodology

Material for the report was gathered in four ways – desk research; calls to relevant organisations including universities, colleges, funding organisations, Government departments and other stakeholders and SSCs for views and examples; interviews (face to face and telephone) with individuals in key organisations; and consultation events held in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A list of contributors to the report is given in Appendix 8.

Web-based research was carried out to identify relevant devolved-administration-specific data and information in published material and documents available online. Trawls for relevant research literature, national policies, strategies and data were made of information available from SQA, SFC, Skills Development Scotland, WAG/DCELLS, HEFCW and DEL(NI). Other underpinning data on qualifications and skills were sourced mainly from ONS data releases, HESA tables, SSDA and UK Commission publications, supplemented by specific requests for data from Edexcel and Ofqual. Discussions often generated follow-up research into additional sources of material.

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<sup>3</sup> In England, Non-Prescribed Higher Education (NPHE) denotes vocational programmes such as higher level NVQs which fall outside HEFCE’s remit but which are eligible for funding by the Skills Funding Agency (usually on a discretionary basis).

In the course of the project, discussions were held with over 60 people, nearly all of whom were based in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Interviews (face to face or by telephone) were held with over 30 people and over 40 individuals attended the consultation events in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, hosted by GCU, UWIC and DEL(NI) respectively. In addition, the call for submissions of views and examples made to HEIs, UVAC members, SSCs and to delegates at UVAC and Action on Access conferences generated seven responses.

See Figure 1: Comparison of UK qualifications frameworks<sup>4</sup> overleaf.

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<sup>4</sup> Extracted from QAA/Ofqual/SCQF/CQFW/CCEA/NQAI (2009). This diagram compares qualifications. Qualification frameworks are compared in Figure 2 where they are also mapped to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Main stages of education/employment	The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework www.scqf.org.uk		Qualifications and Credit Framework/National Qualifications Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland* www.ofqual.gov.uk		Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales www.cqfw.net		Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/fheq	
	Level		Level		Level		Level	
Professional or postgraduate education, research or employment	12	Professional Development Awards, Doctoral Degrees	8	Vocational Qualifications Level 8	8	Doctoral Degrees	8	Doctoral Degrees
Higher education	11	SVQ Level 5, Professional Development Awards, Postgraduate Diplomas, Master's Degrees, Integrated Master's Degrees, Postgraduate Certificates	7	Fellowships, NVQ Level 5, Vocational Qualifications Level 7	7	Master's Degrees, Integrated Master's Degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas, Postgraduate Certificates in Education (PGCE), Postgraduate Certificates	7	Master's Degrees, Integrated Master's Degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas, Postgraduate Certificates in Education (PGCE), Postgraduate Certificates
Advanced skills training	10	Bachelor's Degrees with Honours, Professional Development Awards, Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates	6	Vocational Qualifications Level 6	6	Bachelor's Degrees with Honours, Bachelor's Degrees, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates	6	Bachelor's Degrees with Honours, Bachelor's Degrees, Professional Graduate Certificates in Education (PGCE), Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates
Entry to professional graduate employment	9	Bachelor's/Ordinary Degrees, Professional Development Awards, SVQ Level 4, Graduate Diplomas, Graduate Certificates	5	NVQ Level 4, Higher National Diplomas (HND), Higher National Certificates (HNC), Vocational Qualifications Level 5	5	Foundation Degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Higher National Diplomas (HND)	5	Foundation Degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Higher National Diplomas (HND)
Specialised education and training	8	Higher National Diplomas, SVQ Level 4, Professional Development Awards, Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)	5	Higher National Certificates (HNC), Vocational Qualifications Level 5	5	Higher National Diplomas (HND)	5	Higher National Diplomas (HND)
Qualified/skilled worker	7	Professional Development Awards, Higher National Certificates (HNC), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE), SVQ Level 3, Advanced Highers	4	Vocational Qualifications Level 4	4	Higher National Certificates (HNC), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)	4	Higher National Certificates (HNC), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)
Entry to higher education	6	Highers, SVQ Level 3, Professional Development Awards, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	3	NVQ Level 3, Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Levels, Advanced Diplomas	3	NVQ Level 3, Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Levels, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualifications Advanced		
Completion of secondary education	6	Highers, SVQ Level 3, Professional Development Awards, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	3	NVQ Level 3, Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Levels, Advanced Diplomas	3	NVQ Level 3, Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Levels, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualifications Advanced		
Progression to skilled employment	6	Highers, SVQ Level 3, Professional Development Awards, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	3	NVQ Level 3, Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Levels, Advanced Diplomas	3	NVQ Level 3, Vocational Qualifications Level 3, GCE AS and A Levels, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualifications Advanced		
Continuation of secondary education	5	Intermediate 2, Credit Standard Grade, SVQ Level 2, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	2	NVQ Level 2, Vocational Qualifications Level 2, GCSEs at grade A*-C, ESOL Skills for Life, Higher Diplomas, Functional skills Level 2 (English, Mathematics & ICT)	2	NVQ Level 2, Vocational Qualifications Level 2, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualifications Intermediate, GCSEs at grade A*-C		
Secondary education	5	Intermediate 2, Credit Standard Grade, SVQ Level 2, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	2	NVQ Level 2, Vocational Qualifications Level 2, GCSEs at grade A*-C, ESOL Skills for Life, Higher Diplomas, Functional skills Level 2 (English, Mathematics & ICT)	2	NVQ Level 2, Vocational Qualifications Level 2, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualifications Intermediate, GCSEs at grade A*-C		
Initial entry into employment or further education	4	Intermediate 1, General Standard Grade, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) Level 1, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	1	NVQ Level 1, Vocational Qualifications Level 1, GCSEs at grade D-G, ESOL Skills for Life, Foundation Diplomas, Functional skills Level 1 (English, Mathematics & ICT)	1	NVQ Level 1, Vocational Qualifications Level 1, GCSEs at grade D-G, Welsh Baccalaureate Qualifications Foundation		
Qualifications can be taken at any age in order to continue or return to education or training	3	Access 3, Foundation Standard Grades, National Progression Awards, National Certificates	Entry level	Entry level certificates (sub levels 1-3), ESOL Skills for Life, Functional skills entry level (English, Mathematics & ICT)	Entry level	Entry level certificates (sub levels 1-3)		
	2	Access 2, National Progression Awards, National Certificates						
	1	Access 1						

\*The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) will eventually replace the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

## 2. Background: review of vocational and applied learning in the UK devolved administrations

### Literature on progression

There is little academic literature specific to the progression of applied and vocational learners in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, compared to the range of very largely England-focused reports published by UVAC, CIHE, Action for Access, fdf, HEFCE and the Skills Commission. Examples and models of work-based progression to HE, identified by UVAC/fdf (2008) and based largely on English case studies, are reproduced in Appendix 2. A progression chart developed by Carter (2009) is reproduced in Appendix 3. These models (many of which, with adaption, could inform approaches to supporting vocational progression) and the progression chart are included in this report to illustrate developments in England which will be of interest to those working on vocational progression issues in the devolved administrations.

An exception to the absence of academic literature on the progression of applied and vocational learners in the devolved administrations is a newly-published study on the strategic development of higher level workforce development in Wales<sup>5</sup> which contains useful material and analysis. The study's micro-projects have provided some innovative examples of vocational progression in Wales, two of which are summarised in Appendix 4.

### Strategy and policy

#### Work-based progression

Work-based progression to higher level skills has been a (albeit minor) theme of the Westminster Government's skills policy for a decade. Following publication of the Leitch Review of Skills<sup>6</sup>, a number of policies were announced in 2008-9 to support this aim – further growth of Foundation degrees, the incorporation of apprenticeships in the UCAS Tariff, the development of level 4 technician-level qualifications and higher level apprenticeships, and scholarships for apprentices progressing to higher level skills.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the need for higher level skills is apparent in the skills needs assessments of all three devolved administrations. Recent years, influenced by Leitch, have seen significant emphasis placed on developing vocational progression in Scotland and Wales. For example, in a section on improving transition and progression, Scotland's skills strategy, *Skills for Scotland* (2007), states that there needs to be a wider range of progression pathways, with 'smooth transitions between and through learning'<sup>7</sup>. The following year, the funding agencies for FE, HE and apprenticeships in Scotland – the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) – declared in a joint document that they were 'keen to ensure the seamless transition of learners from vocational to higher education and for that transition to be seen as a legitimate alternative access pathway'<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Treadwell and Kennard (2009). Two further volumes are devoted to the study's micro-projects.

<sup>6</sup> HM Treasury (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government (2007) p.24.

<sup>8</sup> SFC (2008) p.4.



In Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) skills strategy, *Skills That Work for Wales* (2008), highlighted the importance of developing a highly-skilled workforce. It promised to develop Foundation degrees, particularly in sectors of strategic importance to Wales, and to explore how progression routes into higher level skills provision from work-based learning such as Modern Apprenticeships could be improved<sup>9</sup>.

In its latest HE strategy *For Our Future* (2009), WAG stated that it expected higher education in Wales to be embedded more inherently within the wider framework for lifelong learning. This would include more systematic linkage to FE and more opportunities for part-time learning, with more programmes designed with appropriate flexibility. Following recommendations of the Graham review of part-time HE in Wales in 2006, WAG also pledged to create greater equity between part-time and full-time students in terms of financial support and fee policy<sup>10</sup>.

A key policy aim of the Welsh HE strategy is a greater proportion of the population developing higher level skills. This would be achieved through greater utilisation of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW); greater use of accreditation of prior learning; and greater scope for learning in progressive, credit-bearing steps, with acceptance of shared responsibility for investment between individuals, employers and government. Many more people would be able to gain higher level skills by following learning pathways planned, designed and delivered collaboratively.

Considerable emphasis is placed in the Welsh HE strategy on the development of Foundation degrees as a way of meeting the deficit in level 4 and 5 skills in Wales. A new strategy for the development of Foundation degrees is to be introduced, with approaches which promote partnerships between HE, FE and employers at regional and national level as the central driver. The £16m ESF-supported initiative to develop new Foundation degrees in Wales, which commenced in 2009, was the first template for this new approach. The ministerial remit letter for 2009-10 to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) pursued the theme, including action to ensure 'that there are identifiable and effective pathways to higher education from vocational and other non-traditional routes including work-based learning.' The Council was also asked to advise on measures to develop part-time provision, including delivery in the workplace<sup>11</sup>.

No comparable policies could be identified in Northern Ireland, where vocational progression routes have been less of a priority for government to date.

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<sup>9</sup> WAG (2008a) pp. 6 and 62.

<sup>10</sup> WAG (2009a) p.4.

<sup>11</sup> DCELLS (2009).

## Applied programmes

Across the UK the picture is more balanced with regard to applied programmes than their vocational counterparts. Applied versions of Scottish Highers and A Levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were designed in collaboration with HEIs as progression platforms on equal terms with their ‘academic’ or ‘general’ counterparts. Acceptance by the most selective universities and the allocation of substantial points in the UCAS Tariff have been a high priority in the development of Diplomas in England, the Welsh Baccalaureate and the new Scottish Baccalaureate at level 3/SCQF levels 6 and 7. Thus, in contrast to most vocational – particularly work-based – programmes, progression to HE from such applied programmes is ‘built-in’ and supported by specific HEI entry policies. Crucially, with selective universities there is almost invariably a requirement that these programmes are combined with, or incorporate, traditional ‘academic’ qualifications.

## Qualifications frameworks

Scotland and Wales are further along than England and Northern Ireland in developing credit-based qualification frameworks. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) are designed to facilitate progression through all levels of learning, including further and higher education. England is still in the process of implementing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), which does not incorporate HE in credit terms. Until the QCF is fully populated, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) continues to operate in parallel, and HE retains its own framework, the FHEQ, which is not based on credit and, though mapped to the same levels as the NQF and QCF, does not use the same level descriptors<sup>12</sup>. In addition, the five ‘old’ levels still exist across the UK in NVQs and SVQs, whose position within the new frameworks is variable or undetermined.

Figure 2 shows how the levels of all the UK frameworks have been referenced against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), commonly known as the Bologna Framework<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> This may explain why HNC is positioned at level 4 on the FHEQ and at level 5 (the same as HND) on the QCF/NQF.

<sup>13</sup> The Bologna Declaration of 1999 put in motion a series of reforms to make European higher education more compatible and comparable throughout Europe.

Figure 2: UK qualifications framework levels referenced against the EQF<sup>14</sup>

EQF	QCF	CQFW	SCQF	EHEA (Bologna)
8	8	8	12	3rd Cycle
7	7	7	11	2nd Cycle
6	6	6	10/9	1st Cycle
5	5/4	5/4	8/7	Short Cycle
4	3	3	6	
3	2	2	5	
2	1	1	4	
1	E3	E3	3	
	E2	E2	2	
	E1	E1	1	

## Qualifications and programmes

### Vocational<sup>15</sup> qualifications (VQs)

Much of the standard ‘menu’ of vocational qualifications and programmes at NQF level 3 and above – NVQs, VRQs, apprenticeships, Higher Nationals (HNs), Foundation degrees, vocationally-related Honours degrees and post-graduate professional qualifications – is common to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Foundation degrees have not been introduced in Scotland, where HN programmes and units are a very prominent feature of provision.

VQs accredited for public funding in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (other than those awarded by HE institutions) are listed in the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ)<sup>16</sup>. Scotland’s vocational provision can be found in SQA’s catalogues of National Qualifications, Higher National Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualifications<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> QCA/SCQFP/CCEA/WAG (2009) p.14.

<sup>15</sup> One contributor in Scotland advised that the term ‘vocational’ is discouraged among Scottish officials, in favour of ‘work-related’ or ‘work-based’.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/NQ\\_Catalogue.xls](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/NQ_Catalogue.xls) and [http://www.sqa.org.uk/files/hn/HN\\_Units.xls](http://www.sqa.org.uk/files/hn/HN_Units.xls)

In Scotland, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are based on the same UK-wide occupational standards as NVQs. Significantly, few VRQs as such are taken in Scotland. This is partly because Scottish apprenticeship frameworks do not require a separate ‘knowledge’ qualification (a VRQ) such as a BTEC National, but mainly, perhaps, because of the introduction of Scottish Group Awards made up of units from SQA’s ‘national catalogue’, a cornerstone of the SCQF. Group Awards include National Certificates and National Progression Awards (NPAs) up to SCQF level 6, and Professional Development Awards (PDAs) available, potentially, up to level 12, the highest level of the Scottish framework.

National Certificates are primarily aimed at 16–18 year olds and adults in full-time education, normally at a college, and have specific aims which relate to occupational areas. NPAs are designed to assess a defined set of skills and knowledge in specialist vocational areas. They are mainly used by colleges for short programmes of study. Both qualifications are linked to National Occupational Standards, the basis of SVQs.

PDAs can incorporate HN units and are marketed by SQA as ‘designed to develop and deliver high level skills in a sharp, flexible and focused way.’ They are aimed particularly at people in work, for use by individuals and employers as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to enhance career prospects and workforce skills.

One contributor described PDAs as ‘an alternative to the traditional ‘full fat’ qualifications with specific entry points.’ They were introduced as a flexible approach to up-skill the existing workforce, are very sector specific, small awards designed to help an individual to develop specific skills for movement between job roles or to develop skills within an existing job role.

There are also Customised Awards in Scotland for individual employers. Customised awards are employer programmes awarded and quality assured by SQA. They are also levelled and credit rated for the SCQF.

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship branding at level 3 differs somewhat across the nations, in that level 3 programmes were re-branded as ‘Advanced Apprenticeships’ in England in 2004, while Wales and Scotland have retained the ‘Modern Apprenticeship’ brand name. Northern Ireland recently dropped Modern Apprenticeship branding in favour of ‘ApprenticeshipsNI’ level 3<sup>18</sup>. Apprenticeships at all levels in Northern Ireland are also often categorised as ‘professional and technical training’, particularly in the context of DEL’s training initiative for young people, Training for Success.

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<sup>18</sup> ApprenticeshipsNI (<http://www.delni.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsni>) being the responsible government agency.

Apprenticeship framework content is common across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland the frameworks differ somewhat from the rest of the UK in that they do not include a separate ‘technical certificate’ – the knowledge requirements are incorporated into the delivery of the SVQ. Legal requirements in the frameworks may also differ slightly, in that they relate to Scottish law. All apprentices have employed status in Scotland, as there are no ‘programme-led’ apprenticeships (in programme-led apprenticeships learners are not employed).

Importantly in the context of progression, higher level apprenticeship-type programmes have emerged in recent years or are in development. In England there are officially-branded ‘Higher Apprenticeship’ frameworks in engineering, ICT, telecommunications and, more recently, accountancy – comprising NVQs or NVQ units up to level 4, functional skills and an HE ‘technical certificate’ – typically a Foundation degree. Higher Apprenticeship is now a significant programme, with 850 starts in 2009<sup>19</sup>. The National Apprenticeship Service in England<sup>20</sup> is considering the development of new Higher Apprenticeships at levels 5, 6 and 7 which would be developed in consultation with professional bodies and SSCs. In this model, HEIs would potentially provide the ‘technical certificate’ and the frameworks would enable individuals with the aspiration and ability to progress from technician to professional and potentially chartered roles through a work-based route with an employer. This would provide a clear and credible work-based progression route comparable to the established traditional ‘academic’ route.

Wales’s Modern Skills Diploma is an apprenticeship programme which includes an NVQ level 4 and a higher level knowledge-based qualification. Scotland, meanwhile, is at the early stages of developing at least two higher apprenticeships at different levels, using the Scottish system’s facility for unitisation (particularly HN units/awards) and presenting the opportunity of progression through four levels of apprenticeship culminating in a high-level professional award.

## Applied qualifications

In England 14-19 Diplomas have been introduced and by 2013 young people should be able to choose from 17 lines of learning. In Wales the broad Welsh Baccalaureate qualification, spanning vocational and academic learning, can incorporate vocational qualifications and, from September 2009, the curriculum has also been able to incorporate major parts of English Diplomas, potentially providing a significant degree of harmonisation between the two nations’ applied qualifications. At level 3 the Welsh Baccalaureate can be achieved as a Core Certificate or as a full Advanced Diploma (the latter again providing common nomenclature across the English and Welsh systems)<sup>21</sup>.

Northern Ireland is maintaining a ‘watching brief’ on Diplomas and meanwhile offers Applied GCSEs and A Levels, which are also available in Wales.

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<sup>19</sup> From a presentation by John Chudley, National Apprenticeship Service, at NSA FE HE Collaboration, Maintaining Successful Collaboration conference London, 2 February 2010.

<sup>20</sup> National Apprenticeship Service (England) <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk>

<sup>21</sup> More details are available at <http://www.wbq.org.uk>

Although the term ‘applied’ appears to be little used in the Scottish system, a group of 12 Higher qualification subjects (which include such titles as Administration and Business Management) are, in effect, applied courses. The greater number of Highers (typically five) taken by individuals than A Levels provides more opportunity to study a mix of general and applied subjects. In addition, the newly-introduced Scottish Baccalaureate brings an ‘applied’ dimension to Advanced Highers, currently in science and languages<sup>22</sup>.

### Higher level qualifications

At the higher levels, several features of Scotland’s system mark it out as fundamentally different from those of the other UK nations. Degree courses in Scotland are typically of four years duration (or part-time equivalent); there are no Foundation degrees, so Higher Nationals (awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority) comprise nearly all qualifications at sub-Bachelor’s level (SQCF levels 7 and 8). Moreover the large majority of Higher Nationals in Scotland are delivered by colleges – in contrast to England where Foundation degrees are delivered by both universities and colleges.

In Northern Ireland, higher level provision is more polarised: since September 2009 all Higher Nationals and Foundation degrees have been delivered by colleges, while all other undergraduate degrees and above are delivered exclusively by HEIs. There are three further distinctive (and, as reported later in this report, contentious) features of Foundation degree provision in Northern Ireland. They must be validated by a local university (unless the subject concerned is not available locally); there are no bespoke ‘top-up’ Honours degrees, so Foundation degree graduates progressing up the degree route must join an existing university degree course; and such articulation is generally to the second year (or part-time equivalent) of the degree course, not to the final year as would usually be the case in England and Wales. The same applies to Higher Nationals in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>22</sup> More details are available at <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/35631.html>

## Data

Figure 3: Vocational certifications in the UK, 2008 (000s)

	UK workforce (000s)	NVQ/ SVQ level 3	VRQ level 3	Apprenticeship level 3	NVQ/SVQ levels 4 and 5	Higher Nationals	Foundation degrees
<b>England</b>	20,059 84.1%	189.7 81.9%	411.6 91.3%	33.4 66.3%	28.0 84.3%	HNC 6.2 HND 6.5 32.7%	14.5 95.9%
<b>Wales</b>	1,066 4.5%	12.9 6.8%	21.1 5.1%	4.2 8.33%	2.2 6.6%	HNC 1.4 HND 3.5 12.6%	0.6 3.8%
<b>Scotland</b>	2,117 8.9%	17.3 9.1%	5.5 1.3%	11.1 22.0%	2.2 6.6%	HNC 11.7 HND 7.9 50.5%	N/A
<b>N. Ireland</b>	610 2.5%	4.1 2.2%	9.3 2.3%	1.7* 3.4%	0.8 2.4%	HNC 0.6 HND 1.0 4.1%	0.04 0.3%

DCSF (2008), ONS/DCSF (2009), HESA (2009), SQA BIS statistics, Skills Development Scotland website, statistics provided by DELNI, statistics provided by Edexcel, author's calculations\* 2005/6.

Figure 3 points to relatively high levels of NVQ, VRQ and apprenticeship achievement in Wales. Level 3 apprenticeship achievements are notably high in Scotland, in part the result of the highest completion rates in the UK (over 70 per cent).

Looking at higher level programmes, Foundation degrees are predominantly achieved in England and Wales, never having been adopted in Scotland and still being at an early stage of development in Northern Ireland. Of particular note in Scotland are the large numbers achieving Higher Nationals. This is only partly explained by the absence of Foundation degrees. HN achievements in Scotland account for over a third of all HE vocational qualifications achieved at 'sub-degree' level in the UK. This largely accounts for Scotland's high relative percentage of people qualified at HE level, as seen in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: UK nationals of working age holding vocational qualifications at NQF level 3 and above**

	<b>Level 3</b> %	<b>Levels 4-6</b> %	<b>Levels 7-8</b> %
<b>Men:</b>			
<b>England</b>	14	9	3
<b>Wales</b>	15	10	2
<b>Scotland</b>	15	15	2
<b>N. Ireland</b>	11	8	1
<b>Women:</b>			
<b>England</b>	9	11	3
<b>Wales</b>	8	13	3
<b>Scotland</b>	7	20	2
<b>N. Ireland</b>	8	14	3

Dickerson, A. (2008).

An additional and unique feature of vocational provision in Scotland is SQA's unitised Group Awards. In 2008 these included the achievement of 2,633 National Certificates (mostly at SQCF level 6/NQF level 3), and over 8,500 Professional Development Awards (PDAs) (all at level SQCF level 6/NQF level 3 and above). Three-quarters of the PDAs were achieved by individuals in the workplace<sup>23</sup>.

In England particularly, many more level 3 NVQs and VRQs are achieved as stand-alone qualifications than as part of apprenticeship programmes. Level 3 apprenticeship completions are relatively high in all three devolved administrations and particularly in Scotland (73 per cent, some 10 per cent higher than England)<sup>24</sup>. Arguably, the lack of a separate 'technical certificate' in Scottish Modern Apprenticeships is a factor in this high success rate. The fact that in Scotland all apprentices have employed status (i.e. there are no programme-led apprenticeships) and therefore may view apprenticeships as a way to progress at work could also be a factor in this high success rate.

As for applied level 3 qualifications, over 38,000 Applied A Levels (about five per cent of all A Levels) were achieved in England in 2009, of which nearly 9,000 were double awards. In Wales and Northern Ireland nearly 9,000 Applied A Levels (over 11 per cent of all A Levels – more than twice that in England) were achieved in total, including nearly 1,900 double awards<sup>25</sup>. In addition, 2,341 Welsh Baccalaureates were achieved at Advanced Diploma level<sup>26</sup>. In Scotland meanwhile, around 18,000 Highers and 4,300 Advanced Highers were achieved in applied subjects<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> SQA BIS Statistics 2008.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.scottish-enterprise.com/se/sds/sds-training-providers/sds-statistics.htm>

<sup>25</sup> JCQ (2009): [http://www.jcq.org.uk/national\\_results/alevels/](http://www.jcq.org.uk/national_results/alevels/)

<sup>26</sup> WAG (2009): <http://new.wales.gov.uk/news/topic/education/2009/090820students/?lang=en>

<sup>27</sup> SQA BIS Statistics 2008.



In England no Advanced Diplomas, introduced in some subjects in 2008, have been achieved because the first cohorts have yet to complete the course.

Numbers undertaking vocational provision are steadily increasing<sup>28</sup>. This includes work-related learning and the achievement of vocational qualifications in schools, spurred by new school curricula – the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, Entitlement Curriculum in Northern Ireland and Revised School Curriculum in Wales.

Higher Nationals, especially HNCs, have steadily declined in England and Wales as Foundation degrees have been introduced, but they still remain popular in certain sectors. It is of some note that Foundation degree take-up in England has been concentrated in particular sectors – business and administration, education, creative arts and social studies being the largest sectors for take-up. For the progression agenda this underlines the need to recognise and support progression to the full-range of higher level learning programmes, particularly in STEM subjects, on the basis of employer and individual need. HNs continue to be the sub-degree vocational provision of choice in Scotland and UK-wide in some major and strategically important sectors such as engineering. HN certifications in the UK overall still outnumber Foundation degrees despite the latter's vigorous growth and relatively generous funding in England.

Country-specific data in the public domain on rates of progression from FE to HE by applied and vocational learners relate mainly to England. These include:

- At least 90 per cent of those with general and Applied A Levels and Higher Nationals. Progression data does not extrapolate those with Applied A Levels, perhaps because these programmes are usually combined with traditional general A Levels<sup>29</sup>.
- Forty per cent of holders of level 3 vocationally-related qualifications (VRQs – BTEC Nationals etc)<sup>30</sup>.
- Six per cent of level 3 apprentices<sup>31</sup>.

As for vocational progression *within* HE, over 50 per cent of Foundation degree graduates progress to Honours. Progression rates for Higher National graduates are more difficult to identify, as HESA statistics in the public domain group Higher Nationals with other sub-degree qualifications, where the progression rate is 30 to 40 per cent overall<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Edge Foundation (2009).

<sup>29</sup> HESA online statistics.

<sup>30</sup> HEFCE (2007).

<sup>31</sup> Skills Commission (2009).

<sup>32</sup> HESA (2009a).

## Funding and infrastructures

### Scotland

Around 25 per cent of HE in Scotland is delivered by the country's 43 colleges, more than double that elsewhere in the UK. This is a reflection of the substantial Higher National provision in Scotland, delivered largely by the FE sector.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC)<sup>33</sup> funds both further education and higher education. Skills Development Scotland (SDS)<sup>34</sup> (formed in 2008 from a merger of Careers Scotland, the Scottish University for Industry and the skills and learning functions of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise) funds Modern Apprenticeships. SDS's functions include provision of Scotland's all-age careers service.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)<sup>35</sup> is the qualifications regulator and principal awarding body for qualifications below degree level. Its portfolio of vocational qualifications is entirely unit-based and includes Skills for Work qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), National Qualification Group Awards like National Certificates (NCs) and National Progression Awards (NPAs) as well as Professional Development Awards (PDAs), HNCs/HNDs and HN units. Figure 5, taken from the ready reckoner for SQA Qualifications in the SCQF, illustrates SCQF levels and credit points for particular qualifications.

Part-time students on degree programmes in Scotland are not entitled to student loans, and most must pay tuition fees, though these are generally significantly lower than in the rest of the UK. Part-time students on both FE and HE with an income of less than £22,000 are eligible for an Individual Learner Account providing up to £500 a year towards the cost of a course, providing at least 40 SCQF credits (see Figure 5) are achieved. Students achieving less than 40 credits are entitled to up to £200 a year. Students may also have access to institutions' discretionary funds to help cover study, travel and childcare costs<sup>36</sup>.

The SFC's Horizon Fund for higher education institutions includes two priority areas that are particularly relevant to vocational progression. One is enhancing employability, which includes funds for a part-time incentive premium. The other supports widening access and progression through better collaboration with schools and colleges, and a widening access retention premium<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> The Scottish Funding Council (<http://www.sfc.ac.uk>).

<sup>34</sup> Skills Development Scotland (<http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk>).

<sup>35</sup> The Scottish Qualifications Authority (<http://www.sqa.org.uk>).

<sup>36</sup> For more information, see the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, <http://www.student-support-saas.gov.uk>

<sup>37</sup> SFC (2009).

Figure 5: Scottish credits 'ready reckoner'<sup>38</sup>

	SCQF level	SCQF credit points
<b>National Courses</b>		
Advanced Higher	7	32
Higher	6	24
Intermediate 2	5	24
Intermediate 1	4	24
Access 3	3	18
Access 2	2	18
<b>Group Awards*</b>		
Higher National Diploma	8	240
Higher National Certificate	7	96
National Certificates	4-6	72
	2-3	54
Professional Development Awards	6-12	
National Progression Awards	2-6	
<b>Standard Grades</b>		
Credit	5	24
General	4	24
Foundation	3	24
<b>Scottish Vocational Qualifications*</b>		
SVQ 5	11	
SVQ 4	8-9	
SVQ 3	6-7	
SVQ 2	5	
SVQ 1	4	

Dickerson, A. (2008).

As stated earlier, the SFC and Skills Development Scotland work jointly to support vocational progression<sup>39</sup>. This includes support for the five-year programme incorporating Modern Apprenticeship, HNC/HND and an MEng degree described in Appendix 5.

<sup>38</sup> Extract from ready reckoner for SQA Qualifications in the SCQF, [http://www.sqa.org.uk/files\\_ccc/SCQF\\_ReadyReckoner\\_071107.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/SCQF_ReadyReckoner_071107.pdf). An interactive ready reckoner is available at <http://www.sqa.org.uk/readyreckoner>

<sup>39</sup> See page 14.

Importantly, the SFC also funds five regional Articulation Hubs and the Open University in Scotland to facilitate articulation between Higher National qualifications and degrees. The areas and lead institutions are:

- Greater Glasgow (Glasgow Caledonian University).
- Lothian and Borders (Edinburgh Napier University).
- North East (Robert Gordon University).
- Fife and Tayside (University of Abertay, Dundee).
- South West (University of the West of Scotland).
- Open University in Scotland.

The work of the largest hub, Greater Glasgow, is profiled in Appendix 5.

The SFC also supports four Wider Access Forums – North, West, South East and Fife – to develop access routes to HE. Their role is similar to that of Aimhigher in England. One of their projects is profiled in Appendix 5<sup>40</sup>.

The Alliance of Sector Skills Councils<sup>41</sup> has a more significant role in apprenticeship in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, in that it hosts and is a member of the Modern Apprenticeship Group (MAG), which approves all MA frameworks and oversees the marketing of apprenticeships in Scotland. Other MAG member organisations are the Scottish Government, Scotland's Colleges, Skills Development Scotland, SQA, the Scottish Training Federation and the Scottish TUC.

## Wales

Further education and work-based learning are funded by the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS)<sup>42</sup>. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)<sup>43</sup> funds HE in HEIs and colleges.

HEFCW's credit-based teaching funding method aims to promote flexibility in the structure and location of courses. This includes continuing professional development (CPD) and bespoke courses in the workplace. The Council's Third Mission Fund can be used to support skills and employment activities, including graduate employability. Widening participation is supported through its Reaching Wider programme<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> More information about the forums is available at [http://www.sfc.ac.uk/access/wider\\_access\\_regional\\_forums/wider\\_access\\_regional\\_forums.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/access/wider_access_regional_forums/wider_access_regional_forums.aspx)

<sup>41</sup> The Alliance of Sector Skills Councils (<http://www.sscalliance.org>).

<sup>42</sup> Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/?lang=en>).

<sup>43</sup> The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (<http://www.hefcw.ac.uk>).

<sup>44</sup> For more information, see [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars\\_2007/w0718he%20circ.pdf](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2007/w0718he%20circ.pdf) and [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policy\\_areas/widening\\_access/reaching\\_wider\\_initiative.aspx](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/policy_areas/widening_access/reaching_wider_initiative.aspx)

Financial support for part-time HE students in Wales is similar to the system in England, with access to loans but very restricted access to fee and course grants. Students in financial difficulty may have access to institutions' Access to Learning Funds, but only on a discretionary basis if their programme is less than 50 per cent full-time equivalent. Wales's Individual Learner Accounts, like Adult Learner Grants in England, cannot be used for HE study<sup>45</sup>.

The Wales Employment and Skills Board<sup>46</sup> was created in May 2008 to advise the government on employment and skills policies, and to drive forward the implementation of the skills and employment strategy.

GO Wales<sup>47</sup>, established in 2003 and funded by the WAG and the European Social Fund, provides a variety of work experience opportunities for graduates, underpinned by short level 4 awards. The Graduate Training and Development Fund (summarised in Appendix 4) provides grants to SME employers of up to £1,500 a graduate (including Higher National) employee for higher level training.

Careers Wales<sup>48</sup> was set up in 2001, bringing together six regional careers companies across Wales under one national brand name. WAG contracts with the six companies to deliver a wide range of careers services for both adults and 17 – 19 year-olds.

## Northern Ireland

A strong 'academic' tradition in Northern Ireland schools, reinforced by the selective secondary system, is reflected in good A Level results and the hegemony of the traditional 'royal route' to degree programmes. However, the school curriculum does include substantial applied and vocational options, with courses delivered by school-college partnerships.

FE and HE in Northern Ireland are funded directly by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)<sup>49</sup>. The funding formula, based on Funded Learning Units (FLUs) is broadly similar across both sectors, with higher unit prices applied to higher level provision, whether delivered in colleges or HEIs. HE places in colleges and universities are capped by 'MaSN' (Maximum Student Number) allocations.

There are initiatives for widening participation in HE but there are no specific funds earmarked for employer engagement or Foundation degrees.

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<sup>45</sup> For more information, see [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyingfortheirsttime/DG\\_171529](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/Applyingfortheirsttime/DG_171529) and <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learners/16plusineducation/fe/ila/?skip=1&lang=en>

<sup>46</sup> The Wales Employment and Skills Board (<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/foremployers/employmentskillboard/?lang=en>).

<sup>47</sup> GO Wales (<http://www.gowales.co.uk>).

<sup>48</sup> Careers Wales (<http://www.careerswales.com>).

<sup>49</sup> Department for Employment and Learning (<http://www.delni.gov.uk>).

Financial support for part-time degree students in Northern Ireland is similar to the system in England, with access to loans but restricted access to fee and course grants. The maximum course grant available to a part-time student is £260 a year. Part-time students in financial difficulty have access to institutions' Support Funds only if their course is of at least one year's duration and takes no more than twice as long to complete as an equivalent full-time course<sup>50</sup>.

Apprenticeships are funded by (and branded) ApprenticeshipsNI, an agency of DEL and part-funded by the European Social Fund. Payments to training providers are triggered by the achievement of programme milestones and outputs, with the addition of an employer incentive payment of £500-£1,500 upon completion of the framework<sup>51</sup>.

Following the review, *Further Education Means Business*, in 2004, Northern Ireland's 16 colleges were re-organised into six large, area-based colleges. The review positioned FE at the heart of lifelong learning, its aim being to strengthen economic development, enhance social cohesion and advance the individual's skills and learning.

There are two local universities, Queen's and Ulster – and a third, the Open University in Ireland, which is regarded as a local institution. Queen's is a selective, Russell Group institution. Although Ulster incorporates a former polytechnic and is more vocationally-orientated than Queen's, it does not regard itself as a 'Post-'92' university, and attaches considerable importance to its growing research capability.

There is a number of sector-focused Workforce Development Forums co-ordinated by DEL. The role of the forums is to articulate the skills needs for the local economy of the area and to encourage and promote a strategic response to those needs from existing local public and private sector training providers within the existing local resource allocation. These are relatively new and to date have concentrated on levels 2 and 3, not progression to higher level learning<sup>52</sup>.

The careers service is an all-age information, advice and guidance service administered by the Careers Service Support Unit (CSSU)<sup>53</sup> within DEL. Careers advisers are based in JobCentres, Jobs and Benefits Offices, and Careers Offices throughout Northern Ireland.

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<sup>50</sup> For more information, see [http://www.studentfinancenri.co.uk/portal/page?\\_pageid=54,1268443&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://www.studentfinancenri.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=54,1268443&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

<sup>51</sup> DELNI/ApprenticeshipsNI (2009) Annex 2.

<sup>52</sup> For more information, see <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills/workforce-development-forums.htm>

<sup>53</sup> Careers Service Support Unit (<http://www.careersserviceni.com/Cultures/en-GB/CareerService>).

## Commentary

Although the underpinning academic literature on vocational progression is overwhelmingly centred on England, as outlined in the next chapter there is clear evidence of significant and growing higher level skills needs in all three devolved administrations. Scotland and Wales have responded in their national strategies with calls for non-traditional vocational progression pathways to HE to help meet these needs.

As in England, progression to HE from the new applied programmes in Scotland and Wales promises to be relatively uncontentious. In contrast to level 3 vocational qualifications, HEIs have a stake in the development of the new applied programmes, which are recognised both in the UCAS Tariff and in HEI entry policies. Much of this report is therefore focused on the big issues around the progression of vocational learners in the devolved administrations – particularly people in work in skilled roles, but without the conventional brace of A Levels or Highers. Although notable and exemplary exceptions are apparent, apprentices, particularly, are barely on the radar of HEIs across the UK and effectively hit a ‘glass ceiling’ at level 3.

The emergence of higher level apprenticeship frameworks, although still at an early stage, is a very significant development. With student debt a major barrier to participation in HE among non-traditional potential students, the opportunity to progress to professional and chartered levels through a ladder of Higher Apprenticeships promises to be of great appeal to skilled and able workers who might otherwise never realise their potential to fill more senior roles. For employers, Higher Apprenticeships allows them to ‘grow their own’ and ‘raise their game’ in an increasingly competitive world where high-performance working and management are key to future prosperity. For governments, fairer access to higher level skills has added benefits of improving social mobility and the cost-effectiveness of co-funding these higher level programmes with employers. And business-facing institutions, not least, stand to gain from a higher share of the workforce development market, which could offset some of the effects of potential cuts in public funding for HE.

Vocational progression is a major policy priority in England and substantial investment and successful local work has been undertaken by Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) and others to develop and support vocational progression pathways. Scotland and Wales, however, are further ‘down the track’ than England and Northern Ireland on key progression tools – credit-based qualifications and frameworks spanning all levels that promise far greater flexibility and ability to learn in small steps than previously, which is undoubtedly a key approach in engaging employers and employees in higher level work-based learning. Scotland’s Group Awards, notably Professional Development Awards (PDAs), have considerable potential to facilitate vocational progression to higher levels. More evidence is, however, needed on the actual extent to which learners from lower level vocational programmes have progressed onto and through PDAs.

Several issues on credit frameworks emerge from our research. One is the complex array of frameworks, levels and credit systems across the four UK nations, presenting considerable challenges for policy-makers and providers, and for employers and individuals operating or moving across UK boundaries. The issue is compounded by the increasingly divergent system in Scotland from the other nations, including the unitisation of Higher National qualifications. On the other hand, if divergence is the result of innovative policies and practice from which the other nations might learn, it could present an opportunity to advance the progression agenda across the UK and provide a more harmonised approach that would be beneficial to learners, employers and the UK as a whole. These and other issues are examined in the following chapters.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

The progression policies of governments, strategies and activities should include a broader range of higher level qualifications and learning programmes. This should include professional qualifications, NVQs/SVQs, Higher Apprenticeships, smaller flexible bespoke qualifications and accumulative provision that best meet the needs of individuals and employers.

### Recommendation 2

The Higher Apprenticeship model should be expanded in existing sectors and extended to new sectors. New Higher Apprenticeship partnership development and delivery models involving HE institutions, further education colleges, Sector Skills Councils, awarding organisations, professional bodies and private sector learning providers should be tested.

### Recommendation 3

Awarding Organisations and higher education institutions should assess the appropriateness and potential benefits of introducing a Professional Development Award (PDA)-type qualification in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.



# 3. Rationale for applied and vocational progression in the devolved administrations

## Skills case

Both UK-wide and nation-specific labour market research in recent years has highlighted the substantial and growing need for higher level skills in all UK nations. For individuals, higher earnings, which research on wage returns shows to be considerable for higher skill levels in all the UK nations<sup>54</sup>, are of course a major incentive.

For England, the *National Strategic Skills Audit* published by the UK Commission provides a comprehensive picture of current and future skills needs. The skills audit shows that newly created jobs are predominantly in higher skilled occupations (managers, professionals, technical occupations) and future demand for higher skills is underlined by drivers such as globalisation, sophistication in consumer demand and developing technologies.

Figure 6 shows workforce percentages and projected growth in the three highest level occupational groups – managers, professionals and technicians. Although England’s higher level skills needs are highest in almost all categories, particularly in management, those in the devolved administrations are nonetheless substantial.

However, Scotland’s projected growth of associate professional and technicians is significantly lower than in other UK nations, suggesting that action here needs to be more focused on developing managers and ‘chartered’ professionals. Research for this report found very little support, however, for a recent report claiming that Scotland had an over-supply of people with Higher National qualifications<sup>55</sup>.

**Figure 6: Percentage of the UK workforce in managerial, professional and technician-level occupations, 2006, and projected growth 2007-17**

	Scotland		Wales		N. Ireland		England		UK	
	% 2006	% growth 2007-17	% 2006	% growth 2007-17	% 2006	% growth 2007-17	% 2006	% growth 2007-17	% 2006*	% growth 2007-17
<b>Managers/ Senior officials</b>	13.2	+15.2	13.1	+14.0	10.3	+20.6	16.1	+23.8	15*	+18.1
<b>Professionals</b>	12.6	+16.0	10.8	+15.3	12.2	+15.1	12.1	+20.3	13*	+15.7
<b>Associate prof and technical</b>	13.9	+7.8	12.3	+12.4	11.8	+16.1	14.5	+19.1	14*	+14.6

SSDA (2008 a,b,c), UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2008). \* Rounded numbers only available.

<sup>54</sup> Dickerson (2008).

<sup>55</sup> Universities Scotland (2009).

Some sectors of the economy employ a higher proportion of people with higher level skills needs than others, and these vary across the UK regions and nations. For example, in Northern Ireland the hotels and restaurants sector employs the largest proportion of managers and senior officials (20.2 per cent), while in the UK as a whole the sector employs only the ninth largest proportion.

It is also important to note that the high proportion of management-level staff in a sector of a nation's workforce may not be matched by high qualification levels among those managers. This reflects the fact that management tasks can require different levels of skill and different skill-sets in different sectors, and that in some sectors formal qualifications are less associated with management roles than in others. By contrast, professionals and technicians are almost invariably required by law or professional regulation to hold formal qualifications recognised by the relevant professional or trade body. The level and size of these qualifications may vary considerably from one sector or profession to another.

The rising age profile of the workforce, with approximately 80 per cent of the 2020 UK workforce already of working age, is shifting the focus from young people to increasing emphasis on developing the skills of people in work. In Scotland, discussions raised the benefits of 'growing your own' in terms of staff retention, and the need to challenge the myth that training encourages employees to leave.

## Widening participation

Vocational learners up to level 3 tend to come from lower socio-economic groups. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions noted that more than twice as many young people from lower socio-economic groups choose vocational routes as young people with parents in professional occupations<sup>56</sup>. Overall, vocational progression was seen primarily by many contributors in the devolved administrations in terms of widening access to HE. Scottish contributors stressed the culture of widening access in Scotland, making it integral, not an add-on, to the education system.

Many activities in the devolved administrations in this area, supported by targeted public funding, are similar to those of Aimhigher in England, i.e. aimed at individuals in low participation groups. While such an approach produces worthy individual examples of vocational progression, it does not generally in itself forge sustainable progression routes. These require a more joined-up approach linked to the labour market, as adopted by Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) in England in recent years. Although the LLN model does not exist in the devolved administrations, there is evidence of innovative practice in vocational progression, particularly in Scotland, as outlined in Chapter 2.

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<sup>56</sup> The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) p.22.

## Demand for progression

As in England, demand for work-based progression to HE in the devolved administrations appears to be somewhat muted, despite the strong case in terms of skills needs, earning potential and widening participation. Issues regarding employer demand were generally seen in the wider context of employer engagement with HEIs, which required working proactively with employers to 'raise their game' and stimulate demand for higher workforce skills. This theme, articulated by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in its *Ambition 2020* report, was echoed in the Wales Employment and Skills Board's first annual report in 2009: *A Wales that Works* called for higher ambitions among employers that would translate into 'greater demand for and utilisation of advanced skills'. Critical to both was the quality of management and leadership, particularly in SMEs<sup>57</sup>.

A very weak, even imperceptible, actual demand for progression among apprentices was echoed across the nations – there was no evidence of large numbers of apprentices applying for higher level programmes or employers requesting programmes from universities or colleges to develop the skills of their apprentices. There is, however, a paradox here. In England, the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) recently quoted their research findings that 50 per cent of apprentices who completed an Advanced Apprenticeship showed an interest in pursuing a degree-level equivalent course<sup>58</sup>. However, such latent demand appears to remain very largely unfulfilled, in that little such progression actually takes place. There is accordingly a need to stimulate demand for vocational progression among individuals and employers to develop workforce skills. Earlier LSC research revealed a perception among FE learners that apprenticeships can close off future career choices and academic progression<sup>59</sup>.

In Wales the need for progression routes to meet the needs of a wide range of employees, not just apprentices, was stressed. This would involve articulating who the target learners were, as their needs would vary by role, sector, employer size etc. This is an important issue as, unlike the more linear and predictable progression of their academic peers, vocational learners often do not progress immediately to further learning but do so several years after the completion of their learning programme<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Wales Employment and Skills Board (2009) p.5.

<sup>58</sup> At NSA FE HE Collaboration, Maintaining Successful Collaboration conference, London 2 Feb 2010.

<sup>59</sup> LSC (2008).

<sup>60</sup> HEFCE (2009) pp.10-12; HEFCE (2007) p.25.

In Scotland there was some evidence of an ‘appetite for progression’ among people in work, in particular the large numbers enrolled on part-time Higher Nationals, MBAs and other vocational programmes. Professional Development Awards (PDAs) were also very much demand-led and popular with employers who would not fund a full Higher National qualification but would support employee development through a smaller, flexible PDA which could be ‘topped-up’ to a full qualification at a later stage. Indeed, it was suggested that, given the flexibility and relatively generous support for learners in Scotland, lack of individual drive and ambition was a significant factor, an observation that contrasts with the earlier finding of the NAS in England on apprentices’ interest in progressing to HE. This suggests that there is an argument for stimulating demand in sectors where action of this type could meet defined skills needs.

In Northern Ireland there was a strong consensus view that any vocational progression strategy should be linked to the devolved administration’s economic strategy. Demographic change should also be considered, in particular the medium to long-term decline in the numbers of young people and therefore the need for HEIs to focus on developing the higher level skills of individuals already in the workplace.

A consistent finding in every devolved administration was a high level of interest, particularly in the FE sector, in developing higher level vocational progression routes for people in work of whatever age. Activities cited and issues raised, including ‘supply’ factors impeding demand, are discussed in the following chapters.

## Commentary

The argument for ensuring that individuals with vocational qualifications, who have the aspiration and ability, can progress is undoubtedly solid from a skills and social mobility perspective. Less certain is how this relates to particular sectors and more fundamentally the needs of individual employers and their employees. SSCs have an obligation to produce labour market information for information, advice and guidance (IAG) purposes and their position as the prime sectoral provider in this respect should enable the development of progression pathways that clearly articulate work-based routes to higher level skills provision. Where a skills need exists, more reference should be made to vocational progression in SSC Sector Skills Agreements and Sector Qualifications Strategies, and greater use made of these to inform IAG.

A striking issue is the marked contrast in the large proportion of apprentices expressing an interest in developing higher level skills and the very small numbers who do in fact progress. This suggests the perception among college students that apprenticeships close off future career choices and academic progression is largely justified. More positively, the finding that the majority of these students would be more likely to pursue the apprenticeship option if it did provide a route to HE illustrates the significant demand the development of such a

Crucial to this agenda is to redefine higher education and its offering to vocational learners and employers, so that demand can be stimulated. ‘Bespoke’, ‘customised’, ‘bite-size’ and ‘work-based’ are all key approaches covered in later sections of this report. Even more fundamental is the need to position the offering as a service to develop the skills needed by an employer to develop their business. For HE institutions as a whole and partner FE colleges, developing and supporting vocational progression is undoubtedly a tool to enhance social mobility, but a more detailed understanding of this issue is needed across all UK nations.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 4

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) should place more emphasis in their Sector Skills Agreements and Sector Qualification Strategies on articulating detailed higher level sector skills needs in each nation of the UK and on the development of appropriate workforce development activities and vocational progression routes to meet such needs. SSCs should also use the labour market information they produce to support the work of information, advice and guidance practitioners and outline progression pathways that clearly articulate work-based routes to higher level skills provision. Where such routes do not exist, SSCs should work with employers, professional bodies and higher education institutions to develop them.

### Recommendation 5

The Social Mobility Commission should ensure that supporting and monitoring improvements in progression from vocational provision to higher education that enhance social mobility is core to its activities.

### Recommendation 6

Public policy should ensure that stimulating vocational progression is a cornerstone of its work in raising employer demand for higher level skills.

## 4. Progression routes in the devolved administrations

### Overview

Lack of relevant progression data makes comparisons difficult, but broadly the comparative findings of our research are:

- Progression to HE from level 3 applied programmes (Applied A Levels, Highers in work-related areas, Welsh Baccalaureate etc.) is far less contentious than vocational progression in all countries and broadly perceived as on a par with general qualifications (with which applied qualifications are often combined and which applied programmes may incorporate).
- Progression from level 3 VRQs (BTEC Nationals etc.) appears to be broadly similar in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with a significant proportion (27 per cent in England<sup>61</sup>) progressing to vocational ‘sub-degree’ programmes – HNC, HND and Foundation degrees.
- No data on work-based progression in the devolved administrations from level 3 apprenticeships was identified; our interviews suggest that the incidence of such progression is even lower than the six per cent identified in England<sup>62</sup>.
- Higher level apprenticeship models at different stages of development are apparent in Scotland and Wales as well as England<sup>63</sup>.
- Overall, work-based progression (and HEI engagement with employers and workforce development generally) is less well developed in the devolved administrations than in England, and comparatively undeveloped in Northern Ireland.

Progression routes, models and supporting initiatives in England taken from the Carter report are given in Appendices 2, 3 and 6. Findings specific to each devolved administration are summarised below.

### Scotland

Two features of the learning and skills landscape in Scotland stand out as shaping current vocational progression routes to higher learning – the credit and qualifications framework (SCQF) and SQA Higher National qualifications.

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<sup>61</sup> HEFCE (2007) Pathways to higher education: BTEC courses.

<sup>62</sup> HEFCE (2009) p.26.

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 2, p.20.

The development of the SCQF was supported by a unit-based qualifications system with Group Awards made up of credit-bearing units at appropriate levels from SQA's national catalogue. Professional Development Awards (PDAs) made up of HN units are particularly relevant in the context of vocational progression and, as outlined in Chapter 2, substantial numbers of these awards are being achieved. Although examples of the use of PDAs as tools for vocational progression have proved difficult to identify, a range of other examples are documented in Appendix 5. These include:

- extensive work by the articulation hubs in facilitating progression from Higher Nationals to degrees, including HN-to-degree articulation agreements. The work of the largest hub, Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership, includes a well-developed mentoring scheme. In addition, a contributor described the work of the Lothian and Borders articulation hub to track HN students using data from SQA, SFC and HESA. This matching exercise has the potential to provide a comprehensive national dataset;
- development of flexible credit arrangements by SQA enabling degree students who discontinue their studies to achieve a Higher National qualification;
- *On Track*, a range of enhancement modules developed by the West of Scotland Wider Access Forum and delivered to vocational learners by trained student tutors to facilitate progression to degree study;
- *Engineers of the Future*, a five-year higher level apprenticeship programme, unique in Scotland, incorporating Modern Apprenticeship, HNC/HND and a Masters degree in an appropriate engineering discipline. The programme is a three-way partnership between Ineos Manufacturing (a large chemicals company), Forth Valley College and Heriot Watt University.

Regarding apprenticeship, the Modern Apprenticeship Group (MAG) is currently leading work to develop higher level programmes by incorporating HN units. This significant development builds on work with the engineering sector to enhance the existing Modern Apprenticeship frameworks to technician level. This in turn builds on the development of Higher Apprenticeship frameworks in England in the engineering, IT and telecommunications sectors<sup>64</sup>, and most recently in accountancy.

An added benefit of Scotland's single, credit-based framework has been to extend the notion of progression to movement across and down, as well as up, the framework levels, to meet individual and employer needs. For example, a Higher National qualification, or HN units, may be the most effective progression for a graduate seeking to gain the skills needed for employment.

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<sup>64</sup> fdf (2008).

## Wales

Interestingly, examples of vocational progression in Wales illustrate a particular difference to Scotland; whereas in Scotland examples are systematic, those in Wales are largely project based. This is perhaps indicative of the overall approach to vocational progression in Wales. Three examples elaborated in Appendix 4 are given below.

- Engineering Higher Apprenticeship pioneered by Airbus at its plant in Broughton, North Wales. This three-year programme comprises NVQs at levels 2 and 4, a BTEC Engineering National Certificate, five Key Skills at level 3, an ILM level 3 Certificate in First Line Management and a Foundation degree in Aeronautical Engineering, leading to Honours. (Surprisingly no contributors in Wales mentioned this example, which was sourced from research into apprentice progression UVAC carried out for fdf in 2007.)
- Work-based learning contracts. This is from a review carried out by Trinity College Carmarthen and the University of Glamorgan. It was one of seven projects carried out for a HEFCW feasibility study into the establishment of an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development, presented to the WAG in 2009. The project identified the use of learning contracts for work placements, the development of skills and competences, and for negotiation of both individual modules and whole programmes of study. Examples are provided from the University of Glamorgan, the Open University, Trinity College Carmarthen and UWIC.
- Foundation degree and Masters in Applied Professional Practice at the Cardiff School of Management, UWIC. Both degrees are innovative in design and delivery with an emphasis upon learner support that recognises the different needs of vocational learners.

Two other innovations in Wales are worthy of note:

- Modern Skills Diplomas: a 'higher apprenticeship' model at levels 4 and 5 incorporating a higher level NVQ and an ILM certificate. The Diploma provides progression to a Foundation degree.
- Glamorgan Business School's NVQ progression route to an MBA.

## Northern Ireland

No examples could be identified through web research or by contributors, beyond individuals such as a college BTEC student gaining a university place (rather than sustainable progression routes). However, considerable interest was expressed in discussions in developing vocational progression routes.



## Commentary

As progression to HE from applied programmes (Applied A Levels, Highers in work-related areas, Welsh Baccalaureate etc.) is less contentious, the big issues are around vocational progression and particularly the progression of people in work such as apprentices and adults (who want to develop higher level skills) more generally. This is not to say that activity should not be undertaken to raise the aspirations of those following applied programmes. One observation worth noting is that learners entering higher level provision with applied qualifications will have experienced and may prefer different learning styles to their academic counterparts, particularly project-based learning, which may have implications for the design and delivery of some traditional first-year degree programmes.

Although there is a more extensive range of nascent vocational progression routes in England, there are examples of highly innovative developments in other nations that could potentially enrich the progression agenda across the UK. The use of the SCQF as a flexible tool for describing learning in small, customised, credit-bearing steps particularly merits attention, as discussed in the next chapter. There is also considerable scope for sharing good practice across the UK.

## Recommendation

### Recommendation 7

As progression to higher education from level 3 (SCQF Level 6) applied programmes and VRQs is more established than that from work-based programmes, policy and development activity should be focused on the development of work-based progression routes.

# 5. Articulation and HE admissions issues

## Overview

Many comments made in the devolved administrations about articulation and HE admissions issues resonated throughout the UK and were reflected in the Carter report. These included:

- defined and accepted vocational progression pathways were at an early stage of development;
- poor understanding of VQs among admissions staff in HEIs;
- a perception that some vocational learners were less able than their academic peers;
- poor articulation between work-based FE and HE;
- patchy specification of VQs in HEI entry requirements and UCAS entry profiles;
- poor coverage of VQs in the UCAS Tariff;
- patchy use of APEL/RPL in HEIs' entry and assessment systems.

A further point made was that existing progression models were too focused on large organisations and accordingly were not fit for purpose for SMEs.

Discussion of more nation-specific issues is outlined below.

## Scotland

The well-established SCQF and extensive development and refinement of SQA Group Awards provide a coherent framework of credit-based provision and progression across all levels, with the facility for vocational progression in small, credit-bearing steps. Numbers achieving the awards, such as the 8,500 achieving PDAs, appear to indicate that the system is being used by work-based learners and their employers.

However there was some scepticism among contributors about the extent of the framework's use, about public understanding of SCQF levels, and whether the system was facilitating progression effectively in practice. The extent to which PDA take-up was college vis-à-vis employer-driven was questioned, as was the extent of employer 'buy-in' and awareness of PDAs and the effectiveness of articulation to some parts of the HE sector. Some called for more flexibility in approaches to progression, with an emphasis on generic, transferable skills and the ability to 'step on and off' at intervals that meet individual and employer needs. This may well be a funding issue as the unit-based system facilitates such an approach.

There was clearly pride in the SCQF as ‘unique in the world’, not least because it recognised employers’ own programmes as well as national qualifications. The framework had involved a ‘long, hard slog’ and was ‘not there yet’. It was not merely a receptacle for qualifications; it could be used in a variety of ways as a lifelong learning tool to make progression easier. A major issue was to gain the mutual ‘trust’ and recognition in credit needed among providers, employers and learners to have progression based on small, bite-size steps in learning.

The lack of technical certificates in Scottish Apprenticeship frameworks was not considered an issue, as the knowledge requirements were incorporated and rigorously assessed. Skills Development Scotland had funded work on Accelerated Apprenticeships to enable talented apprentices to progress quickly to HNs. Pilot projects currently being developed to incorporate HND or HN units into apprenticeship frameworks are further promising developments in this area.

Higher Nationals were widely regarded as Scotland’s great strength in articulation. The six Articulation Hubs are specifically focused on articulation between HNs and degree programmes, moving the progression agenda beyond the large number of theoretical progression routes. Articulation is seen not only as facilitating progression to a higher level: flexible credit arrangements agreed with SQA make it possible for students unable to complete a full degree programme to achieve HN certification and leave with a vocational qualification that has currency in the employment market<sup>65</sup>. HNs in Scotland were often described as ‘advanced FE’, rather than HE, a description occasionally applied to both Foundation degrees and HNs in England.

The use of RPL was felt to be patchy, but SSCs were helping to address the issue. A need was felt for a UK-wide approach to the recognition of prior learning through a mutually-respected credit model, enabling credit to be transferred across borders. A Europe-wide approach was advocated through use of the European Credit Framework – this is, however, still some way from coming into being.

## Wales

As in Scotland, Wales was felt to be ‘further down the track’ than England on the facilitation of progression through credit accumulation and transfer through its credit and qualifications framework. There was, however, little evidence as to the actual extent that this was supporting vocational expression. It was acknowledged that the potential of the CQFW had yet to be realised, not least because the HE sector in Wales, in common with England and Northern Ireland, has a separate, if linked, framework – the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications overseen by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

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<sup>65</sup> Details in Appendix 5.

The CQFW was felt to have the potential to provide huge opportunities, but that Wales ‘hadn’t got it right yet’. A ‘pick ‘n’ mix’ approach was needed, but provision was ‘still in silos’. The ‘rhetoric’ was there but in practice the framework was not yet a single entity, because the HE sector ‘still does credit its own way’. Using the credit-based framework effectively would require a ‘huge change of culture and collaboration’. A lot of quality-assured lifelong learning was outside the credit framework. There was pressure to address the issue, but there were formidable barriers – tradition, funding, HEI autonomy and competition.

One contributor, not contradicted by others, spoke of a ‘crisis of progression in Wales’, particularly from apprenticeships. There were calls for more effective articulation between FE and HE, and more consistency in HEIs’ admissions policies. The focus on articulation to accredited programmes was questioned, with a call to broaden the debate to progression to *learning* at whatever level. The success, or otherwise, of the lifelong learning and progression agenda was seen to be particularly dependent on regional partnerships. Learner migration from Wales to HEIs in England with a track record of offering innovative vocational programmes was seen as an issue. A danger was noted by several contributors that, following completion of their programme, such learners would not return to Wales.

## Northern Ireland

Since 2009 all sub-Bachelors HE provision in Northern Ireland has been delivered by colleges. This means that progression from FE programmes to sub-degree provision – in particular to Higher Nationals and Foundation degrees – normally takes place within colleges. This should benefit progression, though no national data could be identified to confirm whether this was actually the case.

The big articulation issue in Northern Ireland concerns progression from Foundation degrees and Higher Nationals to Honours at university. Whereas Foundation degree and HND graduates in England and Wales can normally expect to ‘top-up’ to Honours in a year (or part-time equivalent), articulation to degree programmes at the two Northern Ireland universities usually involves a further two years of study.

The reasons for this discrepancy appear to lie in the absence, on grounds of viability, of bespoke ‘top-up’ degrees in Northern Ireland: Foundation degree and HND graduates progressing to Northern Ireland universities must join an existing programme, which may be very different in content and delivery from their ‘sub-degree’ programme. As a result, there is evidence – anecdotal, in the absence of data – that students are migrating to England to do their ‘top-up’ year, with the danger that they will not return to use their skills to assist the regeneration of Northern Ireland.

The '2+2' issue (where 'top-up' from a Higher National or Foundation degree to Honours typically takes two years in Northern Ireland, rather than one year on the mainland) is the subject of much debate. The current position is summarised as '2+1-plus', that is, one additional year plus a variable bridging requirement, dependent on the achieved and destination programmes. Although this means it may be possible to do the required bridging module in the summer and thus enter the Honours programme in year three, this appears to be the exception in practice. However, an articulation agreement between North West Regional College and the Magee campus of the University of Ulster may provide a solution. The agreement hinges on incorporating the necessary bridging module into the final-year delivery of an HND, so that the students can progress to Honours in a year. There are plans to roll out the agreement to other programmes, including Foundation degrees.

The importance of APEL in facilitating vocational progression was raised by a number of contributors. APEL guidelines are being developed across the universities and colleges in a project facilitated by fdf.

Admissions to the University of Ulster, the principal destination in Northern Ireland for vocational higher level learners, are based largely on UCAS points. The paucity of VQs in the UCAS Tariff is therefore a significant issue.

Overall, a belief existed in Northern Ireland that more needed to be done to push forward the progression agenda in tandem with the employer engagement and workforce development agenda. The relatively small-scale development of Foundation degrees was seen as symptomatic of this issue. The sector-focused Workforce Development Forums co-ordinated by DEL currently focus on levels 2 and 3, and a view was expressed that their focus could usefully be extended to higher level skills.

With the very academic educational culture in Northern Ireland, perceptions in HEIs would not just need changing, so would those of parents and schools. Use of the DENI 'entitlement framework' which aims for at least a third of the curriculum in schools to be vocational will be crucial in addressing this issue.

## Commentary

While many fundamental articulation and admissions issues are common across the UK, Scotland and Wales are distinguished by issues around the use of their credit and qualifications frameworks that may hold valuable lessons for the implementation of the QCF in England and Northern Ireland. Although the frameworks are designed to promote greater transparency and simplify the accumulation of learning and qualifications – particularly vocational provision – they are inevitably challenging to implement. There are signs that employers have not yet embraced the idea, and that the public have limited understanding of these changes and developments, particularly the QCF which was introduced as part of a reform programme, in comparison with the SCQF which evolved following reforms to introduce a common ‘qualifications and credit language’ and ease progression.

The challenge of embedding the frameworks does not invalidate the concept, which has considerable potential – already at least partly realised in Scotland – for facilitating vocational progression. The issues appear to be more transitional and systemic, with the prospect of a much improved system which promises to greatly enhance progression of all kinds in the longer term.

A common issue across the devolved administrations was the appropriateness of some existing progression models, based on the needs of large companies and SMEs. Approaches that met the specific requirements of SMEs were needed, potentially involving clusters of SMEs linked to the training and development of staff in the context of the operation of supply chains.

A further issue raised in all devolved administrations was the need for HEIs to make more and positive references to vocational qualifications and programmes in prospectuses and related information on entry requirements. Related to this is the need for admissions staff in HEIs to have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of vocational qualifications.

Northern Ireland has particular articulation issues with progression from HN and Foundation degree programmes to Honours. These issues, in some cases, may have disadvantaged learners in Northern Ireland and stifled progression by extending the vocational route to Honours by a year longer than it would take in England and Wales.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 8

Common principles for credit should be utilised and built upon. Higher education institutions should make greater use of, and seek to develop, common approaches to accrediting and recognising prior learning.

### Recommendation 9

Higher education institutions should revisit their entry requirements and make clearer reference where appropriate to apprenticeships and vocational qualifications in entry profiles and their prospectuses.

### Recommendation 10

Higher education institutions should undertake appropriate measures to raise the knowledge and understanding of vocational qualifications and apprenticeships among admissions staff, potentially through the use of appropriately accredited learning programme(s).

## 6. FE ‘supply’ issues

### Cross-national issues

Common themes were:

- The most able students are frequently steered towards traditional ‘academic’ options in schools, impoverishing the ‘supply’ of well-qualified and able learners commencing vocational programmes. Little involvement of HEIs in level 3 vocational qualifications and apprenticeship programmes (in contrast to applied programmes such as Diplomas and Baccalaureates).
- Although apprenticeship frameworks must specify progression opportunities, they and other work-based programmes are designed primarily to equip people for work in specific ‘skilled operative’ roles. Regard for progression to further learning in their delivery is typically limited to sectors with historically higher skills needs at technician level, notably engineering.
- The variability of NVQs/SVQs of the same level across sectors sits uncomfortably with HEI’s entry requirements and is a major barrier to their inclusion in the UCAS Tariff. The different structure and content of apprenticeship frameworks in Scotland, particularly the absence of technical certificates vis-à-vis England, Wales and Northern Ireland will further complicate the incorporate of apprenticeships in the UCAS Tariff and could lead to the perception of a lack of consistency across the apprenticeship ‘brand’.

### Scotland

The SCQF, unitisation and credit make for a very different and increasingly divergent system of FE-level vocational and work-based provision in Scotland from the rest of the UK. Through SQA, Scotland is well ‘ahead of the curve’ in developing short, credit-bearing composite awards which can be tailored to the needs of individuals and employers. All qualifications in SQA’s National Catalogue, including SVQs, are credit-rated down to unit level, so that options taken within programmes can be individually recognised, as well as the mandatory components. SVQs are also ‘levelled’, so that level 3 SVQs are positioned at either SCQF level 6 or level 7.

These features promise significant advantages in the context of vocational progression, including the flexibility to ‘pick ‘n’ mix’ units, short, bite-size accredited learning, and credit accumulation spanning FE and HE. Significant annual certification numbers (outlined in Chapter 2) of Group Awards undertaken in colleges and training companies point to significant numbers of individuals and employers taking advantage of the flexibility offered by the unitised approach. However some contributors expressed concerns that the SCQF was not well understood by employers or the public. Issues around the SCQF are discussed further in Chapter 4.



The substantial numbers and high success rate of Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland, where there has never been a technical certificate requirement in apprenticeship frameworks, suggests that the relaxation of this requirement elsewhere in the UK would not necessarily threaten the quality of apprenticeships as such. Scotland has the added advantage of apprenticeship credit ratings as a guide to their volume and level, while UCAS struggles to incorporate them into its Tariff. The extent to which HEIs recognise, or use the credit ratings of, vocational programmes for admission purposes, however, is questionable.

## Wales

The credit framework in Wales has not led to the wholesale unitisation of FE qualifications and programmes as seen in Scotland. Feedback suggests that the extent of its use for progression to higher levels is impeded by the existence in parallel of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the credit system used by HEIs, which, together with the NQF and QCF, make for an especially complex situation regarding qualification frameworks and credit in Wales.

One contributor from an HEI saw vocational progression primarily in terms of Access programmes, which were described as ‘Level 0’ programmes for students who had ‘failed’ or ‘done badly’ at school or college.

More positively, the Welsh Baccalaureate, a cornerstone of education policy in Wales, has several years’ start on Diplomas in England and offers an established and rapidly growing route combining practical, applied and general learning that provides progression to both employment and higher learning. The incorporation of A and AS levels into the framework has made it easier to ‘sell’ to parents and HEIs, and has avoided the risks associated with an entirely new qualification. The phased incorporation of major parts of ‘English’ Diplomas into the Baccalaureate curriculum from 2009 promises to further enhance applied learning in Wales and raise the quality of Baccalaureate achievers applying to HEIs. It is also a rare example of a UK nation incorporating parts of another nation’s curriculum to enhance its own home-grown programme. Although this move is not entirely uncontentious – one contributor commented on the low level of awareness in Wales of this development – it has significant potential benefits for applied learners, not least in terms of progression, given the employer and HEI involvement in the development of Diplomas in England.

## Northern Ireland

With the exception of Diplomas (which have a ‘watching brief’ in Northern Ireland), applied and vocational level 3 provision in Northern Ireland is broadly similar to that in England. Issues raised by contributors in Northern Ireland focused on the need for partnerships of schools, colleges and HEIs to support the development and operation of vocational progression pathways. With a very academic culture, partnerships would need to reach back to the early stages of schooling to demonstrate the value of vocational learning, counter academic bias and demonstrate that vocational learning was not the default learning pathway for those failing or seen as unable to follow an academic pathway.

## Commentary

Apprenticeships and vocational qualifications are often seen as the fall-back option for those who have ‘failed’ at school, rather than a positive option for those who prefer applied, practical learning, and for whom earning while they learn is a more attractive prospect than student debt. Such perceptions can impoverish the supply of vocational learners and in turn lead HEIs to question the calibre of applicants with vocational qualifications, compounded by the scant recognition of VQs in the UCAS Tariff. The practice of some large employers of requiring applicants to state UCAS points on application forms for graduate-level jobs is potentially a barrier to those who have achieved a degree following a vocational route.

Vocational progression is further complicated by the purpose of vocational programmes which are primarily, and rightly, designed for employment rather than as a springboard to HE like A Levels and Highers are. The progression agenda is not at odds with this analysis; the crucial point is that the opportunity to progress should be there for those able and willing to take it, particularly where there is a demonstrable need for higher level skills. Work-based progression routes enhance rather than detract from the primary purpose of such programmes to develop workplace skills. Moreover, the potential for higher learning will help raise the standing of vocational options and raise the calibre of people taking them, which will in turn increase the demand for progression.

There are, however, risks with this approach. Steps to adapt vocational programmes to meet the needs of established HE programmes risks damaging their relevance and value as work-ready programmes. Rather, HEIs should adapt provision to meet the needs of vocational learners and employers. ‘Shell’ degree frameworks developed by several English universities and in Northern Ireland, particularly, show that this can be done while meeting the rigorous requirements of course validation. Awarding organisations can respond by engaging HEIs in the design and delivery of FE-level programmes, facilitated by the established and emerging qualifications and credit frameworks.

## Recommendation

### Recommendation 11

Awarding organisations and Sector Skills Councils should consider how to ensure the greater involvement of higher education institutions in the development of level 3/SCQF level 6 vocational qualifications and apprenticeships.

# 7. HE ‘supply’ issues

## Cross-national issues

Common themes were:

- The need to interpret HE provision in this context as higher level learning of all kinds, including professional qualifications and private sector provision, not just traditional degree programmes.
- A perception among some in HEIs that flexible, smaller, bespoke programmes do not provide a learner with a full learning experience and that the purpose of HEIs is to provide education and not ‘training’ the workforce.
- Insufficiently flexible HE provision, with provision geared to large programmes, based on full-time models ‘adapted’ where appropriate for part-time students.
- A perception among employers that HE was ‘supply driven’, combined with a relatively underdeveloped role in workforce development.
- Infrastructures and delivery geared to traditional, young, full-time first degree entrants with academic entry qualifications.
- Slowness of validation processes.
- Decline of sandwich courses.
- The crucial role of colleges in delivering higher level skills locally to vocational learners.

## Scotland

One of the strengths of higher level vocational programmes in Scotland is their extensive incorporation of National Occupational Standards (NOS), which are embedded, for example, deeply in SQA Higher National qualifications. This higher level use of NOS, which are traditionally associated with NVQ/SVQs and apprenticeships, helps to provide a common learning ‘language’ spanning FE and HE, aiding transition between the sectors.

With no Foundation degrees, HN provision in Scotland is substantial. As noted earlier<sup>66</sup>, a Universities Scotland report has argued that there is an over-supply of HNs. Little support was detected for this view however and HNs were widely seen as having a crucial role in facilitating vocational progression to and through higher level skills provision, particularly for apprentices. However, one contributor stressed that HNCs were designed primarily to promote progression *at work*, not to higher level learning.

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<sup>66</sup> See page 32.

Many Scottish HEIs were perceived to be very focused on postgraduate programmes and research, and so perhaps felt that the vocational progression agenda had little relevance to them. Some contributors felt that selective institutions regarded vocational routes as for the less able, and that work-based learning had substantial 'quality issues' associated with it. More positively, HEIs were considered to be well placed to carry out training needs analysis.

Overall, HEI engagement with employers and workforce development was seen by some contributors as a major issue in Scotland. Perceptions of the role of HEIs in workforce development varied, with some parts of the sector regarding 'skills' as a pre-university issue. The importance of promoting to employers the benefits of 'growing your own' was stressed by many contributors.

## Wales

Contributors in Wales acknowledged that Welsh HE provision was still in 'very traditional mode', based largely on supply. Validation processes were perceived by employers as laborious and too long to be responsive to their needs. The University of Derby Corporate (UDC) was cited as an exemplar in responsive work-based learning provision, being able to validate up to 60 credits in eight weeks, rather than up to two years as it might take in Wales. The development of 'shell' curriculum frameworks (such as those developed by the University of Worcester) was recognised as effective in speeding up course approvals. UDC had also developed expertise in accrediting companies' in-house training which was seen as crucial to this agenda.

In Wales there was an issue of the viability of providing for progression for work-based learners in thinly populated areas outside the big conurbations. Current HE provision for work-based learners, particularly for SMEs, in these areas was recognised as generally not fit for purpose. It was suggested that the progression agenda should focus on generic management and leadership, rather than occupationally-specific skills. There was a need to be more business-facing (such as the University of Hertfordshire) and to adopt blended and online modes of learning for employees, supported by workforce and academic mentors.

The Open University in Wales was reported as having considerable experience in the provision of bite-size programmes for employees and volunteers, and expertise in adapting HE to the needs of non-traditional students, supported by a policy of open access.

The Airbus Higher Apprenticeship example (Appendix 4) was seen as untypical and limited to large companies, when the large majority of employers in Wales were SMEs. Small course provision was needed but not encouraged by quality assurance processes. There was a call for QAA to encourage more innovation and flexibility, and for better credit mechanisms, including APEL.

## Northern Ireland

Discussions in Northern Ireland revolved largely around Foundation degree issues. Government policy dictated that Foundation degrees must be developed by a Northern Ireland university unless the university had no provision in the curriculum area concerned and did not wish to develop that area of provision. Colleges were rarely able to ‘shop around’ for HEI partners like their English counterparts. This had contributed, some believed, to the slow growth of Foundation degrees, which in areas such as construction and engineering with established HN provision had failed to develop a market niche with employers. It was suggested that poor marketing and lack of understanding by employers had further hindered the development of Foundation degrees.

Because of relatively small numbers it was not viable to run Foundation degrees and HNs in competition. An added benefit of HNs was the ability to integrate delivery and achieve economies of scale. Articulation of both HNs and Foundation degrees to Honours was problematic, as elaborated in Chapter 5.

Long validation processes (typically 18 months) in the universities perplexed and disenchanted employers, and it was reported that employer referrals from SSCs had been lost because of this. The development of shell frameworks which were beginning to be used in Northern Ireland was, however, seen as a quick and cost-effective approach to accrediting modules based on learner and employer need.

## Commentary

To facilitate vocational progression effectively, flexibility and responsiveness are essential. Higher education must in the first place be regarded as all forms of higher level learning, whether delivered by HE institutions, FE colleges, private providers or employers themselves. The design, delivery, validation and assessment processes must allow for programmes to be offered that meet the needs of vocational learners and their employers. Design will need to involve a range of partners – not just HE and FE institutions but also SSCs, professional bodies and private providers. Some HEIs have greater expertise and a greater commitment to this agenda.

Learners who have followed vocational programmes will have different but not lower skill sets than their academic peers. This will call for programmes of varying size that are focused on the specific skill requirements of particular groups of employers, with different start and completion dates and stop-off points, rapid design and validation processes, mentoring systems and systems to support and recognise work-based learning. There is no one ‘right’ answer or ‘product’ to support vocational progression: flexibility is the key to this agenda.

The size, structures and regulations governing the provision of learning and skills in Northern Ireland raises a number of questions including whether the regulations limiting the ability of Northern Ireland's 'super-colleges' to 'shop around' for HEI partners are stifling progression and driving some HN and Foundation degree students to England to continue their studies. A wider question is whether Northern Ireland is large enough to sustain some vocational progression routes within its borders.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 12

The vocational progression strategies of governments and funding agencies should focus on providers with proven expertise (and/or most potential and commitment) in this area (e.g. post-92s, the Open University and further education colleges). Priority should be given to sectors with the most pressing higher level skills needs.

### Recommendation 13

HE funding agencies and The Quality Assurance Agency should encourage the development and use of flexible accreditation systems to recognise the value of all forms of higher level learning, particularly skills developed in and through work.

### Recommendation 14

Partnerships between HE institutions and FE colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland should make greater use of the QCF at level 4 to make vocational progression more natural and seamless, and support the delivery of smaller programmes of accredited learning that have industry and professional credibility.

## 8. Other issues

### Funding

Funding issues were broadly similar across the UK, with funding methodologies and student financial support systems weighted in favour of traditional full-time students. HE funding systems, particularly, are geared to full-time provision, with part-time provision funded pro-rata in terms of full-time equivalence (FTE). With regard to England, the Carter report commented: ‘Despite improvements in part-time funding and flexibility, the funding of HE part-time provision has been described as an “afterthought” by the university teachers’ association, “inadequate” by a vice-chancellor, “precarious” and “a form of discrimination” by the Select Committee on Innovation, Universities and Skills, and “scandalously unfair” in a recent think-tank report’<sup>67</sup>. The withdrawal in England of funding support for people progressing to higher level programmes of equal or lower level to their existing qualifications presents a further barrier, despite exemptions such as those taking Foundation degrees.

Regarding individual financial support, part-time students, including work-based learners, unless disabled or with special needs, were eligible for relatively little financial support, other than loans. Work-based learners, more often from lower socio-economic groups than full-time students, were often averse to the notion of student debt. Movement across or down qualifications frameworks, particularly from degree to a lower-level qualification raised significant funding issues. The extent to which such progression should be supported by the public purse is of course open to question – but progression of this nature does have a role in enabling individuals to develop the skills required to gain, retain and progress in employment. Overall, however, funding levels and methodologies appeared to be less of a ‘burning issue’ in the devolved administrations than in England.

Each nation has a different funding system, creating disparities and bureaucratic issues for individuals migrating and employers operating across UK borders. A vocational course at a certain level might be supported in one country, but not in another. For example, Airbus’ Higher Apprenticeship framework includes an ILM certificate which receives funding support in Wales but not in the same programme in England.

Education policy in England has generally adopted a more interventionist approach to workforce development than that of the devolved administrations through targeted initiatives such as Train to Gain, funds earmarked for specific programmes such as Foundation degrees, funds to develop employer engagement and funds to lever employer support (financial and in-kind) through co-funded numbers. In Scotland and Northern Ireland FE and HE funds are dispensed by the same body, SFC and DEL respectively. Views were mixed on how this impacted on transition. Theoretically a single funding body should be better able to support seamless progression between the sectors, but limited evidence of this was offered. Policy ‘silos’ and compartmentalisation within funding bodies were observed more than synergy, and in both countries apprenticeships are funded separately by other bodies.

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<sup>67</sup> Carter (2009) p.28.



A further issue in Northern Ireland was the MaSN (Maximum Student Numbers) system, which put a ceiling on each institution's student places in the recurrent grant. This gave institutions no incentive to recruit non-traditional students such as work-based learners and thereby support vocational progression, when places up to the maximum could be filled more easily by conventional applicants.

## Commentary

The current and looming HE funding cuts raise particular issues when the argument to support more vocational learner progression to HE is made. Spending more on vocational learners may mean spending less on traditional full-time academic students where demand for places currently exceeds supply. In the medium-term, with a demographic decline in the number of young people in most parts of the UK, greater international competition for overseas students and the potential economic recovery enabling more young people to enter the labour market, this situation is likely to change.

It could be argued that the development and delivery of smaller qualifications that support vocational progression provides a vehicle for a new type of delivery which is less costly than traditional larger programmes. High-quality work-based learning, however, is not 'cheap' to provide, particularly in terms of learner support and assessment.

Smaller, customised, bespoke learning programmes developed to raise employee skill levels and combined tax incentives could, however, be used to 'lever in' employer and individual funding as part of a workforce development service offering.

It has been estimated that HEIs have only a six per cent share of the market for CPD at higher levels<sup>68</sup>, a market which has largely been left to professional bodies and commercial providers. Funding systems centred on full-time provision disadvantage vocational part-time learners and should be reviewed to provide more accessible and equitable support for people in work.

<sup>68</sup> DIUS (2008) pp. 23-24, based on income of £335 million in a market worth £5 billion. The source of the income figure, HEFCE's BCI survey of 2005-6, refers to England only. The latest BCI survey (2007-8) shows that HE revenue in England from CPD rose to £447 million. As no further estimate of the size of the higher level skills market appears to be available, it is not possible to determine whether HE's share has changed from 6 per cent. The latest figures for the other UK nations are £49 million (Scotland), £35 million (Wales) and £9 million (Northern Ireland), representing 9 per cent, 6.5 per cent and 1 per cent respectively of the UK total of £537 million earned by HEIs through CPD services.

## Information, advice and guidance

In contrast to England, contributors in the devolved administrations made relatively few comments about careers or student support services. In Wales some contributors felt improvements had been made in IAG services by involving private providers and engaging with community leaders. In Scotland some believed that, although in theory careers advice was seen as first class (including by the OECD), many individuals would disagree, and that effective use of the SCQF depended on high-quality effective careers advice. SCQF levels were not well understood in the population, and advice was difficult to deliver, with the challenge of how to disseminate progression opportunities. Although the SCQF could be seen as ‘wiring the system together’ and that there is no need for a learner or employer to see the ‘wiring’, there is a need for learners and employers to understand the levels. Providers and national agencies also need to understand and exploit the system’s considerable potential to facilitate learner progression.

Skills Development Scotland were developing *My Learning Space*, an individual online tool providing information on learning and skills, and *My Coach*, an online coaching service providing access to an advisor.

In Wales there was a call for clearer information through career and qualification maps. SSCs were seen as having a pivotal role in linking such information to sectoral higher level skills needs.

Many comments in this area were more generic, with common issues emerging on the quality of advice given on vocational options by teachers, advisers etc. with insufficient knowledge of or prejudiced views on vocational learning, and able students being steered away from such options. Government has pushed for the inclusion of apprenticeships in the UCAS Tariff to raise the status and currency of apprenticeships and enable those offering IAG to better understand and demonstrate the acceptability of apprenticeships for entry to higher level skills programmes. However, some believe that this needs to be treated with caution. Because the Tariff process is based on the appropriateness of qualifications to prepare people for academic study in HE there is a risk that apprenticeships (which are designed primarily as a preparation for work) will attract fewer points than traditional academic programmes and thus be perceived to be of lower value. Ensuring that all vocational qualifications hold a level and credit value within a national framework should help improve the status of apprenticeships and cement their position as a route to higher level skills.

## Commentary

Although most contributors concentrated on other issues, the information and the quality of advice and guidance on higher level learning opportunities provided to learners following vocational courses is an underlying concern. Even for ‘experts’, identifying and describing vocational progression opportunities can be complex and problematic, given the issues outlined in this report. IAG linked to local access initiatives and progression agreements, such as those successfully developed by articulation hubs in Scotland and LLNs in England, are promising approaches. At a more general level there is a need to raise the quality of advice offered by teachers and careers advisors on vocational options and the potential of such options to lead to higher level learning programmes.

## Communications and promotion

UK-wide marketing issues raised include:

- low awareness of (and therefore demand for) progression opportunities to higher level skills provision among work-based learners, particularly apprentices;
- poor understanding of credit and qualification levels among individuals and employers;
- poor understanding of vocational qualifications among HEI admissions tutors;
- perceptions of HEI provision among employers as not fit for purpose (in contrast to those of private and commercial providers);
- a need to emphasise the importance and value of vocational provision – in 2008 six of the top ten subject areas (in terms of HE qualifications awarded at all levels) were in vocationally related disciplines<sup>69</sup>;
- higher level skills needs of the UK are not matched by employer demand;
- vocational learners (as distinct from ‘professionals’) are perceived as less able.

In Scotland the need for better marketing was stressed to address the poor understanding of the SCQF. Although SCQF credit is general credit, it is still important for programme designers to work with organisations, including HEIs, who might recruit learners from such programmes to ensure the components meet the needs of employers and further learning.

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<sup>69</sup> Edge Foundation (2009).

It is important to dispel the myth that training encourages employees to leave. Key messages were *'grow your own'* and *'train to retain'*. Progression opportunities needed to be embedded in programme promotions. SSCs had an important role in promoting career and progression maps. Good practice in providing vocational progression opportunities could be stimulated and celebrated through high-profile awards.

In Wales there was a call for more effective dissemination of good practice, particularly through the Wales Employment and Skills Board, to avoid losing the lessons of innovative work in this area and *'re-inventing the wheel'*.

Contributors in Northern Ireland called for better marketing of Foundation degrees nationally to stimulate demand for the qualification. This, however, should take place only when the policy issues outlined have been resolved and there is a more marketable offering to individuals and employers.

## Commentary

Communications and promotion have a key role in stimulating demand for progression among learners and employers. Many of the issues raised were fundamental, relating to a deep-seated perception in the UK that vocational (as distinct from professional) learning is second-rate – the fallback option for the less able or *'unacademic'*. The Edge Foundation is vigorously challenging this view and has garnered all-party support for its high-profile campaigns championing the value of practical and vocational learning. Such campaigns can help break down some of the fundamental barriers impeding vocational progression and create a more positive climate of opinion in which to disseminate and promote the variety of good practice examples of progression across the UK. In Northern Ireland, where vocational progression is relatively undeveloped, the initial emphasis should be on marketing and *'product'* development – as a pre-requisite of promoting good practice.

## Measurement and evaluation

It was widely recognised that data were lacking in virtually all aspects of applied and vocational progression, and most acutely in the progression of work-based learners. This was attributed to the predominance of traditional full-time *'academic'* routes, widening participation performance indicators that focused on social disadvantage, lack of employment detail in destination tracking, the complexity of vocational learning (particularly apprenticeship, which is a learning programme incorporating several qualifications), and the practical challenges of capturing data on such a diverse group of individuals.

A lot of work was reported in Scotland on tracking the progression of Higher National students. QAA and subsequently the SCQF partnership undertook a Mapping, Tracking and Bridging project in respect of progression and credit transfer between HN qualifications and degrees. The database strand of the project was discontinued in 2008, in part because of difficulties maintaining it: only a 68 per cent return was being achieved because of the added burden of data collection and duplication of effort it placed on providers. It was also felt that the articulation hubs were better placed to gather tracking data on a regional basis.

One such project is the Greater Glasgow Hub's Further Education to Higher Education Articulation Project, which has interrogated the Student Record System to gain a more systematic picture of students making the transition from HNs to degrees at Glasgow Caledonian University. The project does not discriminate between holders of HNC and HND and focuses primarily on progression to full-time undergraduate programmes.

Another is a database being developed by the Edinburgh/Lothian/Borders Hub, bringing together datasets from SQA, SFC and HESA. Again, the focus (as with all the articulation hubs) is on progression from HNs.

Skills Development Scotland, meanwhile, are planning to develop a database hub from next autumn, with input from SSCs. The facility should enable progression from all vocational programmes, including apprenticeships, to be tracked and analysed.

## Commentary

The lack of data and monitoring arrangements to track the progression of those pursuing applied and vocational learning beyond level 3/SCQF level 6 is a major deficiency in current management information systems. Robust and comprehensive data will enable the extent and nature of the issues to be more fully assessed and enable measures taken to address them to be more accurately targeted. A notable project in England supported by Kent and Medway LLN, tracking the progression trends of vocational college students into HE, may provide the basis for a solution in this area<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> The project is summarised in Appendix 6.

# Recommendations

## Funding

### Recommendation 15

Governments and higher education funding agencies should undertake a root and branch review of how HE/higher level skills provision can be supported and incentivised to become more flexible and responsive to employer and employee need. Such reviews should include: consideration of the funding of HE/higher level skills provision as a workforce development and continuing professional development product; smaller technician qualifications; more effective use of accreditation and recognition learning frameworks; faster validation; part-time and work-based delivery; and flexible start, stop-off and completion arrangements.

### Recommendation 16

Governments and funding agencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should review the experience of employer co-funding models in England and consider piloting appropriate arrangements based on employer and individual skills needs.

### Recommendation 17

Funding agencies in each nation may wish to consider the development of formal funding agreements for programmes spanning further education and higher education, e.g. Higher Apprenticeships.

## Information, advice and guidance

### Recommendation 18

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) providers to undertake appropriate measures to raise the knowledge and understanding of IAG advisors about vocational qualifications and the potential of these qualifications as a route to higher level learning.

## Communications and promotion

### Recommendation 19

Public policy should include the value and potential of vocational/work-based progression as a core theme in its work to stimulate employer investment in workforce development. A key message should be that '*growing your own*' enhances the retention of key staff, i.e. '*train to retain*'.

### Recommendation 20

Governments and higher education institutions should highlight the vocational nature of a substantial proportion of higher education provision and the high-status of vocational learning in the professions (law, medicine etc.), in order to challenge the perception that practical, vocational learning and 'skills' are low-level, low-status and for the less able.

### Recommendation 21

Sector Skills Councils should do more to collate good practice case studies (for use throughout the UK) to highlight productivity, competitiveness and remuneration benefits of progression supported by career 'maps' for both employers and employees.

## Measurement and evaluation

### Recommendation 22

Each government should, where appropriate, utilise and modify existing data collection mechanisms to monitor vocational progression to higher education. Such approaches should also be used to record and monitor data to enable 'cross-border' vocational progression.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Recommendations from the UVAC report *Progression from vocational and applied learning to higher education in England (November 2009)*

### Recommendations

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- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | HE and FE partnerships, potentially working with Ofqual-regulated awarding bodies, should be funded to develop, deliver and award a new range of short, flexible, bespoke qualifications at level 4 with industry and professional credibility. This must be aimed at apprentices, other vocational learners and employees performing level 3 job roles with an aptitude and desire to progress to level 4 job roles and beyond.  |
| 2 | In the development of vocational progression, Government policy focus should be on progression to any higher level learning programme (e.g. Foundation degrees, honours degrees, HNDs/HNCs, new technical qualifications at level 4, higher level NVQs, other higher level qualifications awarded by awarding bodies regulated by Ofqual and recognised professional qualifications), including 'bite-size', accumulative progression through accredited units, based on the best interests of the vocational learner and where existing, their employer. |
| 3 | Government should champion and support, through targeted funding, those institutions (including FE colleges with significant HE programmes) that can demonstrate a commitment to recruiting vocational learners and that have, or are developing, expertise in the provision of learning programmes, recruitment processes and related support that meet the needs of level 3 vocational learners and their employers.  |
| 4 | Government should commission a study to evaluate how developing vocational progression opportunities can enhance social mobility and in particular increase the number of men from lower socio-economic groups progressing to higher education.   |
| 5 | UKCES should commission a study to track and identify the benefits of progression for apprentices, other vocational learners and their employers in terms of promotion, career prospects and business performance. Sector Skills Councils should be asked by the UKCES to develop and disseminate case studies demonstrating the tangible benefits of progression to individual learners and employers.   |
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## Recommendations

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<b>6</b>	Ofqual should work with the HE sector to raise levels of understanding of the QCF among HE admissions and academic staff.
<b>7</b>	The excellent work of Aimhigher and LLNs in advancing progression opportunities should be celebrated. New initiatives must come forward on sharing existing best practice, particularly bridging modules that have already been developed. The Government should commission a report on bridging modules best practice.
<b>8</b>	From 2011, level 3 vocational qualifications and apprenticeships offered to young people should only be eligible for public funding if they outline clear progression routes and opportunities for progression to higher education. A taught progression and careers – bridging module or half module should be available for inclusion in all Advanced Apprenticeship frameworks.
<b>9</b>	Ofqual and UKCES should ensure that awarding bodies and SSCs consult with the HE providers in the development of level 3 vocational qualifications and apprenticeships.
<b>10</b>	The National Apprenticeship Service should strengthen the emphasis on progression to higher level learning in the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) and strengthen consultation with HE providers in the apprenticeship development and approvals process.
<b>11</b>	HEIs should revisit their entry requirements and make clearer reference where appropriate to diplomas, apprenticeships and vocational qualifications more fully in Entry Profiles and their prospectuses.
<b>12</b>	HEIs should enhance levels of awareness and understanding of vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and diplomas among admissions and academic staff by the development and delivery of an accredited HE module for admissions staff on level 3 vocational progression (with appropriate on-line information, materials and training courses).
<b>13</b>	Government should invite universities to make an apprenticeship admissions pledge – where an appropriate course is available they will guarantee interviews to Advanced Apprenticeship framework completers.

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## Recommendations

14	HEIs should be encouraged to review existing knowledge and perceptions about non-traditional qualifications and review the content of appropriate degree courses and their suitability for level 3 vocational learners.
16	Government should commission research to establish how HE programmes, particularly the first year of undergraduate programmes, can respond to the needs of diploma students, those with vocational qualifications and apprentices.
16	HEIs should consider making specific support available to part-time vocational learners. The additional cost of provision such as this should be taken into account by HEFCE.
17	HEIs should be encouraged to support and reward staff (through, for example remuneration and promotion) for work in employer engagement, including the development and delivery of innovative programmes and teaching and assessment for vocational learners.
18	Government should ensure that any future funding system supports part-time learning more effectively and reflects more fully the additional costs of part-time learning. The review should consider how bite-sized chunks of learning are delivered on the basis of learner and employer need. The leverage of employer funding is important together with the employer role as purchaser of such learning.
19	The LSC (and successor organisations) and HEFCE should review the negative connotations and anomalous position of Non-Prescribed Higher Education (NPHE) in the funding system and make appropriate recommendations to Government on statutory implications and how the use of NPHE can maximise vocational progression.
20	Government should ensure that when the careers advice and guidance service is transferred to schools and colleges, sufficient emphasis is placed on ensuring advisors have an extensive knowledge and understanding of vocational as well as academic progression opportunities.
21	The Adult Advancement and Careers Service should provide specific support for apprentices and other vocational learners, such as interviews to discuss potential career and higher level learning opportunities following completion of their Advanced Apprenticeship. It should also introduce a national mentoring scheme to encourage and support the progression of vocational learners to higher education.

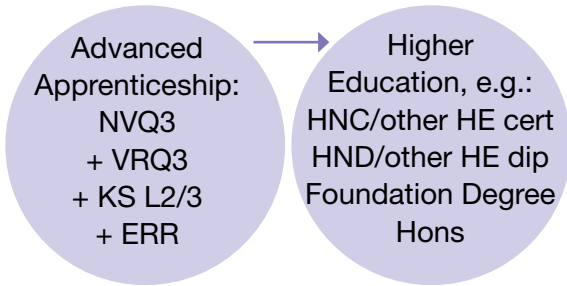
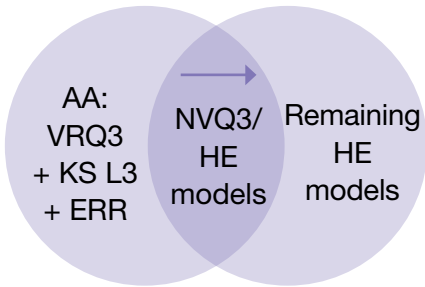
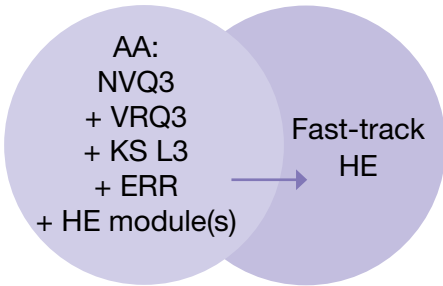
## Recommendations

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<b>22</b>	UCAS should consider providing an online directory and/or information on part-time HE programmes developed for, or of particular relevance to apprentices, other vocational learners and their employers.
<b>23</b>	A research exercise should be undertaken to determine a new system for the measurement and evaluation of vocational progression and progression from diplomas to and through higher education and professional qualifications.
<b>24</b>	UKCES, in partnership with representative bodies in the HE sector, should ensure SSCs develop stronger partnerships with HE focused on vocational progression and the role of HE in developing employee skills and performance.

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## Appendix 2: Models of apprenticeship progression to HE (England)<sup>71</sup>

Model	Examples studied	Diagram
<p><b>1. End-to-end</b></p> <p>‘End-to-end’ progression from completed Advanced Apprenticeship to bespoke HE, typically Foundation Degree with the opportunity of progression to Honours.</p>	<p>IT:</p> <p>EDS ‘Degrees for Modern Apprentices’*</p> <p>*Discontinued</p>	
<p><b>2. Integrated</b></p> <p>Integrated progression from Apprenticeship to HE, with the HE qualification started before completion of the Apprenticeship framework. Opportunity, particularly with a Foundation Degree (though Higher Nationals are still often the HE technical certificate of choice in some sectors) for progression to Honours.</p>	<p>Engineering:</p> <p>Rolls Royce Ford Slack &amp; Parr</p>	
<p><b>3. Accelerated</b></p> <p>Accelerated progression to HE, typically to second year of HE course, through incorporation of HE module(s) into Apprenticeship programme.</p>	<p>Healthcare:</p> <p>NHS Trusts</p>	

<sup>71</sup> fdf/UVAC (2008).

#### 4. Higher Apprenticeship

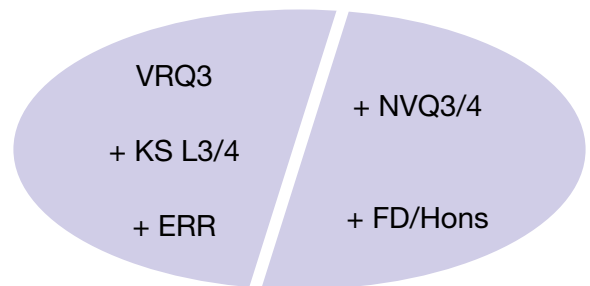
Fully integrated, high-level Apprenticeships (currently available in the engineering and IT/telecoms sectors) incorporating an HE qualification (typically a Foundation Degree) and higher NVQ and KS requirements than Advanced Apprenticeship. Still officially regarded as a trial.

Engineering:

Airbus

IT/telecoms:

BT



#### 5. NVQ route

Progression through NVQs/ Apprenticeships to NVQ4, associate professional recognition and higher professional qualifications. NVQ4 also provides fast-track through degree courses.

Accountancy:

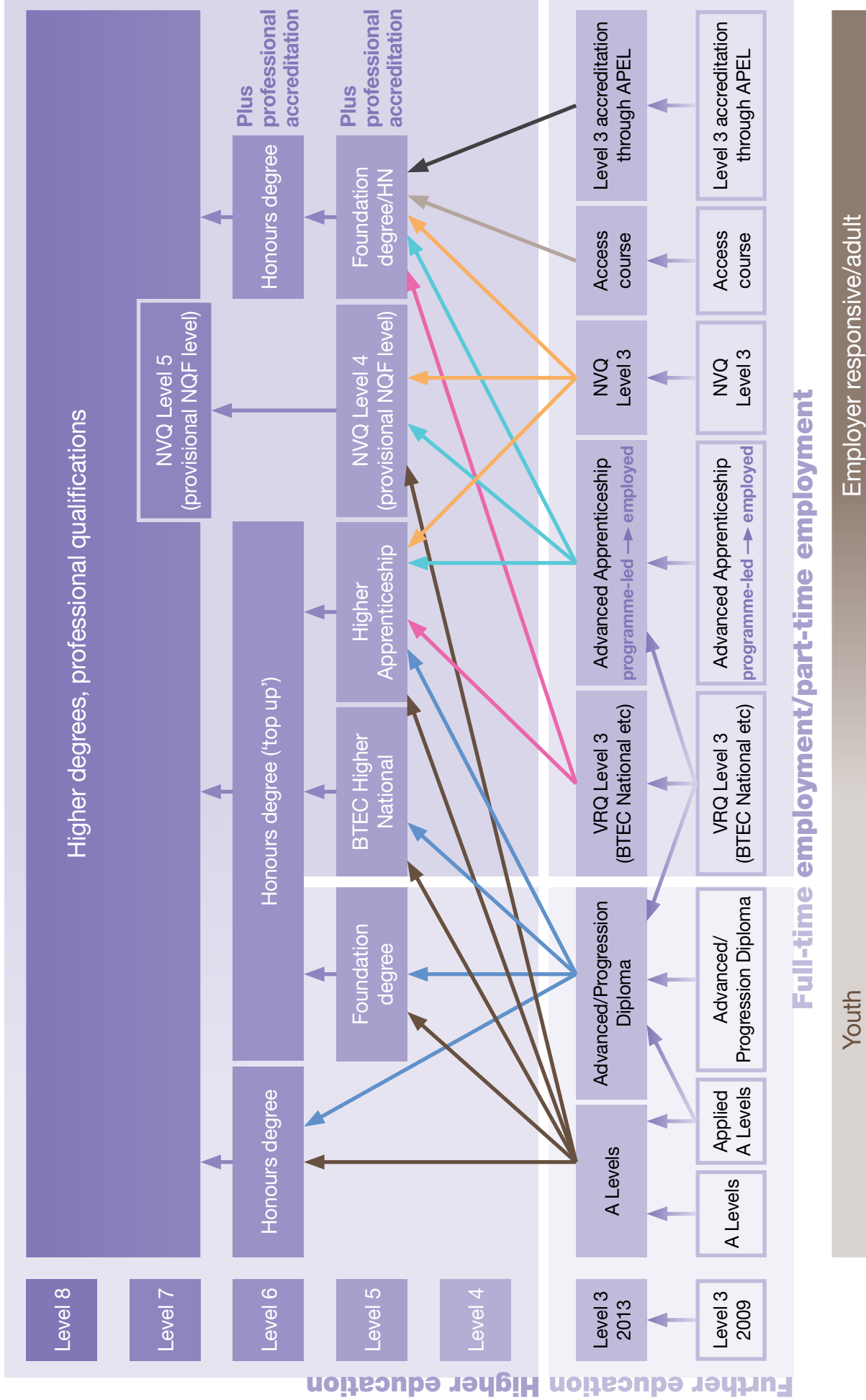
AAT



#### Acronyms

- AA Advanced Apprenticeship
- AAT Association of Accounting Technicians
- ERR Employment Rights and Responsibilities
- FD Foundation Degree
- HE Higher Education
- KS Key Skills
- NVQ National Vocational Qualification (the practical competence component of an Apprenticeship)
- VRQ Vocationally-Related Qualification (typically the 'technical certificate' component of an Apprenticeship)

# Appendix 3: Progression routes (England)<sup>72</sup>



<sup>72</sup> Carter/LUVAC (2009)

## Appendix 4: Examples of innovative practice in Wales

### 1. Engineering Higher Apprenticeship: Broughton, North Wales

#### *Partners*

- Airbus
- Glyndŵr University (formerly NEWI)
- Deeside College

#### *Programme*

- Higher Apprenticeship (HA) in Engineering Technology

#### *Progression*

- NVQ Level 4 in Engineering Management
- Foundation Degree (FD) in Aeronautical Engineering
- Honours Degree in Aeronautical Engineering
- EngTech and/or Incorporated Engineer professional registration

### Summary

#### *Background*

Airbus piloted an early version of the Higher Engineering Apprenticeship (HEA – then Higher Modern Apprenticeship) with SEMTA in 2002, when the technical certificate was an HNC. The company has a significant need for engineering technicians at its plant at Broughton, North Wales (as well as at Filton, near Bristol). Large Apprenticeship and Advanced Apprenticeship programmes provide the craft operatives. Some progress to the Higher Apprenticeship programme; most Higher Apprentices, however, are recruited direct from schools and colleges, mostly with A Levels. The three-year HEA programmes develop the technicians. Apprentices are highly valued in the company: 70 per cent of senior managers (including the chief executive) are ex-apprentices.

### *Launch of the programme*

Airbus and its Welsh HE partner, NEWI (now Glyndŵr University), were instrumental in the development of the HEA framework, launched in 2005, through membership of SEMTA's Steering Group. The company pioneered the framework and graduated the very first cohort of 18 Higher Apprentices nationally (as Engineering FDSs) at the Broughton site in November 2006. Nearly all the first cohort progressed to the third year of an Honours degree course, which they will complete part time over two years. Twenty-nine Higher Apprentices were recruited in 2009, mostly at the Broughton site.

The Filton HEA is based on Broughton's, so the programme is almost identical across the two sites, despite spanning England and Wales and delivery by different institutions.

### *Framework components*

The framework components adopted by Airbus are:

- NVQ Performing Engineering Operations Level 2.
- BTEC Engineering National Certificate.
- Five Key Skills at Level 3.
- ILM Level 3 Certificate in First Line Management.
- NVQ Engineering Management Level 4.
- FD in Aeronautical Engineering, leading to Honours.

The ILM certificate is additional to the basic HEA framework, included by Airbus to enhance opportunities for progression to management within the company after completion of the Higher Apprenticeship.

The company was closely involved the development of the Foundation Degree programmes, which have a substantial work-based element. They have found that having the FD as the technical certificate provides a broader foundation of knowledge than HNC and provides smoother progression to the Honours degree.

### *Recruitment*

The minimum entry requirements are typically six GCSE at grade B or above and two A Levels (or equivalent) at grade C or above. This ensures that they have the ability to cope with the academic part of the programme. Advanced apprentices with potential also have the opportunity to join the HEA programme. Of the 29 recruited last year, six are women.



HEA places are widely advertised alongside craft apprenticeship opportunities. After an initial sifting, the HEA applicants do a range of diagnostic tests at an assessment day before being short-listed for interview. Airbus also promote the programme in schools.

Airbus have found that having the FD as the technical certificate attracts better candidates than the HNC. Nevertheless they have to work hard with schools to promote the HEA programme because it has no national profile. The company is lobbying to have HEA established as a national apprenticeship brand and an attractive alternative to the conventional route to higher level skills.

### *Delivery*

Deeside College deliver all the FE components of the programme, including Key Skills, both on their own campus and at Airbus's training centre. The HEAs spend the first year at college on the NVQ level 2, National Certificate and most of the ILM programme, so the timetable is full and the pace brisk. The NVQ level 2 is completed in the first year, in common with the craft apprentices. Evidence from the NVQ is used to satisfy many of the Key Skills requirements.

For school and college leavers, the NVQ is the more challenging qualification; vice versa for the craft apprentices. Most of the HEAs gain distinctions in the National Certificate.

Airbus had always done some NVQ level 4 units as part of the craft apprenticeship. The management units in the NVQ are challenging for young people with no management experience or responsibility. They address the issue by selecting the management units of the NVQ that can be applied to the management of resources or processes within their control, and to managing their own personal development, rather than managing people.

The FD is delivered by Glyndŵr University. Glyndŵr has a very good relationship with Airbus, having worked for many years with the company on the HNC and as such is used to developing programmes which meet the company's requirements. The HEAs are closely monitored and supported by the college and university tutors, and by their designated training advisers in the workplace. They have a personal development review every six months.

The work-based FD assignments are real work projects given to the HAs by their group leaders or managers from the business units to which they are assigned. Many of the projects have been concerned with quality issues in the manufacture of Airbus wings, as well as process changes that may lead to time/cost reductions for the business unit.

### *Progression*

Attrition rates among the apprentices are very low; only one HEA completer has moved on. Opportunities to progress within the company are actively promoted.

The company does move some craft apprentices over to the HEA if they have the potential – but currently only in very low single figures. The company is developing a process to facilitate this progression, not least because these apprentices have excelled in both the work-based and academic parts of the HEA programme. They also perform well post-apprenticeship.

These craft apprentices make a big financial commitment in transferring to the HEA because they could be earning good wages as qualified fitters or electricians. In order to move to the HA they have to go back to their second year apprenticeship. Those coming in with A Levels start with a year at college and then get rotated around different areas on the site, whereas the craft apprentices will have already done that. They will have done a National Certificate, so their Maths and science should be good enough to cope with the FD.

All HEA graduates go into one of the company's three main functions: the biggest, manufacturing engineering; or design; or quality. They are classed as professional aircraft engineers and are affiliated members of IMechE. They are encouraged to go onto the BEng Honours degree programme, which they join in the third year. To aid this, the HEAs do a bridging course through Glyndŵr in the last year of the apprenticeship. This gives them the credits needed to progress into the third year of the Honours degree programme. Graduation and subsequent professional development in the workplace over two years, supported by mentors, opens the door to full IMechE membership.

### *Funding*

Funding arrangements are complicated because the programmes span England and Wales. The Welsh system is seen as more generous in that there is no upper age limit for apprenticeship funding, and the ILM certificate, a supplement to the actual framework, is funded in Wales but not in England. A further additional cost in England has arisen from treating the Foundation degree as full-time, with an attendant larger tuition fee than in Wales.

In both countries the NVQ level 4 is funded only at the Advanced Apprenticeship (level 3) rate. While this has not deterred Airbus from supporting the programme, they point out that their investment in each Higher Apprentice is some £70K.

### **Sources**

- Mike Jones, Apprenticeship Manager, Airbus.
- Gary Griffiths, Apprenticeship Programmes Manager, Airbus.
- Ian Carnell and John Harris, SEMTA.
- SEMTA Higher Apprenticeship framework, July 2005.
- Airbus Higher Apprenticeship web pages, <http://www.airbus.com/en/careers/airbus-for-juniors/uk-juniors/apprenticeships/apprenticeships-opportunities/apprenticeships-higher>
- Press releases and articles, 2007-9.

## 2. Work-based learning contract frameworks<sup>73</sup>

This review by Trinity College, Carmarthen and the University of Glamorgan of work-based learning contracts in Wales formed one of the seven micro-projects for a HEFCW feasibility study into the establishment of an All-Wales Centre for Workforce Development. It used qualitative data collection methods to: consider the extent to which learning contracts are prevalent in Welsh HEIs; review the use of learning contracts in the UK and internationally; identify good practice; and discuss specific issues arising from the use of such contracts.

Following a brief review of the increasing importance of higher level skills and workforce development for the policy agenda in Wales, the findings start by considering a range of definitions and variations in form, which evidence a continuum of practice. It goes on to identify the use of learning contracts for work placements, for the development of skills and competences and the use of learning contracts to negotiate both individual modules and whole programmes of study. Examples are provided from the University of Glamorgan, the Open University, Trinity College, Carmarthen and UWIC.

Finally there is discussion around the perceived advantages of using learning contracts: collaboration, relevance, autonomy, and clarity of the roles of stakeholders together with limitations around their suitability for all learners and issues of control and power. The discussion notes the increasing use of e-contracts and concludes with an analysis of the implications for institutional development, particularly those of changing staff roles, the need for staff development and implications for programme management.

## 3. Design and validation of an FdA and MA in Applied Professional Practice at the Cardiff School of Management, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff

To gauge demand and interest in achievement at level 4 and above via work-based learning, meetings were held with a wide cross-section of 'involved parties' across Wales. Several SSCs were canvassed for their input as were SMEs and larger employers. There was considerable positive feedback from these meetings and the final format of both the Foundation Degree (FdA) and the Masters (MA) were submitted for validation via UWIC's Cardiff School of Management.

The design, whilst academically rigorous, recognises the non-traditional learner demographic of the participants in the extensive use of learning contracts and negotiated assignments. These two methodologies allow learners to play a far greater part in the learning process and thus underline the andragogical ideology that is pivotal to both the FdA and MA.

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<sup>73</sup> Sourced from Treadwell and Kennard (2009) part 1, p.3

Both degrees are innovative in design and delivery with an emphasis upon learner support that recognises the different needs of learners from non-traditional backgrounds and who are carrying on in employment whilst completing these awards. Many organisations stated that there was a feeling amongst their workforce that if these awards were to be truly work-based in their learning methodology then the delivery team involved should have a working knowledge of learning at work. To enable and support the learners engaged on the programme(s), careful consideration was given to the selection of the delivery team and allowance for ad hoc deliverers to be brought in as required.

Many of the organisations that were canvassed stated that generic degree programmes, although being worthy and credible amongst learners, were not perceived in the same high regard by employers. By introducing additional modules that were specific to employment sectors, the FdA could be regarded by employers and learners alike as having workplace credibility.

#### **4. GO Wales Graduate Training and Development Fund**

SMEs in Wales can claim up to £1,500 towards the cost of training graduate staff through the Graduate Training and Development Fund.

Eligible employees must be doing a degree, HND or equivalent qualification of NQF level 4 or above, the training must cost a minimum of £175 including VAT, and the funding must provide a clear benefit to the business.

For higher level courses GO Wales can fund 50 per cent of the cost up to a maximum of £1,500. The business covers the rest of the cost. The training must lead to a higher level qualification such as MSc, MBA, Chartered Institute of Marketing diploma or the Prince2 Practitioner qualification in Project Management.

## Appendix 5: Examples of innovative practice in Scotland

### 1. Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership (GGAP)

GGAP is one of six articulation hubs funded by the Scottish Funding Council to develop sustainable approaches to increasing the volume and quality of progression from college (HNC/D) to university (degree). GGAP is the largest hub with 18 college and university partners led by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). The partnership is coordinated by the GCU's Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRL) as part of responsibility for implementing the widening participation strategy across the university. Addressing the workforce development needs of particular sectors, such as health, is a key driver for enhanced articulation within the Greater Glasgow area.

The partnership builds on and incorporates a range of earlier work and ongoing HN articulation agreements, projects and initiatives, including the use of flexible credit (described in example 2 on page 77), the On Track programme (described in example 3 on page 78) and CRL's well-established College Articulation Project (CAP). Mentoring is a major strand of activity, building on GCU's induction for HN entrants to provide a continuum of support through trained mentors who are all current GCU students.

The mentors are involved in providing support for students both pre-entry to GCU, at induction and also during their studies through a programme of weekly drop-in 'surgeries'. The surgeries aim to help new students adapt to university by offering re-assurance, practical advice, informal support, and signposting to appropriate support services. New students can also e-mail the mentoring mailbase with individual queries or to request a meeting. Mentors are also available to assist with wider departmental and central support activities such as open evenings, careers fairs and FE-HE liaison events. The scheme's success has led to its adoption as a template for a project to increase the numbers of males students on further and higher level learning programmes.

Another strand is research and evaluation. This strand extends GCU's Student Experience Project to gain a more systematic picture of students making the transition and their progress. It also evaluates each strand with a view to identifying effective approaches for future development. The Student Record System has been interrogated to identify entrants with Higher National (HN) qualifications to full-time GCU undergraduate degree programmes.

GGAP priorities for 2009-10 are:

- Designing and developing new articulation routes and agreements from college-based HNC/D programmes or equivalent work-based (VQ) provision to degree provision.
- Reviewing and redesigning curriculum alignment and content with partner institutions.
- Exploring and implementing effective support strategies for college students in transition.

- Exploring and developing strategies to enhance the student experience and improve achievement, progression and retention.
- Developing, expanding and improving articulation arrangements and activities in this specific area, in collaboration with other regional articulation hubs where appropriate.

## 2. SQA: Working towards flexible credit

Although there has been a long tradition in Scotland of students progressing from HNC/D to degree, a significant minority of degree students choose, for whatever reason, to discontinue their degree programme study and seek employment. As HNC/Ds have strong employer recognition as preparing students for employment through application skills as well as theoretical knowledge, the facility to transfer degree-course credit to HN certification is highly desirable. Benefits include:

- a positive outcome rather than a negative experience of withdrawal, having been guided onto an appropriate learning pathway and re-engaged with learning;
- no repeat of learning already undertaken;
- a reduction in the time to achieve a respected qualification which will equip them for employment;
- possibility of articulation back onto a degree programme on successful completion of HNC/D.

However, such transition has been rare, largely because of a very poor record of study toward degrees being given recognition towards HNC/D qualifications. Research found that SQA's policy on credit transfer within the SCQF was a barrier because of rigidly specific requirements attached to credit transfer. These included specific evidence requirements which could not be met when transferring from programmes with different content, styles of delivery and modes of assessment.

SQA in consultation with the HE sector and other bodies responded by developing policy and procedures for flexible credit. These enable a 'broad match' to be made between the aims and objectives of the HN qualification for which credit is being sought and the elements of the degree programme for which credit has been awarded. In order to ensure that the 'employability' of HN qualifications is not undermined, the policy states that the broad match of aims and objectives should include not only a match of knowledge/skills content but also the extent to which these have been applied.

Flexible credit applies all SQA Group Awards, i.e. not only to HNs but also to SVQs and Professional Development Awards. The policy also enables credit to be awarded for both accredited and informal learning, that is, learning gained through practical and life experience. Thus students can gain credit towards a Group Award from a wide range of sources.

Students do not receive certification for individual SQA units on which the broad match is based and always need to complete the HNC/D graded unit(s) in order to achieve an appropriate Group Award. It is anticipated that there will be a number of ways in which the graded unit(s) criteria can be met, for example through project work.

Flexible credit decisions are made by appropriately skilled and trained staff in centres in accordance with the guiding principles issued by SQA. Decisions are documented and subject to external verification.

### 3. On Track: Supporting college and university transitions

*On Track* is a programme funded by the West of Scotland Wider Access Forum to address the challenges students face in making the transition from college to degree-level study at university. Since 2002 *On Track* has worked with college students on Access, HNC and HND courses across the full range of subject areas. They also work with workplace learners and adults responding to unemployment by returning to degree-level study.

The programme consists of a menu of customised activities and resources. In general, the programme consists of the following:

- Introduction to university life and study.
- Decision-making.
- Lectures, tutorials and labs.
- Presentations and group work.
- Critical thinking.
- Written assignments and exams.
- Referencing.
- Library resources and reading lists.
- Virtual Learning Environments.
- Employability skills.

The programme is delivered by trained tutors, who are current undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as some recent graduates with additional teaching experience. Delivery is usually in the student's place of learning, although a distance learning facility is being developed.

Examples of delivery formats include:

- **The classic model:** the full ten-hour programme delivered in weekly two-hour sessions.
- **The two-stage model:** decision-making support and an introduction to university life in the autumn term, with subject-specific study skills in the spring after university choices have been made.
- **The fast-track model:** the full programme delivered over one or two days.
- **The customised model:** a reduced programme delivering selected sessions identified as priorities by college staff and learners.
- **On Track workshops:** one-off sessions on specific themes (e.g. essay writing) open to any college student.

In 2008-9 *On Track* delivered 6,426 hours of learning to 711 registered learners.

#### 4. Engineers of the Future programme

Engineers of the Future is a three-way partnership between Ineos Manufacturing (a large chemicals company), Forth Valley College and Heriot Watt University. The five-year programme, unique in Scotland, is a 'higher apprenticeship' model, incorporating Modern Apprenticeship, HNC/HND and a Masters degree in an appropriate engineering discipline. Trainees can specialise in a range of engineering disciplines, including chemical, mechanical, electrical and instrumentation.

Launched in 2008, the programme complements Ineos's well-established Modern Apprenticeship programme and partnership with Forth College. Around 30 trainees are currently on the higher level programme, with more being recruited in 2010. Entry requirements include at least four Highers and an aptitude for practical as well as academic learning. The Highers must include Maths and Physics with a minimum of B grade passes. Higher chemistry is required for applicants wishing to study chemical engineering. A second language is desirable, or at least a willingness to learn another language. The trainees are fully sponsored by the company, who cover all tuition fees and pay an allowance of £5,850 in year 1, £8,320 in year 2 and approximately £8,500 in years 3, 4 and 5.



Forth Valley College delivers the first two years of the programme, during which the SVQ and Higher National qualifications are achieved. The following three years leading to the MEng degree are based at Herriot Watt University, combined with substantial practical work at Ineos's Grangemouth plant.

One trainee, Stacey Edmiston, said: 'I'd always liked chemistry and Maths at school and this led me to apply to Heriot-Watt University to do a degree in chemical engineering. However, when I found out about the Engineers of the Future programme I felt it would be a better option for me. The programme involved a lot more practical experience, not just studying from text books, plus we would be paid whilst we were studying. I also liked the idea of the opportunity to work closely with our sponsoring company, INEOS, at their site in Grangemouth.'

William Kane, Youth Development Manager, INEOS explained: 'For us there was recognition of the value to the company of recruiting work-ready graduates. We needed a training solution that would meet the business needs of the company, and fulfil the academic requirements for participants to progress to graduate level.'

Teaming up with Forth Valley College, in partnership with Heriot-Watt University has been very successful. We now have a unique five-year programme which develops candidates' practical skills, professional and managerial knowledge, resulting in a Masters Degree.

'It's thanks to our close relationship with Forth Valley College and Heriot-Watt University that we can ensure students progress through the programme receiving a rich mix of practical skills and academic studies.'

Initially funded by the company, college and university themselves, the programme is now supported by SFC funding for skills utilisation.

## Appendix 6: Examples of innovative practice in England

### 1. Progression agreements

#### a) *University of Huddersfield and Royal Mail*



### Progression Agreement Template

Between

Course(s)/Programme(s) title: Varied

Name of Organisation: Royal Mail (RMG)

And

Course(s)/Programme(s) title: FdA Business Skills for HR

Name of Organisation: University of Huddersfield

This Progression Agreement will commence in March, 2009. This Progression Agreement is initially agreed for a 3 year period. This Progression Agreement will be evaluated by both parties, bi-annually in May and October-November of each year.

#### 1. **Course/Programme Entry Criteria**

The University of Huddersfield agrees that the following entry criteria, if met, will enable a place to be offered on the FdA in Business Skills for HR:

Applicants must be employed by RMG HR Services or a related part of the business.

The educational background of applicants will be varied, encompassing NVQs, AVCEs (Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education), AS and A2 Levels, BTEC and those who have pursued professional qualifications in the past. Applications from mature students with appropriate relevant business experience will be welcomed and some evidence of recent study will be sought.

The Course Leader (University of Huddersfield (UoH)) has discretion over entry to the course for all students and will encourage an inclusive approach to access.

## 2. Guaranteed interview, or review of learner's transcript/portfolio, or place

The University of Huddersfield agrees to guarantee an interview for a place on the FdA Business Skills for HR if the following criteria are met:

- The applicant is employed by RMG and can demonstrate a capacity to benefit, personally and for the business, from the course.
- The applicant has the support of his/her line manager.

There are 25 places available per annum on the FdA Business Skills for HR (RMG).

## 3. Application Process

Learners should be employees of HR Services or related sectors of Royal Mail Group. They are expected to apply for the FdA Business Skills for HR by:

- Completing an application form, including business rationale for attendance;
- Obtaining agreement from their line mgr;
- Attending for interview.

In the event that places are over-subscribed a piece of additional written work outlining suitability for the course may be required, in addition to the above process.

The final selection decision will remain with the University course team, in consultation with RMG.

All unsuccessful applicants will receive feedback on their application in written format and may request additional one-to-one discussions with RMG staff about future applications.

General feedback on the selection process will be provided by the University of Huddersfield and the application process will be evaluated through the annual evaluation process.

#### 4. Understanding HE

<b>Month</b>	<b>Activity</b>
Jan-May	FdA course literature will be provided to RMG and distributed throughout the RMG business
June-August	An information event for new learners will be held at RMG, Rugby (RMG and U of H staff) with ongoing support to understand University requirements and the course.
August-following June	A launch event for new learners accepted onto the first year of the FdA will be held (RMG, Rugby) and the concepts of study skills and learning within HE will be introduced. There will be ongoing support throughout the first year both virtually and in face-to-face meetings.

#### 5. Personal Career and Development Planning

<b>Month</b>	<b>Activity</b>
Jan-May	RMG will provide information on the progression agreement and the application process.
June	An IAG session on applying to HE will be held jointly by UoH and RMG staff.
August-June (following year)	Applicants will receive information about the FdA and personal development at the launch event and in PD modules during the year. Throughout the year learners will have the opportunity to discuss the progression agreement and its implications for them and their personal learning & development. Final year students will receive IAG about progression to top-up degrees (UoH staff)

#### 6. Curriculum Planning and Development Activities

Any changes of modifications to the course will be discussed between representatives informally on an ongoing basis and at the bi-annual meeting of representatives.	
<b>Month</b>	<b>Activity</b>
Sept-Dec	RMG and UoH staff will exchange calendars. Outcomes of the progression agreement reviews will be included in the UoH annual evaluation process

May	<p>A meeting will take place between RMG and UoH staff to discuss and agree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- changes to the FdA</li> <li>- changes to UoH regulations for awards</li> <li>- feedback on students progressing from the previous year</li> </ul> <p>RMG will provide details of predicted numbers for the following year</p>
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## 7. Publicising the Progression Agreement

Details of the Progression Agreement will be published on each both the Royal Mail Group and the University's website and on the WYLLN website.

Information on the partnership will be included in organisational documents and appropriate publications to outline the partnership and the successes of participants.

## 8. Modification or Termination of the Progression Agreement

This progression agreement can be modified at any point with the joint agreement of both RMG and the University.

The progression agreement will be terminated if the FdA Business Skills for HR is discontinued or amended in such a way that it no longer meets the requirements of RMG.

RMG representatives will advise learners of alternative learning options available.

RMG and the University of Huddersfield will ensure that details of the learner progression agreement are removed from both institutions' and WYLLN websites.

## 9. Review of the Progression Agreement

Review will take place through bi-annual meetings (May and Sept-Dec) between UoH and RMG staff, the outcomes of which will be reported through incorporation in the annual evaluation report for the FdA Business Skills for HR.

**b) Extracts from the Construction Progression Agreement between Birmingham City University, the University of Wolverhampton and FE Colleges**

Feeder Institution and Craft Qualification		Bridging Units Required	Progression from Bridging Units to higher level courses or programmes at FE or HE
<b>Craft Qualifications</b>			
City of Wolverhampton college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brickwork – Advanced Apprenticeship Level 3</li> <li>Carpentry &amp; Joinery Advanced Apprenticeship Level 3</li> <li>Level 3 Diploma with NVQ: Wood Occupations</li> <li>MES Plumbing Award Advanced CGLI 6129</li> <li>Plumbing – Advanced Apprenticeship City and Guilds 6129 and 6089 Level 3</li> </ul>	Yes	BDes (Hons) Product Design and Innovation (UoW) BDes/Des (Hons) Interior Architecture & Property Development (UoW) BSc (Hons) Architectural Technology BSc (Hons) Construction Management and Economics (BCU) BSc (Hons) Planning and Development (BCU) BSc (Hons) Property and Construction (BCU) BSc Architectural Visualisation (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Architectural Design Technology (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) CAD and Construction (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Civil and Environmental Engineering (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Civil Engineering (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Construction Management (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Design Technology (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying (UoW) & (BCU) FD (Science) Auctioneering and Valuation (UoW) FD (Science) Construction (UoW) HNC Architectural Studies (UoW) HNC Building Studies (UoW) NHC Civil Engineering Studies (UoW) HNC in Construction (BCU)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brickwork Advanced Construction Award</li> <li>Carpentry and Joinery Advanced Construction Award</li> </ul>		
Dudley College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brickwork – Advanced Apprenticeship Level 3</li> <li>Carpentry &amp; Joinery Advanced Apprenticeship Level 3</li> <li>Gas Fitting Installation &amp; Maintenance C&amp;G 6012/03 NVQ Level 3</li> <li>Plumbing – Advanced Apprenticeship City and Guilds 6129 and 6089 Level 3</li> <li>Wood Trades (Advanced Construction Award) C&amp;G 6313/CITB Level 3</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brickwork Advanced Construction Award</li> <li>Carpentry and Joinery Advanced Construction Award</li> </ul>		
South Birmingham College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6129 City &amp; Guilds Plumbing Level 3</li> <li>Brickwork – Advanced Apprenticeship Level 3</li> <li>Carpentry &amp; Joinery Advanced Apprenticeship level 3</li> <li>Level 3 Diploma: Carpentry &amp; Joinery</li> <li>Plumbing – Advanced Apprenticeship City and Guilds 6129 and 6089 Level 3</li> </ul>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brickwork Advanced Construction Award</li> </ul>		

[...]

<b>BTEC National Certificate</b>		
Construction City of Wolverhampton College Dudley College South Birmingham College Stourbridge College Walsall College	BSc/BSc (Hons) Design Technology (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying (UoW) & (BCU) BSc (Hons) Planning and Development (BCU) BSc (Hons) Property and Construction (BCU) FD (Science) Auctioneering and Valuation (UoW) FD (Science) Construction (UoW) HNC Architectural Studies (UoW) HNC Building Studies (UoW) NHC in Construction (BCU)	Pass BTEC National Certificate
	BSc/BSc (Hons) Building Surveying (UoW) & (BCU) BSc/BSc (Hons) Commercial Management and Quantity Surveying (UoW) BSc (Hons) Construction Quantity Surveying (BCU) BSc (Hons) Real Estate (BCU) & (UoW)	Pass BTEC National Certificate with DD

[...]

Advanced Diploma (Level 3)		
Construction and the Built Environment City of Wolverhampton College Dudley College South Birmingham College Stourbridge College Walsall College	BDes/Des (Hons) Interior Architecture & Property Development (UoW) BDes (Hons) Product Design and Innovation (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Architectural Design Technology (UoW) BSc (Hons) Architectural Technology (BCU) BSc (Hons) Architectural Visualisation (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) CAD & Construction (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Civil Engineering (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Civil & Environmental Engineering (UoW) BSc/BSc (Hons) Construction Management (UoW) BSc (Hons) Construction Management and Economics (BCU) BSc/BSc (Hons) Design Technology (UoW) BSc (Hons) Planning and Development (BCU) BSc (Hons) Property and Construction (BCU) BSc/BSc (Hons) Quantity Surveying (UoW) & (BCU) FD (Science) Construction (UoW) FD (Science) Auctioneering and Valuation (UoW) HNC Architectural Studies (UoW) HNC Building Studies (UoW) HNC Civil Engineering Studies (UoW) HNC in Construction (BCU)	

## 2. Bridging modules

### a) Skills for HE (15 credits)

The Skills for HE module was an early priority of the Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Lifelong Learning Network, who saw a need for a short course that would help vocational learners to think about progression to higher level provision, develop important skills and raise their aspirations and confidence. The 15-credit module is delivered through eight classroom sessions providing a mix of teaching, discussion, workshop exercises and group work, supported by a CD ROM and 124 hours of independent study.

Learners explore:

- research and practical research skills;
- critical thinking as an academic process;
- academic writing approaches;
- reflection as a part of learning.

About 35 learners have taken part in the pilot so far, with many now considering progression to a Foundation degree offered by college partners.

Plans for the module include incorporating it into higher level skills programmes. The Faculty of Health at Staffordshire University will be adopting it as the first module of their Foundation degrees. It will also be run as a trial with a group of Diploma learners as part of their Extended Project. A tracking mechanism is being developed to evaluate the module's success in preparing learners for higher level learning.

**b) *Step-In to HE (10 credits)***

Step-In to HE is an innovative project from Aimhigher Greater Manchester and the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA) Lifelong Learning Network, aimed at increasing progression to higher level learning by Advanced Apprentices and other work-based and vocational learners.

The aim of the project is to build Advanced Apprentices' confidence in their ability to progress with the help of the Step-In Module, a new Level 4 bridging course worth 10 credits, validated by the University of Bolton and delivered over seven weeks. The content of the course covers research skills, personal development planning and writing techniques, and the course was developed by a partnership of delivery centres: Bury College, Skills Solutions, Stockport College and Wigan and Leigh College with the help of Aimhigher Greater Manchester.

Thirty-six learners commenced the Step-In Module across the four centres in April-May 2008 – most while still working towards completion of their apprenticeship programme. Learners rated getting more qualifications and learning new skills as important factors in their decision to take the course and most knew little or nothing about higher level skills provision at the outset. Of the 32 learners who completed the course successfully, 38 per cent intended to progress to higher level learning immediately and their intended progression routes, largely at the centres where they studied the Step-In Module, include HNCs, HNDs and FDs. A further 41 per cent of completers intend to progress in the next one-two years. Learners' knowledge about progression routes had increased significantly by the end of the course and most learners were confident that if they applied to a HEI, they would be accepted.

Plans for the further development of the Step-In to HE Project include significantly increased numbers of Advanced Apprentices taking the Step-In Module, the expansion of the targeting of the project to include other groups of work-based and vocational learners, and plans to widen the scope of recruitment by developing a new partnership of work-based learning providers across Greater Manchester.

**c) *Access to Higher Education Diploma: Vocational Engineering – Basingstoke College of Technology***

Noting the lack of apprentices progressing to HE, Basingstoke College of Technology (BCOT) decided with its partners to develop a gateway for many current apprentices and past apprentices. Developing a 'vocational' Access course was BCOT's choice because it provided matriculation to most universities.



The Lifelong Learning Network of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (Progress to Succeed) provided some funding for this work. The Open College of the South East helped with the curriculum development and it was soon established that half (30 credits) of the Access Diploma could be achieved by mapping the Level 3 advanced apprenticeship against the requirements of the Diploma. That left 30 credits of extra mathematics and HE skills units to make up the 60 credit award. These units were written and agreed after discussions with Portsmouth University, to ensure acceptability by engineering departments at universities. BCOT intends to offer these units as an evening class (over 24 weeks) with some weekend workshops. It is a course that can be taught at any college and which leads to a qualification accepted by most universities. As it was funded by the LLN it is available to all.

Two universities were represented on the validation panel and both representatives agreed that anyone studying this new course would enter HE with higher levels of skills in mathematics than a learner following the traditional 'A' level route.

### **3. Information, advice and guidance**

#### **a) *GMSA Pathways online progression tool***

Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA) is the Lifelong Learning Network for Greater Manchester. GMSA Pathways is an online progression tool which maps all of the progression opportunities from BTEC programmes within Greater Manchester FE providers onto higher level programmes at universities or colleges. Progression Agreements have been drawn up for each of the sectors, so that vocational learners have a clear entitlement linked to success in their vocational programmes.

The online enquiry system holds progression opportunities from some 80 vocational feeder courses onto more than 300 higher level receiver programmes. GMSA Pathways offers more than 10,000 BTEC learners across Greater Manchester a broad range of progression opportunities with a breadth of offer beyond the limits of their current area of learning. The system has been developed so that new content is added on a regular basis and refinements to the online system can be made as more user feedback is received.

Pathways have been extended to include agreed routes into HE for Advanced Apprentices in two pilot sectors: Built Environment and Business Administration. Currently agreements exist for progression from Advanced Apprenticeships in these two sectors to 21 higher level destination programmes. This includes nine Foundation Degrees and three Higher National Certificates. The additional nine programmes are all degrees, with the stipulation of the successful achievement of the Step-In to HE module (see 2b, above) as an entry requirement.

There is now a focus on embedding the online service into existing learner support systems and processes. Colleges are working on their own plans to develop tutorial sessions to include Pathways and to focus further activity with learners where there is still low progression. The service is now also being introduced to Connexions personal advisors who see it as a valuable online service for both colleges and schools when considering options and progression.

GMSA also plans to extend the scheme to include progression opportunities for Diploma students.

### ***b) Aimhigher Learning Pathways System (ALPS)***

#### ***Background***

Aimhigher is a national project to widen participation in HE, operating through 44 local area partnerships. In the West Midlands there are six Aimhigher partnerships:

- Birmingham and Solihull.
- Black Country.
- Coventry and Warwickshire.
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire.
- Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Aimhigher in the West Midlands have developed the Aimhigher Learning Pathways System (ALPS). The ALPS website (<http://www.aimhigherwm-alps.org>) offers a one-stop shop for detailed information on planning education and training options, mapping routes from entry through to higher level skills programmes and beyond to enable individuals to explore career opportunities.

#### ***Barrier addressed***

The ALPS System was developed in 2004, launched in 2005 and designed to:

- align information on vocational and work-based pathways and qualifications with academic ones, and make their equivalency and portability clear;
- help practitioners and learners establish the pathways into HE for those with non-traditional entry qualifications;
- link learning outcomes to careers and the information on the local labour market;

- provide information on progression in a user-friendly way that transcends local boundaries, reflecting travel to learn and earn patterns;
- capture both full and part-time provision;
- have currency, to ensure information on new provision is accessible.

Uniquely ALPS gives users a personalised progression map populated at all levels with details of qualifications, learning providers and possible careers relevant to their search criteria.

#### *Evidence of success and sustainability*

Used in schools, colleges, training providers and by Connexions and nextstep advisers across the region, ALPS is a valued IAG tool. ALPS currently contains information on 592 learning providers and 45,000 courses, and received 120,779 unique visits in 2007/08.

The value of ALPS is also reflected in the interest it has generated amongst other initiatives:

- five local authorities in the region have adopted ALPS as the platform for their 14-19 Local Area Prospectuses;
- two of the region's Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) are developing IAG tools based on ALPS data and infrastructure, to make the new pathways underpinned by LLN Progression Agreements visible to practitioners and learners;
- Aimhigher partnerships across the East Midlands have used the ALPS database to develop a similar system: [www.yourfuture-eastmidlands.co.uk](http://www.yourfuture-eastmidlands.co.uk)

## **4. Tracking vocational progression**

### *Where are all our students going? Tracking the progression trends of vocational college students into HE*

The Kent and Medway LLN is funding a research project undertaking longitudinal tracking at the individual level of the progression of level 3 and level 4 learners from FE colleges in Kent and Medway to HE programmes in local institutions and nationally. This is being carried out using ILR datasets from the LSC from 2005/06 to 2008/09 and matching with HESA data from 2006/07 to 2009/10. This tracking study fills a gap: providing quantitative evidence of progression trends and behaviour not previously available to sectors.

Initial analysis using a local progression sample into the five universities in the network enables comparisons between the progression rates of A Level, vocational and access learners from the local colleges, and the national analysis will provide comprehensive coverage. This data is further broken down into full and part-time modes and level 3 and level 4 qualification aims. These are analysed against age and gender and using postcodes, against indices of deprivation and other indicators. Early local findings are already providing interesting data relating to, for example:

1. numbers of level 3 learners progressing to non-prescribed HE in colleges compared to HEFCE funded HE;
2. comparison across the colleges of progression rates for BTEC National programmes;
3. delayed entry into HE programmes after one or two years compared to direct entry;
4. comparative socio-demographic profiles of college learners using indices of deprivation and other indicators.

## Appendix 7: Contributors to the review

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