

## Engaging employers with higher education

### HEFCE's strategy: what's in it for employers?

1. Higher education has a vital role in making the country more competitive by promoting the knowledge-based aspects of our economy and driving up productivity and growth, through improving skill levels. Although many universities and colleges are already engaged with the world of work, the HE sector needs to collaborate more effectively with employers to maximise the benefits for learners, employers, employees, the economy and society.
2. HEFCE's strategy will identify how we should support the HE providers to do this. In doing so, a key aim will be to promote partnerships between HE, employers and individuals. This will deliver a holistic approach to the key challenges and ensure a fair partnership in which all three share in the costs as well as the benefits of higher education. The strategy will seek to improve the employability of graduates, as well as helping HE to make a stronger contribution to workforce development.
3. We are adopting a two-phase approach. In the first phase we are funding a range of pilot projects which will develop our understanding of current activity and test approaches to making provision more relevant and tailored to employers' needs. More information on the projects is on the web at [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/pilot](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/pilot). The second phase will draw on findings from the pilots to develop a shared strategy between HE and its partners.

### What can employers expect from the first phase of the strategy?

4. We will be supporting a range of projects at national, sectoral, regional and local levels. These will explore and address the barriers faced by universities and colleges in being responsive to employers' needs. These include ensuring that:
  - quality assurance systems which apply to HE provision are fit for purpose
  - employer-responsive provision is funded appropriately
  - HE links effectively to policy for 14-19 year-old learners and further education
  - vocational and work-based learning is valued and supported by providers
  - academic staff have opportunities to update and refresh their knowledge of industry and the world of work
  - there are clearer routes to enter HE for learners from non-traditional backgrounds
  - credits and qualifications systems enable learners to learn and accumulate qualifications in a flexible way that fits with their work and broader life commitments.

5. Employers can also expect to see better services tailored to their needs, such as:
  - a. Access to HE level provision through the Train to Gain brokerage service for employers in three regions: North East, North West, and South West. We are running three higher level skills pathfinder projects: more information is on the web at [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/path/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/employer/path/)
  - b. Clearer presentation of the costs of HE programmes to help employers source programmes which meet their needs for general business skills and specialist knowledge.
  - c. More undergraduate and postgraduate courses that are relevant to employers' current needs; and more student placements and consultancy which will contribute to higher productivity and business transformation.
  - d. More universities and colleges offering opportunities for workforce development, such as through:
    - work-based learning
    - e-learning
    - short courses
    - flexible delivery at the workplace
    - accreditation of prior learning
    - accreditation of experiential learning
    - accreditation of companies' in-house training programmes.
6. To improve services for national employers, we will work with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC, the funding body for further education) to explore the potential for HE provision to be accessed through the LSC's National Employer Service.
7. We also aim to expand opportunities for employers to access HE provision to complement and enhance knowledge transfer, research and consultancy from universities and colleges.
8. In the longer term we seek to:
  - make clearer to employers which universities and colleges can meet their needs
  - spread good practice on engaging with employers to enable employers to focus on practical outcomes, with fewer committees
  - develop a shared language between employers and the HE sector
  - ensure employees know what support is available to them for increasing their skills and personal development
  - ensure graduates are well-rounded, with the skills and attributes not only for employability but to help them transform the businesses they work in.
9. We hope that employers will work with us in understanding their needs and how the HE sector can support these more effectively. To input your views or comments please contact Sarbani Banerjee ([s.banerjee@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:s.banerjee@hefce.ac.uk)).