

Higher Skills Pathfinder Project in the South West

Top-line skills, bottom-line benefits

Newsletter 9

Summer 09

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HLSP Conference, Manchester



On 19th March 2009 HERDA-SW co-hosted the National Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Conference with the North West Universities Association and Universities for the North East. The event, which took place at the Manchester Conference Centre, was well attended. Speakers included representatives from Balfour Beatty, Flybe and Nicholson's Transport; Hugh Tollyfield from HEFCE and the Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Directors: Deborah Winwood (HERDA-SW), Dr Celia Brigg (NWUA) and Katherine Paterson (Unis4NE). The event, chaired by Juliette Williams from the South West RDA, gave an overview of each region's pathfinder outcomes as well as providing delegates the opportunity to take advantage of several afternoon seminar sessions, giving information and advice on brokerage, credit frameworks and working with SMEs.

New Project Manager

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Deborah Winwood as Project Manager from 1st February 2009. Deborah was previously employed as the Business Development Officer, leading the project's intermediary activity. Her work history has revolved around the national skills agenda for the past 20 years, being heavily involved with skills training and adult education since 1988. Deborah moved into mainstream adult education in 2003 and has seen her career progress from FE lecturer at South Devon College to Centre Manager for Acacia Training and Development Ltd, before becoming involved with the HLSP project in 2007. We wish her well in the final stages of the project.

See overleaf for the Project Manager's update

Project Manager's Update



Now well into its final year the pace of the Higher Skills Pathfinder Project has accelerated and outcomes are significant. It is inevitable with any project of a "pathfinder" nature that the time taken to explore effective ways of working in unknown territory often exceeds the remaining time available to properly trial and establish the new methodologies and processes. Such is the case with the Higher Skills remit to "stimulate employer demand" and "test innovative ways to respond to employer demand for higher skills" and it seems that just as we get well into the swing of it plans are being laid for its closure in December.

The team of field based intermediaries is now well established and is working with a sub-regional as well as regional remit to find and respond to higher level skills demand from employers. Partnership working with other employer facing organisations and associations, particularly LMAS and LSW has led to some extremely successful results, and in some instances to collaborative responses from HEIs. The research team have published a "Literature Review" and will, in June, publish a joint report with CIHE relating to case studies of best practice in employer engagement. The Shell Framework has been validated at UWE and is now ready for trial learners to register. The funding methodology work has defined and is testing a methodology to cost Work Based Learning (WBL) and has now increased the size of the data set such that a more reliable outcome will be available after June. In addition, a HE Staff Development package is due for completion at the end of May.

As part of the project's legacy, plans are now in place to provide a series of dissemination events towards the end of the year. These will cascade the methodologies and the learning from the project to the region's HEIs in a manner that enables them to consider and plan how to take forward the work from the pathfinder. In conjunction with this, products will be made available, loosely named "HE Toolkit" at this point, to provide processes, documentation, templates and guidance material relating to brokering higher skills and meeting employers' demands.

The project has undergone a number of staff changes, but new members of the team have been made very welcome by the remaining "old hats" and have thrown themselves wholeheartedly into the project, on both a work and social front! Team meetings and events have become a lively and very productive place to be. A large proportion of the team are working towards attaining SFEDI Accreditation which places them on an equal footing with other skills and business brokers in the region, further adding to their growing credibility in the business community.

A passing mention has to be made to the economic climate, no article is currently complete without it! The situation comes high on the project risk log in respect of the potential to affect employer engagement, willingness to proceed with training solutions and the viability of the employer led development fund projects. In acknowledging the risks a number of measures have been put in place to reduce the potential impact on the project successes and these appear to be working. With a considerable effort from the intermediaries we are meeting quarterly targets. And so we return to the nature of a "pathfinder" and the necessity to continually evolve and test new ways of working in response to business needs.

Having completed my first 4 months in the post as Project Manager I am confident that not only will the Higher Skills project meet its intended outcomes, but that it will do so with aplomb!

Deborah Winwood, Project Manager

To contact Deborah please call 01392 454970 or email deborah.winwood@herda-sw.ac.uk

Strands Update

Funding Methodology

The first interim report was completed at the beginning of 2009. This was very much a pilot exercise for the strand using early data from 6 projects with a view to quantifying the cost per FTE student of employer demand led learning experiences and evaluating the relative contributions from each partner. The outputs were presented to the HLSPP Steering Group and then discussed with the Funding Council. Acknowledging that definitive conclusions cannot be made with such a small sample size, the Funding Council focused on strategic messages from the first interim report with a view to informing future policy initiatives.

It was agreed that the second interim report would proceed with minor amendments to the format at this stage. The report, which should be completed in May 09, will use data from about 15 projects and will contain more empirical data than was available earlier. Recent activity has therefore focused on summarising data for the second interim report using a cut off point of December 2008. The project then forecast further costs needed to deliver to a defined cohort of students. The process is intended to be simple to encompass the range of employers from very large manufacturing companies and public sector organizations, to SMEs.

Daphne Rubner, University of Bath

Research

Research activities over this quarter have mainly centered around reviewing and preparing case study material for the collaborative report with the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE). We have had a number of meetings during this period and made substantial headway in compiling the report. The intent is that this report will provide a powerful means for individuals and their institutions to reflect on the possible range of employer engagement activity and the extent to which different approaches contribute towards the overall strategic mission(s) of the institution. Thus, rather than a detailed description of individual cases, they will be used in an illustrative capacity to highlight how organisations can achieve a closer alignment of strategy, processes and people. It is planned that this report will be completed by the end of May.

The next phase of the research will involve interviews with middle-senior level staff involved in employer engagement in a number of different HEIs (both within and outside the South West) to identify how institutions are facilitating and supporting employer engagement activities. These interviews will be carried out between May and July, with a report prepared by the end of September.

Richard Bolden, University of Exeter

Shell Framework

Following regional scrutiny and advice, validation documentation was submitted to UWE for a Panel to consider the Framework for approval in February 2009. The Framework was enthusiastically received and the Panel granted its approval for the Framework and a suite of non-subject specific awards entitled Integrated Professional Development (IPD).

The distinctive features of the Framework are that it will:

- * allow for the acceptance of credit from other awarding bodies as a formal part of an award of the Framework.

- * enable the integration of short courses/CPD and experiential learning into a higher education qualification.

The acceptance of learning from another awarding body, including marks and grades, was considered by the Panel to be a pivotal development with the Framework offering a vehicle for the management, quality assurance and credit accumulation of learning opportunities for a range of higher education providers within and beyond the South West region.

Validation of the Framework by UWE was not without a number of conditions which must now be met to the Panel's satisfaction and work is ongoing in this regard. Any parties interested in further information about the Framework or getting involved in its implementation should contact Helen Millican, Development Officer: Helen.Millican@uwe.ac.uk

Helen Millican, University of the West of England

Intermediary Away Day

On 3rd April the Higher Skills team gathered for a day of team building activities hosted by the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester. Here is a selection of memories from the day.

"Ready... steady... cook" came the cry from across the kitchen and, fuelled with a selection of small pastries, orange juice and coffee which they had enjoyed half an hour before, the Higher Level Skills team sprang into action like coiled culinary springs. Each team with one goal in mind: to win the cookery challenge.



With several new members joining the Higher Skills team, the away day—held at the Royal Agricultural College—was a great team-building opportunity. Before the cookery challenge the group was split into four smaller teams and asked to prepare sausage, mash and Baked Alaska to be judged at the end. The whole group then assembled at lunchtime to taste the Michelin-standard meal which the teams had so expertly prepared.

Lunch over, the group headed to the outdoor centre for a workshop on NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) by Alan Howe who entertained and educated the group on successful interaction. During the workshop, the groups of four were given the chance to do some off-road quad-biking. And, despite several slow starts, the teams were soon roaring through the tranquil fields of Gloucestershire.

The day was a great success, a fantastic opportunity for the team to get to know each other and to learn some really useful skills to take away.

Rachel Jenkins, Higher Skills Project Assistant



"The Away Day was especially useful for me as I have just joined the team late in the day and know no one. Everyone was very welcoming and friendly and I picked up some good advice along the way. I also had a very good time and was quite surprised at how much I enjoyed the cookery class - others said the same. Obviously, I think the team I was in should have won the 'cook off', but let's not dwell on injustices... At the end of it all I felt very much part of the group and had a greater understanding of how things work and how we work together. A successful Away Day all round."

Jono Wardle (pictured top right)



"Challenging, exhilarating, informative"

Michelle Collins, Uni of Glos



"Enlightening, creative and enjoyable"

Sally Sharpe, SCAT



The skills that the intermediaries developed over the course of the day have been carried forward to increase the effectiveness of team working - particularly evident at the quarterly project meetings.

Deborah Winwood, Project Manager

"Thought provoking and fun"

John Britton, Uni of Bath

The Higher Skills Project Team would like to say a big thank you to the RAC who hosted an enjoyable and memorable day for all.

Upcoming Events

NEW! Short course starting soon! Leadership Essentials for an Economic Downturn

An exciting new short course for anyone leading an SME or those with an interest in developing their leadership skills.

Developed by Bristol Business School (UWE) in partnership with Leadership South West and the University of Exeter Business School, this course will focus on immediate, practical support in the following essential leadership activities:

- Mastering your finance
- Planning for performance
- Focusing on your people
- Focusing on your customer
- Mastering your marketing
- Finding funding and support

The programme is made up of two half day workshops which will provide the opportunity to work through your current challenges with your peers in the peer learning sets. A comprehensive workbook and one-to-one coaching sessions are also included, facilitating the development of personal leadership skills or enabling you to focus on particular leadership challenges. Workshop dates are available in Bristol (at UWE's Frenchay Campus) and Exeter.

First dates are:

Bristol - 25/06/09 & 20/07/09
Exeter - 12/06/09 & 17/07/09

For more information and details on how to book please visit:
<http://www.uwe.ac.uk/bbs/business/short/workshop.pdf>

Or call 0117 328 6304 (Bristol) / 01392 269231 (Exeter)

Growing Gloucestershire Conference - Thursday 25 June 2009

This year's Growing Gloucestershire Conference promises to offer the latest thinking in organisational and personal development. As well as a fantastic selection of seminars from local experts and academics there will also be two inspiring keynote speakers - Charles Landry, Director of Comedia, and Robin Fielder, Managing Director with Leadership Development Ltd.

The Growing Gloucestershire Conference provides several ways of adding to your Continuing Professional Development (CPD), offering opportunities to...

- Listen to local and national experts; an excellent opportunity to learn from their successes and gain current business insight from some of the best minds the country has to offer
- Network and meet other professional people at the GEN Networking Café located within the Exhibition Centre; a good opportunity to discover new local products and services whilst networking
- Benefit from lessons in professional development and take away ideas to improve your business

For more information and to book a place at the conference please visit www.genconference.net or call 01242 714104

Contacting Us

If you have a query or wish to learn more about our activities you can email us at higherskills@expertsouthwest.com or alternatively you may wish to contact one of our sector specific intermediaries below who will be pleased to help you.

Creative Industries

Stella Yates	Arts Institute at Bournemouth	syates@aib.ac.uk	07838 234848
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Engineering

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Health

Shelley Rider	University of the West of England	shelley.rider@uwe.ac.uk	07990 778032
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Strands

Funding Methodology

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Research

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Shell Framework

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