



NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder March 2007

March 2007 saw continued progress on the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder (HLSP). Crucially, a call for proposals for employer led provision from HEIs has now been issued (see below) so the model of a demand led system can begin to be tested.

- **Pathfinder Information Event**

An information event about the Pathfinder was held on the morning of 16th March at the Reebok Stadium. The first call for proposals for demand led provision was also launched on the day. The event was well attended with over 150 delegates present from HEIs, FECs and other partners.

The first half of the morning involved a presentation from NWUA about the wider Pathfinder project and input from Train to Gain and Business Link on the brokerage element. There were then 4 sector based sessions where the Sector Skills Councils presented their higher level skills needs to HE colleagues and the application process was explained in detail. The deadline for proposals in this round is **Monday 30 April 2007**. The application form and guidance notes are available for downloading from the NWUA website at www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/downloads.aspx. Presentations and other material from the event can be found at www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/event_docs.aspx.

- **Sector Panels**

Sector Panel colleagues have continued to liaise throughout the period, to identify their shared higher level needs and latterly, to discuss criteria for the assessment and scoring of the applications received in the first call for proposals to ensure that process is transparent and meets the identified needs of the employers in their sector. Debbie Hatton, Regional Strategy Advisor for Construction Skills, has been appointed Chair of the Construction Panel.

- **Brokerage**

HEFCE and the LSC have been developing a protocol for joint working between the three Higher Level Skills Pathfinders and the Train to Gain brokerage service nationally. This will be agreed soon and will be available on the NWUA website. NWUA have also been working with the NW Regional LSC team to produce a NW version of this protocol to guide the relationship between the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder and specifically the four HE Specialist Advisors and the Train to Gain brokers. This protocol details how the relationship will work between the two projects including clear outlines of the referral process and follow up and reporting mechanisms, these details will be crucial to the success of integrating HE into the brokerage activity. A final version of the protocol will be agreed by the HLSP Steering Group when they meet on April 11th.

For the Business Link IDB element, it is anticipated that a meeting will take place with Peter Watson, Chief Executive of NW Business Link, in April when the new organisation is up and running to discuss the relationship with the Pathfinder. This meeting will investigate the potential for co-location / hot-desking of the HLSP Advisors with sector specific brokers as well as discussing how HEIs can best be represented on the supplier database for the brokers.

The North East HLSP is leading on the development of a HE training module for brokers. A course has now been developed which will be piloted in the North East in May. It is hoped that the module will be available for national use within a month after piloting, although this is subject to change dependent in the initial evaluation. The NW team will be producing other materials to support this training and these will be made widely available to colleagues.

- **Specialist Advisors**

The Specialist Advisors have continued their visits to HEIs and FECs throughout the region to discuss provision already delivered and areas where demand led provision might be developed to meet the needs of employers. If colleagues in HEIs and FECs would like to meet with an advisor to discuss opportunities available, please contact us. The Advisors also continue to meet with several partner organisations in the course of this work, including Regional Cluster Organisations, Aimhigher, Foundation Degree Forward and the 4 Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs). Discussions with the LLNs have focused around data management and ways in which the Pathfinder and the LLNs can effectively work together on the development of employer led provision.

A number of presentations have also been given to groups of interested staff within HEIs by Dr Celia Brigg, Assistant Director (Skills). These have allowed institutions to consider how they will engage with the HLSP across all sector areas and how the activity will integrate with current and planned activities with the individual HEI. If other institutions are interested in having similar discussions please contact the HLSP team.

- **Database**

Work continues on the regional database of provision which will be used by brokers to respond to enquiries from businesses with higher level skills needs. The first phase of updating information from NW HEIs is almost complete and the data will be used to develop and test an online database before information from FECs and private providers is added in. The next phase will involve gathering information on provision from the FE sector and this will commence in April.

- **Staff Development**

If the aspiration of a demand led HE system is to be realised, there is clearly a need for significant staff development activity for colleagues in HEIs. In this regard, the NW Pathfinder is working with the other Pathfinder projects in the North East and South West to identify what these needs might be and how they can be addressed. Work is being undertaken with the HE Academy to take this forward. In the longer term, there will be a need to roll this out across the HE sector and initial lobbying of HEFCE has begun in order that they recognise and support this.

- **Other Links**

Pathfinder staff met with a representative of unionlearn, the TUC's learning branch, to discuss possible collaborations. A briefing on the project for unionlearn staff and union learning representatives will be held in May and other linkages are being explored.

Contact Us

Previous updates are available on the NWUA website at www.nwua.ac.uk along with full details of the NW HLSP.

For further information please contact:

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