

## NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Update Winter 2007

The North West HLSP has continued to make considerable progress with over 20 employer engagement projects now supported by development funding from the sector panels. These are helping HEIs and FECs to meet the challenge, set by Leitch, of enabling the workforce to reach ambitious targets for attainment at Level 4 and above.

### **Brokerage**

#### ***Referrals***

The HLSP has continued to receive referrals throughout this period from the Train to Gain Skills Brokers and from other partners such as the Sector Skills Councils. The Specialist Advisors will continue to work closely with Brokers in the New Year to maintain this.

It is anticipated that the number of Digital and Creative referrals received may increase following a change in the remit of Train to Gain brokerage and the ability for Brokers to now engage with the self-employed. The Specialist Advisor (Digital and Creative) is spending time within the NWBL Office to help build relationships with the Brokers and with their sector specific activity.

#### ***Training***

The HLSP team have continued to build strong links with the relevant sector Train to Gain Skills Brokers and have undertaken a number of joint visits and meetings where referrals relate to higher level skills training. This has supported the development of the Brokers knowledge of HE.

NWUA and FDF delivered some specific training on HE to all brokers at a development day in January, utilising the modules developed by the LSC in partnership with the HE Regional Associations and FDF. The resources from these modules are also available on the NWBL Knowledge Platform to provide ongoing support.

### **Development of Provision**

#### ***Summary of year one activity***

There are currently 20 HLSP projects that have been fully approved and selected by the Sector Panels with further projects being finalised over the next month. Projects are now working across 12 institutions to develop around 13 full qualifications and a wide variety of flexible CPD courses. Organisations and employers from across the 4 priority sectors are well represented. New types of partnership have been formed to facilitate the dialogue and collaboration across institutions. For example, Manchester Metropolitan University in collaboration with Liverpool Community College and Wigan and Leigh College, is aiming to build on all three institutions' links with the fashion and textile industry and respond to the sector's skills needs through the development of a portfolio of integrated short courses which lead into accredited progression units at both level 4 and 5. The aim of this collaboration is to allow the three HE and FE institutions to develop innovative approaches to demand led training for the fashion sector. Details of all funded projects can be found on the NWUA website at [www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/default.aspx](http://www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/default.aspx).

Initial feedback has presented positive accounts of progress to date in joint discussions, curriculum development and networking between partner HE institutions. The Pathfinder has demonstrated a positive impact and beneficial relationships are being built even at this early stage. A formal evaluation report from HEFCE is due to report on the key findings of all three HLSPs in March 2008.

Project teams have been able to attract additional funding from partners and employers that will be of direct benefit to HLSP projects. This funding has come as in-kind support in the form of provision of work placements and careers advice, contributing time to curriculum development, contributing time as guest lecturers, being active members of project Steering Groups and Curriculum Development groups, meetings and specific workplace mentoring, travel costs, consumables, equipment and tuition fees for employees. Some projects funded in the early stages of the Pathfinder are now nearing a mid-point review and Specialist Advisors are arranging meetings to monitor progress and obtain detailed feedback and evidence of impact against the original milestones.

### ***Future Funding Rounds***

There will be a fourth and final round of funding in the Construction sector, which will commence at the end of February. As in the previous round, this will be a two stage process. Institutions will be invited to submit Expressions of Interest (EoIs) against agreed skills priorities, issued by the Sector Skills Councils. The Sector Panel will then evaluate the EoIs, and invite proposals that meet the expressed criteria to develop into full bids, with collaboration and guidance from the relevant Sector Skills Councils. The schedule for the next round of funding will be as follows:

25<sup>th</sup> February 2008 – launch of call for Expressions of Interest

31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 – deadline for receipt of Expressions of Interest

16<sup>th</sup> May 2008 – deadline for receipt of full bids (only those invited to develop from Expressions of Interest will be accepted).

Full details of the next round of funding will be emailed to providers on 25<sup>th</sup> February, and will also be available on the Construction pages of the HLSP website  
[http://www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/downloads\\_construction.aspx](http://www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/downloads_construction.aspx).

The third round of funding for the Business and Professional Services Sector was launched in late November. The deadline for proposals is on February 25<sup>th</sup> and the panel will meet in early March to assess any proposals received.

Currently there are no further rounds of funding in the Advanced Engineering and Materials sector or the Digital and Creative Industries sector.

Further details on funding rounds in all sectors and relevant documentation can be found on the NWUA website at [www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/default.aspx](http://www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/default.aspx).

### **Database of Provision**

The development of the database has been delayed due to the position of Senior Officer within the HLSP team being vacant since October 1<sup>st</sup>. This has now been resolved and it is anticipated that significant progress in the development and piloting of the database will be made during the first quarter of 2008.

### **North West Development Funding**

NWUA has been working with NWDA on the development of a proposal to extend the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder (HLSP) to cover the RES priority sectors of Biomedical,

Energy and Environmental Technologies and Food and Drink. NWDA is also interested in supporting the development of any demand led non-prescribed HE in the four sectors already covered by the HLSP, as this is not eligible for funding with the current HEFCE monies. NWDA has also asked NWUA to oversee the spend of £1m for leadership and management activity at level 4+ across the seven sectors. This development will be in alignment with the recently finalised NWDA Framework for Leadership and Management. The funding is anticipated to run from April 2008 until March 31st 2010 and would be managed in the same way as the current HLSP funding. The full proposal has now been submitted and the outcome is expected after Easter.

## **Other Activity**

### ***Staffing***

NWUA has now recruited to the Senior Officer vacancy within the HLSP Team following interviews at the end of November. Olesya Shipova joined NWUA during January 2008 and is working to provide support across all areas of the HLSP, focusing specifically on the database of provision and dissemination of activity as well as undertaking some research activity relating to the potential NWDA HLSP Extension.

### ***FDF Linkages***

The HLSP team have been working with Foundation Degree Forward (FDF) to organise two Leitch seminars for 2008.

The events will look at the outcomes of the Leitch Review, the creation of the new Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), the Comprehensive Spending Review settlement, the Government's Sub National Review, the HEFCE annual grant letter for 2008/09, the forthcoming Higher Level Skills Strategy and other key related initiatives impacting on the development of higher skills, and, in the light of them, to consider through presentations and interactive exercises, how flexible approaches to achieving higher skills can be most successfully promoted to employers in the post-Leitch context.

The Leitch Review report (published in December 2006) and the Government's response (the Leitch Implementation Plan, published in July 2007) represent a watershed in UK higher skills policy, with the emphasis on employer demand led higher education. This strategy was given further impetus in the Comprehensive Spending Review and the HEFCE annual grant letter for 2008/09.

Meanwhile there has been a major shift in the Government's approach to local economic development with the publication in July 2007 of the Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration which signalled clearly the Government's intention to devolve more power on economic development (including skills) issues to the local and sub-regional levels, where the North West City Regions of Manchester and Merseyside have been particularly prominent in pressing for greater autonomy.

Taken together these developments open up quite a new environment for the development of higher skills in the North West and these two events, building on the very successful events organised by *fdf* in early 2007 to look at the immediate outcomes of the Leitch Review, aim to explore the potential implications, with a list of high profile speakers from central Government, HEFCE, NW HEIs, and our City Regions, backed by relevant case studies.

The events will be held from 9.30 to 13.00 (followed by buffet lunch):

- On Friday 15 February 2008 at Harris Park Conference and Function Centre, University of Central Lancashire, 253 Garstang Road, Fulwood, Preston
- On Friday 29 February 2008 at the Conference Centre, University of Manchester Incubator Company, Grafton Street, Manchester

Further details are available at [http://www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/event\\_leitch\\_review.aspx](http://www.nwua.ac.uk/pathfinder/event_leitch_review.aspx)

### ***Links to SW HLSP***

The SW HLSP is undertaking a significant piece of work on the cost of bespoke work-based / work-place HE learning which is also informing the work HEFCE is undertaking on TRAC-T. To inform this work, which is being led by the University of Bath, they have asked both the NW and NE HLSPs whether any of the projects funded by HLSP money would be willing to work with them to provide input on the true costs of developing and delivering this type of provision compared to traditional on campus HE. 2 of the NW HLSP funded projects have agreed to participate in this work.

### **Contact Us**

Previous updates are available on the NWUA website at [www.nwua.ac.uk](http://www.nwua.ac.uk) along with full details of the NW HLSP.

For further information please contact:

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