



North West Universities Association Response to the DIUS HE at Work – High Skills: High Value Consultation

June 2008

The North West Universities Association (NWUA) is the representative body of 14 HE Institutions¹ in the North West. In addition to this collaborative response NWUA members may respond to the consultation on an individual basis.

The NWUA response has focused on questions where there was a specific consensus of opinion between NWUA members. Member HEIs also wished to emphasise particular views on this area of HE activity where there was a strong consensus of opinion between NW HEIs and therefore some of the response sits outside of the specific questions asked in the document.

NW HEIs are very supportive of strategies which aim to improve the employability of graduates, increase the number of student studying STEM related subjects and up-skill and re-skill the existing workforce. All the institutions in the region have been working on these activities for a number of years now with a wide range of approaches and different HEIs focusing on different areas depending on their individual missions and specialisms.

NWUA members welcome the HE strategy and the focus of skills policy on the higher level skills as many recent documents have focused on lower level skills and not addressed the full range of skills issues at all levels. There was however, a consensus of opinion from NWUA members that the HE at Work consultation was not very stretching and did not address many new areas of activity. The document was felt to focus on activity which was already ongoing across the region and yet did not fully recognise the extent of the work, which is already taking place collaboratively or on an individual institution basis.

The response below highlights many examples of current activity which already address the questions in the consultation and which NWUA members feel should be used as examples of best practice which can be rolled out and grown rather than developing further new models. The response also addresses NW HEI views on the role of Sector Skills Councils, unionlearn, RDAs and other relevant partners, these are based on close working linkages

¹ University of Cumbria, Lancaster University, University of Central Lancashire, Edge Hill University, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University, University of Liverpool, University of Chester, University of Bolton, University of Salford, University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, The Open University in the North West and Royal Northern College of Music (Associate Member)

between all such partners in the NW region both through the NW Regional Skills and Employment Board, the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder and individual HEI projects and activities e.g. HEFCE funded employer engagement pilots.

NWUA would like to make a couple of specific points not covered through the questions but which are of key interest and concern to NW HEIs. The first of these relates to the proposed HEFCE funded national 'clearing house' service for Train to Gain brokers. NWUA understands that this has already been funded by HEFCE in the form of the National CPD Network but a number of concerns have been raised regarding this model and its effectiveness. In the NW region NWUA previously ran the Knowledge Northwest project on behalf of the NW HEIs. This project looked to have a regional 'clearing house' for HE related referrals both relating to skills and knowledge transfer / research activity. The project demonstrated that this model is not an effective way of dealing with such enquiries due to the significant investment of resource from an HEI to handle enquiries relative to the very small return received from such enquiries. This and further outcomes are clearly articulated in the final report from the project which is available on the NWUA website at http://www.nwua.ac.uk/docs/pdf/KNW_Final_Report_FINAL_200907.pdf

There is further concern relating to the potential for duplication with regional HLSP activity relating to integration of higher level skills with the Train to Gain Brokerage service and also some pilot activity being undertaken by NWUA through our HEFCE and NWDA funded cluster programme investigating integration of HE activities with the wider Business Link brokerage teams. The model utilised by the HLSP provides Specialist HE Advisors to support the Train to Gain Brokers on HE related enquiries, supplementing the knowledge held by the Brokers and working on a sectoral basis. Informal feedback to date is suggesting that this model is proving successful but this will be formally tested in the Impact Study being commissioned by the HLSP over the next few months. NWUA would question the added value provided by a national service and would argue that these types of relationships are best handled on a local or regional basis where there is a greater knowledge of specific HEI expertise and of the correct contacts within HEIs depending on the referrals received.

Secondly, NWUA would like to clarify the understanding of the co-purchasing role outlined for Sector Skills Councils in section 7.15 of the consultation document. Following discussion with DIUS colleagues at an NWUA meeting and also at the Manchester Consultation Event it is our understanding that this relates to SSCs working with their employers and HEIs in order to stimulate demand from employers for higher level skills provision and to stimulate a willingness from employers to then invest in this co-funded provision. NWUA understands that this section was not intended to imply the diversion of HEFCE resources into SSCs.

Section 5 Going forward – more, and more employable, graduates

Question 1: What incentives would encourage employers to be more involved in providing careers information, advice and guidance both before, and during university?

For employers to be involved there needs to be clear benefits to their business. For this reason it is difficult to see how to incentivise employers to only be involved in IAG activity, however, if they are involved in research activity, knowledge transfer or skills development with an HEI then they can be encouraged to also contribute to IAG activities to help with their future workforce.

Some examples of good practice could also be taken from STEM work; here employers are involved with IAG work before and during university due to their difficulties recruiting graduate level staff. Therefore there is a direct benefit to them encouraging students to study science subjects at all levels.

Question 2a: Given that subject choice at 14 and GCSE and A-level attainment are critical factors, is there a case for specific incentives to prospective students to take Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects?

There are already many projects addressing this issue and working with schools and colleges to promote the take up of science subjects prior to HE. Lessons need to be learnt from current initiatives and then the successful schemes grown and rolled-out across the country.

Question 3: What support and incentives would help universities offer access to the workplace for all their students?

In order for HEIs to offer access to the workplace for their students, employers need to be encouraged to take students into their workplace and provide them with useful experience. In recent years fewer employers have been willing to offer placements and therefore we have seen a decrease in sandwich courses and placements within courses. However, employers express the need for students to have work experience and prefer to employ graduates from courses which include a work related component.

More work could be undertaken to investigate other approaches to work-related course components such as using virtual environments to help students understand the workplace and also using employers to come into the institution and set real life problems and investigations for students to undertake as part of their course assessment.

NW HEIs have also demonstrated that when employers know a course produces graduates with the skills they require then they are happy to be involved in providing work-related components of the course and often offering placements to the students during their course.

Question 4: How can we help employers better articulate their needs for broad based employability skills?

Generally HEIs already have a good understanding of what employers are looking for from employable graduates. There are many generic skills which include communication skills, interpersonal skills, presentation skills etc... and then there are sometimes skills specific to certain industries i.e. engineering, science etc... although many employers are often looking for the most talented graduates and are then happy to give them industry specific knowledge and skills themselves through in house training and CPD.

A NW example of work already being undertaken in this area is Liverpool John Moores University and their WOW Skills Programme which runs alongside all their undergraduate programmes. Over the last two years, LJMU has carried out extensive research with key stakeholders and business partners to identify exactly what is required from a university and its graduates in the 21st century. Based on this research, the University has completely changed its offer to students. First, it has overhauled all of its undergraduate degrees to make graduate skills development and work-related learning explicit in every single course. Secondly, and uniquely, all students will have the opportunity to develop high-level 'world of work' or WOW skills in addition to their academic development.

These high-level WOW skills will cover such areas as leadership, professional and business ethics, finance, entrepreneurship and negotiation, skills which will help LJMU graduates develop their careers. These skills are being determined by an Advisory Group, consisting of senior business figures in national and international companies including Airbus, BNFL, British Chambers of Commerce, CBI, Ford Europe, Ford International, GKN Aerospace, IoD, Littlewoods, Marks and Spencer, NHS, Oracle, RICS, Shell International, Sony Europe and United Utilities.

Question 5: What more can we do to provide more graduates with the language skills and cultural awareness to thrive in a global marketplace?

Many HEIs now offer language options as part of the majority of undergraduate courses and students can be encouraged to take up these opportunities to aide them in entering the global marketplace. Other initiatives such as the Leonardo Da Vinci Mobility programme allows both students and staff to undertake placements and exchanges with employers and providers in other EU countries. This provides students with work experience relating to their degree and also with the experience of living and working in a different country. Other schemes such as Erasmus and Socrates also assist these objectives through the students undertaking periods of study in other countries, one or more of these schemes are offered in most HEIs and are open to all students, however, more could be done to make students aware of these schemes and of the value to them in their future working careers.

At the University of Liverpool a number of modern languages students have participated in the Leonardo programme. One student identified a need to improve his confidence when speaking and writing in German in a real work environment. The student arranged a placement at a publishing company in Berlin, Germany for a period of 5 months. The publishers, Berlin Story Ltd., is an SME with between 21 and 50 employees focusing on German and Berlin history. The student was employed to undertake day to day shop duties and also oversee the translation of the company website from German into English, the student also helped by translating a number of books from the company's publishing house. The placement gave the student daily experience in writing and speaking the German language and increased his confidence greatly as well as giving him specific translation experience to enhance his CV and assist him in gaining a job following graduation. The student also reported a greater understanding of German culture gained through living and working in the country during the placement.

Section 7 Going forward – raising the skills and capacity for innovation and enterprise of those already in the workforce

Question 6a: What further incentives are needed to stimulate and meet employer demand for high level skills?

The stimulation of demand for higher level skills by employers is a key remit for Sector Skills Councils and employer representative bodies such as Chamber of Commerce, CBI and IoD. At higher level many employers see themselves as funding training in its entirety and do not understand that there is public funding of training through HEFCE. Clearer articulation of the public funding support for level 4+ training would assist in enabling employers to understand they are not paying in full.

More work should also be undertaken with existing HE/employer activity to articulate the bottom line benefits to employers of training their workforce at this level. Many employers still think that training their staff will enable them to leave and more needs to be done to make employers understand that not training their workforce would have more serious effects on the businesses than some staff leaving.

A greater emphasis on higher level skills within the national skills campaign would assist in helping employers consider the skills needs of their entire workforce. Previously focus has been placed on basic level skills and level 2 and similar focus could be given to level 4+ in the future.

The NW HLSP has demonstrated that once employers are committed to training and have worked with HE providers to develop a course which specifically meets their needs and is delivered in a way they feel is acceptable then they will be happy to support their workforce to undertake this training. Statistics from NW HLSP funded development projects have shown significant levels of employer investment in the development and delivery of HE provision.

To incentivise HE providers to meet employer demand for higher level skills initial development funding and funding for delivery through numbers to support growth help to reduce the risks to institutions of this type of work. Risks to institutions are high in the time and commitment involved in developing provision which meets employers need but for which employers then have no commitment to utilise. This can impact on the viability and sustainability of the provision and therefore external funding to support this activity can reduce the risk to institutions and hopefully act as pump priming funding to help institutions adopt this type of activity as part of their institutional mission.

United Utilities clearly saw the benefits to their business of higher level skills when they approached UCLan to develop a water industry specific higher level development course. United Utilities worked with UCLan, FDF, EU Skills and Bolton Community College to develop a Foundation Degree in Utilities Management which combines specific technical knowledge with general management training. The design and development of the modules was undertaken in close collaboration with United Utilities and their staff were also involved in teaching on the course, University staff also spent time with employers so they had a full understanding of the business.

Demand can also be stimulated from small companies and the University of Cumbria has been working closely with a Cumbrian Based SME, Alan Dawson Associates Ltd. The company, which employs around 50 staff, identified a demand for a world class metalwork course with a new specialist curriculum building on the expertise of the Company and of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Cumbria. A Foundation Degree was developed through close partnership working and this now offers current employees access to specialist HE provision as well as providing new entrants to the industry with the specialist skills required.

Liverpool Hope University has worked with a local Merseyside Manufacturing company to undertake an Executive Mentoring Programme. This need was identified through the Centre for Leadership Development, a partnership of the 4 Universities in and around Merseyside. While undertaking the mentoring activity the company identified the need for further development and training relating to the longer term strategic direction of the company and examined areas such as teamwork, delegation, communication, and performance improvement. The company then worked with Liverpool Hope University to develop a programme to meet their specific needs and subsequently embarked on an organisation change programme which was rolled out company wide from the Directors to the Shop Floor.

Question 6b: How can we best build on the contributions of further education colleges and providers and their links (in particular) to networks of small and medium sized enterprises?

FE providers can play an important role in working with HEIs on progression from employer led level 3 to level 4 provision. There is potential to work with employers already involved with level 3 training to address their level 4+ needs within the FE College or an HEI.

Some good examples of this type of arrangement can be found within Lifelong Learning Networks and also through some of the development projects supported by the NW HLSP. Similarly examples are often found within the partnership between an HEI and its college network.

One example of such a partnership is Manchester Metropolitan University in collaboration with Liverpool Community College and Wigan and Leigh College for a project funded through the NW HLSP called Furthering Fashion. This project will involve CPD short course development for technicians and managers in the NW fashion and textile sector. The partnership will build on the experience and success of all three institutions and ensure that employees of NW companies involved in the design, development, engineering, production and marketing of fashion products and brands will benefit from education being embedded into the workplace.

After many years of successfully developing and delivering short course programmes for the UK and global fashion sector, the three institutions will build on their existing links with industry and ensure that these relationships are developed across the North West. This will include the development of a wide range of industry partnerships, including; Matalan, Littlewoods, Hilly, Reebok, Kirsty Doyle Ethel Austin, JJB Sports, Henri Lloyd, M&S, Next, Bhs, George at Asda, Hirdaramani, MAS, and Brandix.

The project will include the development of progression units at both level 4 and 5 and it is intended that these qualifications will meet the needs of large and medium sized employers and will allow the collaborative institutions to identify opportunities to carry out innovative approaches to demand led training.

Question 6c: How well does the framework for high level skills support employer engagement?

Generally the framework for higher level skills effectively supports employer engagement recognising the need for activity relating to demand led HE provision, links to Brokerage activity, accreditation of employer training, improved IAG, revised funding methodology etc. Changes to the funding model and the move to co-funding are assisting the sector in being more responsive to employer need. However, the vision of achieving 50% co-funding is challenging with most institutions only achieving a 20-30% funding from employers currently. Clarification is also required on how this percentage funding from employers is measured as in kind contributions are often very valuable but often not fully recognised.

Question 7a: How can we best work with businesses and employers, Trade Unions and employees to encourage demand for high level skills?

Organisations such as SSCs, Chambers of Commerce, IoD, CBI and unionlearn are key to this activity and there is potential to both further build on existing partnerships and to develop new partnerships between these organisations and HEIs in the NW region. The NWUA is developing Memorandums of Understanding with both the Chambers of Commerce and the IoD that include commitments to partnerships between business and HEIs across a number of strategic areas, one of which is the development of HE provision which meets the needs of business. This type of activity raises awareness in the business community of the offer available to them from the regions HEIs and has a knock on effect of stimulating demand for higher level skills.

SSCs should be stimulating this demand in their employers, raising awareness of the opportunities available and the benefits to business of undertaking training at all levels. Up to now many SSCs have focused on lower level skills but this is changing with the majority of SSCs now appointing members of staff with specific responsibility for HE activities.

Business Link and the Train to Gain Brokerage Service also have key roles to play in stimulating the demand for high level skills. Again the focus has been on lower level skills in many regions but work between HE and Brokers can help them to address all the skills needs of businesses they work with not only those at levels 2 and 3. Through the work of the NW HLSP we are undertaking regular training sessions with Skills Brokers to increase their understanding of HE and the NW HLSP has also provided a layer of support to brokers through the appointment of sector specific Specialist HE Advisors. The Specialist Advisors do not approach businesses directly but work behind the scenes to support and advise brokers when they have a higher level skills referral. The Specialist Advisors have an in depth understanding of the current HE provision for their sector in the region and also can liaise with HEIs and FECs when there is no provision currently available which meets the needs of employers.

The NW HLSP has also developed a database of HE provision which includes undergraduate, postgraduate, short courses and CPD provision from all 15 HEIs in the NW and currently 29 FECs (this is expanding constantly). The database is a response to feedback from the brokers who previously had to search each institutional website separately to find what provision was on offer. This is particularly difficult when looking for CPD offerings as these are often not in one place on a website if they are advertised at all. All these developments are intended to make it easier for Skills Brokers to know what is available to them and to provide expert support as no Broker can have a detailed understanding of everything available to employers from Skills for Life to Postgraduate CPD.

Through a HEFCE funded employer engagement pilot the University of Chester has worked with the Food Technology CoVE at Reaseheath College

and the Cheshire based private training provider Total People to build demand in employers already engaged at level 3, to undertake training at level 4 and above. The projects aims to work with these employers and partners to identify, create, and validate 'missing' provision at level 4 and above including validating employer in house training.

Question 7b: How can we encourage rapid implementation of an effective framework for credit accumulation and transfer?

This activity is already being addressed by some Lifelong Learning Networks and by projects such as the SW HLSP. Encouragement for such activity should be through existing networks and projects which already have the buy-in of their member institutions and the required level of representation to achieve the desired outcome.

Credit accumulation is an easier area to address and this should be initial focus of any work, ensuring that learners can accumulate credit from one institution through small bits of learning undertaken at different times as stand alone training.

Question 8: Do we have the right incentives to encourage higher education providers to be more responsive to business and employer demand?

HEIs need to identify the level of risk to their institution when undertaking this type of activity. Risk can include cost, time and the potential for a course to be viable and sustainable. Incentives which reduce this risk would encourage HEIs to undertake employer engagement more readily and in a wider range of areas.

Excellence in employer engagement and business related activities also need to be given recognition in a similar way to excellence in research and 'traditional' teaching and learning are recognised and rewarded within the HE sector. Currently the pressures on academics to undertake world class research, attract research funding and build the research reputation of their departments outweigh the pressures to be involved in developing demand led provision and therefore this is seen to be of lower importance within many departments and faculties. There are obvious exceptions to this in all institutions but a higher regard for this work would lead to a greater expansion of activity.

The Royal Northern College of Music have worked through their Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning and with their Professional Development Department to offer CPD modules for the music industry including action learning, IAG and enterprise activity. The Music for Health sector has been identified as an emerging area which offers musicians the opportunity to bring live music to settings within acute healthcare. Working with partners including Arts for Health and Musique et Santé, RNCM is forging a dynamic Music for Health Learning Programme that will embrace practice, training and research

at world-class level. This demonstrates where training and research are given equal recognition at a high level and within a joint project.

Question 9: What should be the key features of a model for regional and sectoral bodies to play a much greater role in solving local skills problems and linking higher education institutions and businesses?

Care should be taken to ensure that any new arrangements supplement existing linkages between individual HEIs, regional and sectoral bodies.

In the NW the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder (NW HLSP) has proved successful in engaging HEIs collectively in responding to articulated regional and sectoral demand. Best practice from within this project should be identified and rolled out across England and potential other nations, particularly the work with the RDA, LSC, SSCs, GONW, AoC and the Regional Skills and Employment Board to understand the higher level skills needs of business in the region on a sectoral basis.

This market information is gathered mainly from Sector Skills Agreements and is then supplemented by additional region specific LMI from the RDA and other partners. This intelligence is then issued to regional HE providers both HEIs and FECs who are asked to respond to these needs by developing flexible HE provision in partnership with employers. This work is undertaken on a sectoral basis working through sectors which are a priority for the NW region as identified by the RDA in the Regional Economic Strategy and with SSCs whose footprints overlap that of the regionally defined sector footprint. In this way the SSCs and regional partners for each sector act in a commissioning role only supporting activity which meets the identified needs of the sector.

Initially HE providers submit an expression of interest outlining their proposal and these are assessed against the skills needs by a sector panel involving SSC, RDA, LSC and other relevant regional sectoral panel. A smaller number of proposals are then asked to develop their ideas into a full bid and this development process can then be supported by the NW HLSP team and the SSCs ensuring that employer involvement in the design, development and delivery of the provision is a key aspect of the bid. SSCs have also proved helpful in linking the HE provider to a number of employers who have previously identified this higher level skills need for their business.

The NW HLSP can then provide development funding to successful bids to support the development of this responsive provision and additional student numbers or co-funded numbers to support the growth associated with these developments.

The key features of this model which should be built on and factored in to similar activity in other regions would be:

- The key role of SSCs in articulating the higher level skills needs of their industry and in brokering links between these employers and HE providers willing to address these needs. Through the work of the NW HLSP it has been demonstrated that not all SSCs are able to undertake this key role effectively, but there are some excellent examples of best practice within the SSCs.
- Clearly articulated labour market information and intelligence for the HE sector to respond to which includes sufficient detail to enable providers to understand the precise needs of the employers.
- Support for HE providers from SSCs and other relevant regional partners during the development stages, including assisting in building links to employers, and marketing the provision developed.
- All partners working together to pool resources and intelligence to support this activity. This has been shown to work effectively within the sector context.

The model has been shown to be effective through the 24 development projects funded to date. Two examples of such projects are:

Lancaster University are working with Cogent, Chemicals NW and employers to develop a range of CPD modules on Chemicals Regulation and Management designed to provide training on the implementation of the REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals) and additional key safety, health and environmental (SHE) legislation. The training will be specifically tailored to meet the needs of non-SME compliance managers and REACH managers, developing capability within the service provision market. The approach will be modular, allowing maximum flexibility for trainees and provide a range of possible outcomes from post-graduate certificates of attendance to masters level degrees. This need was originally identified by Cogent in their SSA and through the work of the regional cluster organisation Chemicals NW and through the NW HLSP Lancaster University are utilising their expertise to meet and address this very specific skills need.

The University of Manchester and the University of Bolton are working with SEMTA and Skillfast-UK to develop modules in Advanced Composite Design and Analysis of Advanced Engineering Materials. A qualification will be achieved via credit accumulation with individual module credits available as recognised continuing professional development (CPD) or counting towards a qualification at certificate, diploma or full MSc level at both the University of Bolton and the University of Manchester. The development involves around 20 employers who are working with the Universities to specify the curriculum content and delivery mechanisms. The project has a Steering Group which oversees the general content of the modules and specific sub-groupings of employers working on each specific module considering content, delivery and assessment aspects of the course. Delivery is due to commence in September 2008 at both institutions.

Question 10: How can we encourage Regional Development Agencies and Sector Skills Councils to work together to solve local and sectoral skills needs?

This links to the previous question and is being demonstrated clearly in the NW region by the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder. The sector panels set up to commission the development of demand led provision through the NW HLSP bring together sector and skills related staff from the RDA with SSC colleagues. The pooling of LMI from both the RDA and the SSC is critical to ensure that a detailed picture can be presented to the HE providers regarding the skills needs of the sector.

The NWDA have found this model successful and are now considering match funding the NW HLSP (initial funding from HEFCE) to expand the sectoral coverage of this work to all high growth sectors in the region.

The SSCs have also experienced value from this model of activity with developments funded through the NW HLSP assisting them in delivering key higher level skills actions from within their Sector Skills Agreements.

The Open University in the NW has worked closely with ConstructionSkills, Asset Skills and SummitSkills on the development of two CPD short course modules at level 6 (Honours level). The courses will enable construction sector employees to update and improve their management of construction projects in a changing context by undertaking one or both of the modules. The modules will be developed in conjunction with employers, and will be delivered online with face-to-face workshops to ensure maximum flexibility. Module 1 is entitled 'Effective Collaboration in Modern Construction Projects' and will examine the need to integrate and collaborate effectively across firm and professional boundaries. Module 2, 'New Leadership in Construction', is targeted at those seeking to update and improve their leadership of construction projects in a changing social, technological, economic, environmental and political context.

Question 11a: What further incentives are needed in universities – e.g. through internal appraisals, promotion processes – to increase demand from academic staff for business secondments?

All academic staff want equal recognition of effort be it towards research excellent or through employer engagement. More recognition should be given to staff involved in links with business to make this an equally appealing career direction for academics. This is not a new issue and has been discussed frequently since initiatives such as HEROBC funding started and have continued through the work of staff within HEIF funded activities. The practice of recognising this area of work is becoming more widespread in institutions but is not yet common place and best practice should be taken from some institutions and spread nationally.

Where enthusiasm exists in academic staff it is often curtailed by institutional restrictions and procedures and many of the HEFCE employer engagement pilots are looking to address this by considering the culture change required in their institution to enable them to be more responsive to employer demands and to enable their academic staff to undertake the activities as and when required.

If systems become more flexible and recognition is given to this type of work the linkages between employers and HEIs will continue to grow and more secondments and similar activity will grow as a natural outcome.

Edge Hill University has participated in the Leonardo Da Vinci mobility scheme operated by NWUA on behalf of the NW HEIs. A member of staff from the university visited Cyprus ITV, a SME with between 51 and 200 employees in Cyprus. The exchange was for a period of 3 weeks and was to investigate the possibilities and limitations of establishing an internet TV station at Edge Hill University connected to Liverpool 2008 Capital of Culture. The trip included investigation into content production, editing, sales and transmission enabling knowledge transfer between the business and the HE staff member. The member of staff reported that the exchange was invaluable in allowing him to gain knowledge of this cutting edge area of technology, to build links with staff in the business in Cyprus who will now visit Edge Hill University as guest lecturers and to develop a more practice based curriculum and project approach to related courses at Edge Hill.

Question 11b: And how can we encourage movement in the other direction so that business people are increasingly contributing directly to course content, design and teaching?

Once demand has been stimulated for higher level skills training then employers appear very willing to be involved in the course content, design and delivery. But the interest has to be stimulated and the end benefits to them articulated clearly. This is a key role for the SSCs and in order to be able to undertake this effectively the SSCs need to have a full understanding of the offer of HEIs to business.

Examples of this can be seen in the work of the NW HLSP where SSCs such as Skillset, Skillfast-UK, Asset Skills, SummitSkills and ConstructionSkills have worked closely with the NWUA and NW HEIs to understand what is on offer to their employers and then brought interested employers to partnerships with HE providers.

The Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) is the largest competency card scheme in the construction industry. To attain a CSCS card in construction management at the highest level (black card) requires the completion of an appropriate National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 5. Through the National Skills Academy for Construction, facilitated by ConstructionSkills, employers articulated a clear need for a Masters level programme that would provide the underpinning knowledge and

understanding to satisfy the requirements of the NVQ. Without this provision, employers identified that the transition from site manager (NVQ level 4) to construction manager (NVQ level 5), was being made on an ad-hoc basis, often only achieved by moving company. The University of Salford developed a Masters level qualification to address this need. The underpinning knowledge and understanding present in the NVQ forms the basis of a Postgraduate Diploma in Construction Management, with an optional 60 credit 'top up' to the full MSc if required. The development was overseen by a steering group, consisting of employers and relevant stakeholders, including ConstructionSkills. The steering group was consulted on each aspect of the programme development including the programme structure and content, delivery mode, contact time and programme fees. This collaboration ensured that the programme was operational within nine months, with an initial cohort of 10 students. The second cohort will commence in September 2008.

First Post NW – This HLSP funded project addresses skills issues in the post production sub-sector of the audio-visual industries. MANCAT together with the University of Bolton are developing a Foundation Degree in conjunction with Skillset and employers. Existing regional employers within the post-production industry have partnered with Skillset to promote and support the development of this provision within the region through the formation of the First Post North West Steering Group. During the development of the course the Steering Group were closely involved in reviewing the curriculum originally developed in London, adapting it to meet the needs of the industry in the North West. These employers have also identified the training needs within their new employees. The Steering Group employers are all SMEs and include 360Media, Sumners, Flix, Soundhouse and VTR North. They have developed a coherent view as employers that First Post is an investment rather than a cost to themselves and as a result;

- have committed staff as learners
- agreed the time required will be part of their weekly working time
- agreed to contribute to the pilot programme financially (£700 per employee)
- offered support with site visits

Question 12: How can we do more to increase the level of STEM skills in the existing workforce?

Much work is already being undertaken to increase the level of STEM skills in the existing workforce and in the future workforce. Activity is being led by a wide range of organisations including SSCs, Regional Cluster Organisations, STEMNET, RDAs, Aimhigher and individual HEIs. Care needs to be taken not to duplicate current activity but to build on it and to learn lesson from current projects. It also needs to be recognised that work such as this takes time to be reflected in the statistics and time needs to be allowed to see learners through the training and into the workforce.