



North West Higher Level Skills Partnership (HLSP) March 2009

The North West HLSP is an innovative project which looks to increase employer engagement with the Higher Education sector in the North West in order to boost the investment in and take up of higher level skills within the NW workforce.

The NW HLSP is being led by the North West Universities Association (NWUA), as the representative body of the fourteen North West Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), in partnership with the North West Regional Development Agency (NWDA), Government Office North West (GONW), the Association of Colleges (AoC), the North West Provider Network (NWPN), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and the NW Regional Skills and Employment Board (RSEB).

OVERVIEW

The North West Higher Level Skills Pathfinder (NW HLSP) funded by the HEFCE as part of their employer engagement activity in 2006, has received new funding from the North West Regional Development Agency and the project has been renamed as the NW Higher Level Skills Partnership to represent the collaborative working of all the partners on this area of activity and the development of the project past the original pathfinder status. The funding from NWDA is for the period until 31st March 2011 therefore extending the current HLSP by 18 months.

MAIN ACTIVITY

The NW HLSP model is driven by demand and the encouragement of employer investment in skills. Therefore the model is based on two aspects: brokerage and the development and delivery of new provision which meets employer demand. The main aims of the NW HLSP are to:

- Increase demand from employers for higher level skills provision
- Increase employer engagement with skills provision in HLS providers
- Increase the capacity of HLS providers to respond to employer demand for higher level skills and embed work-force development in HE strategies
- Test the level of investment employers are prepared to contribute for development and delivery of this provision
- Disseminate best practice identified through the NW Model

PRIORITY SECTORS

The project will utilise the existing model developed as part of the original pathfinder that was available for four priority sectors. The new funding will extend the project and focus on the seven priority sectors in the North West economy:

- Advanced Engineering and Materials
- Biomedical (*new*)
- Business and Professional Services
- Construction
- Creative and Digital Industries
- Energy and Environmental Technologies (*new*)
- Food and Drink (*new*)

The NW HLSP looks to develop provision at level 4 and above including both prescribed and non-prescribed HE rather than being only HEFCE funded provision as with the original pathfinder work.

RESULTS

Partnerships are monitored and reviewed at regular intervals by HLSP Sector Specialist Advisors. Overall reports have presented positive accounts and beneficial relationships being built:

- 28 HLSP projects have been funded across the four original priority sectors to develop 34 courses from Foundation Degrees to Masters including CPD and bite-sized chunks of learning.
- 15 of these projects have reached delivery stage
- Over 150 learners have been enrolled on this demand led provision to date and over 1000 learners are expected to be enrolled on the 34 courses through their first cohort.
- Projects currently work in 10 HEIs and more than 12 FE Colleges and this number is growing all the time
- Projects involve over 150 employers in developing new provision
- Each project has been able to secure in-kind support from employers in the form of participation in the project steering groups, input to the design and development of the provision and course materials, etc. To date, employer in-kind contributions stand at over £250,000 and over 2500 hours, and this is set to increase steadily
- NW HLSP Specialist Advisors have been running a series of training events with Business Link North West Skills Brokers to support and develop their HE awareness
- Over 800 higher level referrals received by Train to Gain since April 2007
- There are a significantly greater number of HE referrals in the sectors covered by the NW HLSP than in the other sectors covered by BLNW.

DISCOVER HE



A major area of activity over the last year has been developing, testing and refining the web-based application of the Discover HE database. Discover HE originally developed as part of the NW Higher Level Skills Pathfinder and launched in September 2008 offers a free, easy to use and quick tool for accessing sector-specific information on higher level courses in the North West. It brings together more than 8,000 courses from 15 Higher Education Institutions and 29 Further Education Colleges in the region. It offers a starting point to explore provision for industry sectors from various providers in one single place and will direct users to individual institutional websites to find out more details <http://www.nwua.ac.uk/discoverHE>