



## Open Research Online

### Citation

Coleman, Phil and Mendelson, Felicity (2011). The Integrated Vocational Route (IVR): an employer-driven learning programme in health & social care practice at the FE/HE interface. In: The Future Agenda for Higher Level Skills and Work-Based Learning. University Vocational Awards Council Annual Conference., 11-12 Nov 2010, York.

### URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/33420/>

### License

None Specified

### Policy

This document has been downloaded from Open Research Online, The Open University's repository of research publications. This version is being made available in accordance with Open Research Online policies available from [Open Research Online \(ORO\) Policies](#)

### Versions

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding



UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL

## **The Future Agenda for Higher Level Skills and Work-Based Learning**

Seminar Papers from the University  
Vocational Awards Council Annual  
Conference

York, November 2010



# **The Future Agenda for Higher Level Skills and Work-Based Learning**

Seminar Papers from the University  
Vocational Awards Council Annual  
Conference

York, November 2010



## **CONTENTS**

- 1           INTRODUCTION  
Adrian Anderson, Chief Executive, UVAC.
- 2           HIGHER LEVEL SKILLS IN TEES VALLEY  
Dr Ruth Helyer, Head of Workforce Development (Research & Policy)  
and Dionne Lee, VCE Policy Officer, Teesside University.
- 8           THE INTEGRATED VOCATIONAL ROUTE (IVR): AN EMPLOYER-  
DRIVEN LEARNING PROGRAMME IN HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE  
PRACTICE AT THE FE/HE INTERFACE  
Phil Coleman, Area Manager/Staff Tutor, Faculty of Health & Social  
Care, The Open University in the North and Felicity Mendelson, Senior  
Learning & Development Officer, Corporate Learning & Development,  
Newcastle City Council.
- 20          EXPERIENCES GAINED WHILE MANAGING AND DELIVERING  
FOUNDATION DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN EARLY YEARS AND  
TEACHING IN THE LIFELONG LEARNING SECTOR  
Lesley Faulconbridge, FdA Children and Young Peoples Services and  
Peter Tunnicliffe, FdA Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector,  
University of Derby.
- 31          RESPONDING TO THE 'BIG SOCIETY': FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM  
DEVELOPMENT FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR  
IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE  
Sonia Vougioukalou, Centre for Health and Social Care Research,  
Canterbury Christ Church University.

© University Vocational Awards Council 2011

ISBN: 978-0-907311-33-1

University of Bolton



## INTRODUCTION

---

### **Adrian Anderson, Chief Executive, UVAC**

This report features four papers based on seminars held at the University Vocational Awards Council Annual Conference *The Future Agenda for Higher Level Skills and Work-Based Learning* in November 2010. For many years UVAC has positioned its Annual Conference to chart the development of policy and practice related to higher level vocational learning, work-based learning and higher level skills. The Annual Conference also enables HEIs, FECs and partner organisations to showcase innovation and good practice, network and to contribute and influence the high level skills policy debate. As such, UVAC's Annual Conference has become the key national event for all those engaged in and passionate about higher level skills at all HE levels.

To promote and support academic research in this area, UVAC has now established a partnership with Emerald Group Publishing Ltd. to publish an academic journal: *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning - The journal of the University Vocational Awards Council*. Papers published in the journal have so far included:

- Work-based learning in US higher education policy – Joseph A. Raelin, Center for Work and Learning, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
- From work-based learning to organisational development – A case study in learning interventions in a large company – John G Mumford, Reputation Risk Consultants Ltd, Cobham, UK
- Cross-university collaboration for work-place learning: a case study – Alison Felce, Institute of Learning Enhancement, The University of Wolverhampton, UK
- Aligning higher education with the world of work – Ruth Helyer, Department of Academic Enterprise, Teesside University, Middlesbrough, UK
- Extending and embedding work-based learning across the university, change strategies in action – Barbara A. Workman, Institute for Work Based Learning, Middlesex University, London, UK
- Building the capacity of higher education to deliver programmes of work-based learning – David Major, Denise Meakin and David Perrin, Centre for Work Related Studies, University of Chester, Chester, UK

Information on *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning - The journal of the University Vocational Awards Council* is available to UVAC members at <http://www.uvac.ac.uk/members-area/uvac-journal-higher-level-skills-and-work-based-learning/> More information on UVAC is available on our website, [www.uvac.ac.uk](http://www.uvac.ac.uk).

Adrian Anderson  
Chief Executive



## HIGHER LEVEL SKILLS IN TEES VALLEY

---

**Dr Ruth Helyer, Head of Workforce Development (Research & Policy)**  
**and Dionne Lee, VCE Policy Officer, Teesside University**

Skills developed through higher education (HE) level study are categorised as higher level skills. There is widespread recognition that higher level skills are vital to improving productivity; Britain is knowledge driven, “its competitive advantages in the global economy are all built on sophisticated skills, high levels of creativity and intellectual confidence” (BIS 2009:41). For these reasons successive Governments have reiterated the importance of higher level skills. In 2009 the then Government launched a number of key publications focused on building Britain’s future, in particular its economy. A common theme running through these documents was the repeated questions about future jobs, key sectors and the skills required:

- What are the jobs of the future?
- Is it possible to determine the skills required?
- How can training providers and employers develop provision appropriate to jobs that, effectively, don’t exist yet?

During this period Tees Valley Unlimited commissioned a piece of work on higher level skills in the sub-region. This research (*Higher Level Skills in Tees Valley*, Helyer & Lee, 2010) gave particular attention to strategically important sectors in Tees Valley. These sectors – process industries, advanced engineering, digital media and logistics were considered in the context of the regional, national and indeed global higher level skills agenda. Focussing on the sectors outlined above the research objectives were:

- To assess the demand for higher level skills in certain economic sectors of Tees Valley
- To measure demand against existing provision identifying where gaps exist
- To produce some recommendations to help create a local skills strategy for the Tees Valley

In the current economic and political climate many of the general themes outlined in the key publications mentioned above remain relevant if the UK is to achieve full economic growth. Since coming into power in June 2010 the coalition Government has made it clear that it intends to rebalance the economy – focussing on facilitating economic growth. Within this context the importance of higher education is recognised and, like the previous administrations, the current Government continues to prioritise higher level skills, especially in the private sector. It is anticipated that the majority of these higher level skills will be developed through higher education however the HE sector was hit by unprecedented cuts in the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010. Despite this, both David Willetts and Vince Cable have continued to reiterate the importance a strong higher education sector “The ideas, evidence and conclusions which emerge from our universities are among our greatest resources, and enrich our national conversation immeasurably. I continue to draw on their insights whenever I can”. (D Willetts, 2011).

Based on an extensive literature review and contextualised by data from interviews with, and surveys completed by, diverse local employers, the research undertaken by Helyer and Lee in 2010 revealed a number of very sector-specific demands. Simultaneously, many employers were articulating comparable needs. Some employers were already engaged with higher level skills, with them and/or their employees undertaking study, and/or advocating it and willing to engage. The main reasons cited were to develop, expand, diversify the company and indeed survive. Whilst some companies stated that investment in educational training was essential, in general the companies who had company training plans and budgets were the most likely to be involved in the agenda and to give importance or status to higher level skills within the company. Other key findings from the research highlighted that:

- Who delivers the training matters
- Communication between stakeholders is essential
- Training has to be business-relevant and delivered through flexible and tailored provision
- There needs to be a balance between general and specific skills
- Well-rounded, professional developed individuals are essential (therefore employability skills are vital)
- There is a need to develop flexible provision (including an appropriate postgraduate portfolio) and create lifelong learners.

The above findings were presented in a workshop at the 2010 UVAC conference. The presentation sparked an enthusiastic and wide-ranging debate; the three topics which generated the greatest amount of discussion were:

- Employability skills
- 'Curriculum at the speed of light'
- Communication

The responses from the research participants (*Higher Level Skills in Tees Valley*, Helyer & Lee, 2010) suggested very strongly that employers expect graduates to be in possession of generic **employability skills**. This term was used to encompass transferable and life skills; not job searching skills like interview techniques and producing a powerful CV, but those skills that would help an employee to be a productive addition to the workforce, over and beyond their higher education level subject specific knowledge and skills. This is a multifaceted issue as there are academic skills which all graduates are 'assumed' to have achieved by undertaking study at a higher level – such as thinking autonomously and creatively, making connections, and problem-solving. However, the employers surveyed were *also* looking for good team-working and communication skills as well as more ephemeral qualities like common sense and integrity (harder to teach, assess and indeed quantify). The lively discussion provoked by the presentation raised some important facts. Several Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) represented at the conference were already tackling this issue and were at various stages of embedding 'employability' skills into their curricula. Some had chosen to do this by seamlessly inserting the desired activity into existing modules – in one case a university had done this in all of their programmes. Others

had taken varying approaches – ranging from altering some programmes to using ‘bolt-on’ modules – sometimes assessed and carrying credit and sometimes not. It was the general consensus in the room that the most successful schemes included some kind of ‘real’ work experience – and this ranged from a year in industry to several weeks in voluntary placements and even ‘virtual’ placements using technology to replicate the workplace. It was generally agreed that the HEIs with the best records for graduate employability were those who embedded the skills across their curricula and also offered all students the chance to undertake at least some of their course in a real workplace scenario (The Universities of Surrey and Bath are leaders in this). Some universities are using online personal development planning (PDP) tools which allow students to record, track and evidence their skills development.

Because of the restricted economic environment and the generally depressed global picture it was widely agreed, via the research findings, that more was expected of graduates than ever before. The figure for youth unemployment, as of December 2010, was 965,000 (BBC, 2011), reiterating that employers looking to recruit new staff have more choice than ever. These figures include the age range 16 – 24 and therefore include the growing numbers of unemployed graduates. The research respondents also acknowledged the rapid changes, technological, financial and so on, which could not help but impact on how they would select new staff members. Jobs and industries are changing at an unprecedented rate, with government policy and other contemporary research frequently reminding the public of the necessity to change and adapt within a career lifespan, in today’s graduate market, where neither employers nor their employees consider a particular job to be for life, shifting between different sectors, “changing the way you work and making complete career changes are increasingly the norm” (Gradfutures, 2011). The very real need for employees to adapt and welcome inevitable change and challenges means that degree level study must encompass this. Learning is about new knowledge and experience and it should be expected to cause some discomfort – which can be viewed as a positive sign that something is happening. HE level students need help in making the connections between this discomfort and developments in their personal and professional profile; without this they cannot hope to fulfil their potential. Those who make a success of their working lives in the future will undoubtedly be the candidates who become practitioners of lifelong learning, appreciating its connections to their social, personal, cultural and professional development.

The idea of developing ‘**curriculum at the speed of light**’ inspired a lively discussion. This phrase had been used by a respondent to the research (Helyer & Lee, 2010) who was an HE colleague. Although based in the digital media sector, and therefore specifically relating to their needs, this comment can also be seen to be true across the spectrum. Businesses want developments to happen quickly and many of the research respondents (Helyer & Lee, 2010) stated that HEIs were slow to respond and often unwilling to change the way in which they had always operated. Many stated experiences of HEIs attempting to sell them programmes ‘off the shelf’, as they termed it. Few thought that HEIs would create something new for them, and if they did they felt it would take a long time to be validated and would probably be riddled with compromises (such as irrelevant forms of assessment and onerous amounts of campus attendance). “More than anything, training has to be business relevant and providers need to be very flexible in developing and delivering training packages that are tailored to individual needs” (*Higher Level Skills in Tees Valley* survey respondent). As with employability skills, this demand is accelerated by the current economic climate and the speed at which the world is changing. Practitioners in digital media especially need to feel

confident that what they are studying will not be out of date before they have completed it. The media industry changes so rapidly through the impact of digital technology that universities need to adopt new ways of designing and managing media production courses which respond in 'real time' to these changes. This idea was initially presented at a workshop run by Teesside University in conjunction with the BBC. This idea of 'curriculum at the speed of light' raised numerous questions about the existing models of course design, industry involvement, professional culture and student experience all of which suggested that radical changes may ultimately be needed. The benefits to industry and academia of looking at new and innovative solutions were widely recognised as well as the idea that media may possibly be the forerunner for what will increasingly become an issue affecting many disciplines. Digital technology might be seen as the catalyst to better and more meaningful collaboration between industry and education, as a precursor to what becomes normative/standard.

The dominant feeling of the conference audience was that qualifications in many areas need to be almost constantly changing and updateable. Good examples of how to keep 'up to date' were volunteered and they included: involving practitioners in the design and delivery of material; allowing students to write their own learning route and to inform their own curriculum (especially effective for students who are employed already); perfecting 'fast-track', yet robust, validation procedures; nurturing relationships with companies to keep at the cutting edge of what they do, and so on. Teesside University runs higher skills courses for TV professionals, in conjunction with industry giant Endemol. These courses have, of necessity, been continually improved upon and developed each time they are offered. In addition to this all of Teesside University's taught courses in this area are to some degree being transformed, in an ongoing way, by the idea of continuous industrial relevance. This is driven in no small part by the external work the University is undertaking with industry and its status as a Skillset Media Academy ([Institute of Digital Innovation](#)).

The final point to really ignite a large amount of audience discussion was '**communication**'; the comments covered several aspects of communication and its permutations. Respondents to the research survey had felt that it was crucial to supply good definitions of what the sector means by 'higher level skills', 'work-based learning', 'workforce development' and so on. The UVAC audience echoed this and felt that it was vital to ensure that translation of Higher Education terms was taken into account in conversations with students and businesses to subsequently ensure that such conversations are meaningful and understood. Many respondents to the research had suggested that such labour market intelligence was gathered every year with many of the interviewees expressing their gratitude that university staff had taken the time to visit them at their office, factory, plant and so on. "We need more training providers who are prepared to talk to business and ask what our needs are and then fit in around them" (*Higher Level Skills in Tees Valley* survey respondent). It was also felt that collaborating with companies was one of the key ways to secure future work (i.e. multi-touch relationships in which a company avails itself of many aspects of an HEI's portfolio) and good quality communication was the first step for these potential collaborations; if the business did not know or understand what the benefits of working with an HEI could be then they are not likely to instigate a relationship or welcome an approach from an HEI. Training budgets (mentioned earlier) were also a pivotal subject in a conversation about communication. Many companies who have a training budget plan

their allocation of it well in advance of expenditure – therefore a university or training provider hoping to secure work with that company needs to be a party to these early planning conversations if they have any chance of being included in the planned expenditure. Colleagues from various HEIs talked about what their institutions were attempting in the area of communications. One of the most interesting developments was the growth of research repositories (for example [Teesrep](#)). These repositories enable businesses (and indeed anybody) to access new research very quickly. The open access nature of such repositories means that research/information reaches a much wider audience; businesses are less likely to access research traditionally available in an academic journal, however they can now quite simply by using an internet search engine, such as Google. Several universities represented in the audience said that they either now had a repository for research or were planning one.

It seemed very apparent from the audience that there is a great awareness of the continuum between skills learned *at* work and skills learned *for* work. There can be a tendency to associate 'skills' with lower level study (Level 2 and below) but the professionals in attendance at this UVAC conference presentation were not assessing skills from that limited viewpoint, they were instead exploring the blurred boundaries between what working HE level students bring with them to their university studies (what they know already), how to build on this knowledge and expertise to make them even more employable and effective; better at their job and better lifelong learners. The same applies to more traditional students; it is not enough to amass knowledge, especially when technological advancements will do that for you, application of said knowledge is probably more important. Students need help to enable them to apply what they have learnt, including the skills acquired through academic learning, to real world scenarios to make them more employable and better lifelong learners. Universities need to be open and flexible about what they are offering and allow for the different learning styles of individuals. Activities may need to be 'bolt-on' or embedded but first and foremost relevant to students and enable them to draw out/articulate the skills they have developed. In addition to specific activities there is also a need for a continuum of conversation between students, businesses and universities which is open to change and welcomes challenges.

Clearly some Universities have been successful in developing schemes supporting their student's employability profiles and professional development, however the HE sector as a whole needs to go further in order to successfully address this issue. HE level students are traditionally claimed to be problem solvers, intellectually curious, autonomous learners and more ; in order to keep facilitating this institutions must also mirror these sought after skills - solving problems, rising to challenges and continuously innovating.

## **References**

BBC, February 2011, Youth Unemployment: Fears over record figures, available online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12482018>

Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2009), *Higher Ambitions: The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy*. Available online at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/publications/Higher-Ambitions.pdf>

GradFutures, Change and adaptability – Graduate Careers, 2011. Available online at <http://www.gradfutures.com/career-advice/managing-your-career/what-is-a-career/change-and-adaptability>

Helyer and Lee (2010), *Higher Level Skills in Tees Valley*. Available online at [http://www.teesvalleyunlimited.gov.uk/empskills/documents/TVJSU\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.teesvalleyunlimited.gov.uk/empskills/documents/TVJSU_report_final.pdf)

Willetts D, Guardian HE Summit, 16 Mar 2011, available online at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/speeches/david-willetts-guardian-he-summit>

## THE INTEGRATED VOCATIONAL ROUTE (IVR): AN EMPLOYER-DRIVEN LEARNING PROGRAMME IN HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE AT THE FE/HE INTERFACE

---

**Phil Coleman, Area Manager/Staff Tutor, Faculty of Health & Social Care, The Open University in the North and Felicity Mendelson, Senior Learning & Development Officer, Corporate Learning & Development, Newcastle City Council**

### **Abstract**

In 2006, the Open University Awarding Body, Faculty of Health & Social Care and the Vocational Qualifications Assessment Centre began exploratory discussions with health and social care (HSC) employers regarding the creation of a flexible programme of vocational and academic development which would seek to bridge the FE-HE divide, embed learning in the workplace rather than the classroom and facilitate progression in this field of practice. The product of these discussions was the *'Integrated Vocational Route'* (IVR).

The IVR is designed to meet the needs of support staff directly involved in the provision of health and/or social care who have higher career aspirations and employers seeking to develop those non-professional care workers in their organisation whom they believe have the greatest potential to progress to more senior roles. The original programme integrates a *Level 3 HSC (Adults) National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)* within the OU K101 *'An Introduction to Health and Social Care'* module (offering 60 credits at NQF Level 4). Successful completion of the IVR will therefore provide both a *'Certificate of Health and Social Care'* (60 credits at NQF Level 4) and a full *NVQ Level 3 HSC Adults* award.

HSC employer consultation and briefings in twelve UK towns and cities helped shape the IVR model and four organisations (Newcastle City Council, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Trust, Salisbury Foundation NHS Trust and Social Work Information & Interpretation Services [SWIIS] Foster Care Scotland) have been particularly influential in determining IVR design and models of delivery. One such model enables both the IVR tutor and assessor roles to be undertaken by staff within a partner organisation and tutorials to be held in the workplace. Most of the IVR learning and support materials are available online and a bespoke, user-friendly electronic portfolio has been created for the integrated NVQ. By simultaneously developing and assessing academic skills, knowledge and competence related to care practice, the IVR offers better preparation for progression to qualifying routes such as nursing and social work and scope for credit transfer.

A second IVR integrating a full *Level 3 HSC Children and Young People (CYP) NVQ* within the K101 module was offered for the first time in 2009. The IVR is currently being re-developed to accommodate the new vocational Diploma qualifications which replace Level 3 NVQs from 2011.

### **K101 'An Introduction to Health and Social Care'**

In October 2008, The Open University (OU) launched a new module K101 *'An Introduction to Health and Social Care'*, which offers 60 credits at NQF Level 4 (The OU Vocational Qualifications Assessment Centre 2008). This module is an updated version of the very successful K100 *'Understanding Health and Social Care'* course and provides an authoritative overview of health and social care provision in the UK, using real-life case studies and taking students deep into the experience of receiving care and working in care

services. It is also designed to develop academic skills and thereby facilitate successful module completion and progression to higher level study (The OU 2011).

Based on the OU's 'supported open learning' model, K101 involves individual study supported by comprehensive module materials and face-to-face, telephone, email and online forum interaction. Frequent use is made of text, video and audio material (within bespoke DVDs). Currency and relevance to all four UK nations is maintained by use of a regularly updated online resource bank. The module is delivered over 28 study weeks and is presented twice a year in February and October. It comprises six study blocks and assessment involves completion of monthly assignments, an online project and an unseen examination at the end of the module (The OU 2011).

K101 currently attracts over 6000 students a year (Hester & Wood 2011). These include frontline care workers, social work and pre/post-registration nursing students, informal carers, service users and those studying the module out of general interest. It provides a stand-alone qualification (the 'Certificate in Health & Social Care'), is a required component of the OU's BA/BSc (Hons) Health and Social Care, Pre-Registration Nursing and Social Work programmes and is an optional component for the BA (Hons) Childhood and Youth Studies and BA/BSc Open degree (The OU 2011).

### **Background to the IVR**

Many health and social care (HSC) courses offered by colleges, universities and other learning providers (including the K101 module) contribute to the development of care competences, but do not achieve National Occupational Standards and the qualification requirements in the National Minimum Standards (DoH 2001, DoH 2003a, DoH 2003b). Indeed until early 2011 only one set of awards met these standards; namely National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).

Successfully completing an NVQ, however, can be a difficult and slow process with some assessment centres because of local shortages of suitably qualified/experienced assessors (Arblaster et al 2004, LSC 2004, LSDA 2005, West Yorkshire Social Care Workforce Project 2004), insufficient time allocation for workplace assessment (Ashton et al 2005, West Yorkshire Social Care Workforce Project 2004), difficulties with the language of NVQs (Castle 2004, Lawrence & Mazey 2004, Rosenfeld 1999, Witton 2005) and their associated bureaucracy (Centre for Advanced Studies 2007); including the requirement to cross-reference all portfolio evidence to every performance criterion and knowledge specification in each unit of an NVQ - some 400 or so items for an NVQ 3 HSC award. Perhaps of equal concern is the assertion that NVQs do not provide the best preparation for university study and professional education/training in HSC (Rosenfeld 1999, Warr 2002); primarily because completion of an NVQ does not require an individual to develop many of the fundamental skills required in HE, for example, academic essay/report writing, referencing of published work and demonstrating critical analysis and synthesis in an academic argument. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that many universities require applicants to hold more than an NVQ Level 3 for entry to pre-registration nurse or midwifery education courses (RCN 2007).

Since NVQs were designed to assess competent practice rather than develop academic skills, this situation is perhaps unsurprising. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for the successful completion of a Level 3 NVQ, deemed equivalent to two 'A' level passes at grades A-C (Newcastle City Learning 2011), to lead its recipients to acquire a better sense



of their educational potential and stimulate their interest in progression to HE. This suggests that a programme of learning designed to offer seamless progression at the FE/HE interface would be highly desirable; especially if it was capable of assessing care competence and developing academic skills.

### **What does the IVR offer?**

The IVR aims to provide an integrated HSC care route that brings together the strengths of a supported open learning approach to developing knowledge, understanding and academic skills (the K101 'An Introduction to Health and Social Care' module) with a more user-friendly way of achieving a Level 3 HSC NVQ.

### **Structure of the IVR**

The IVR currently has two routes; both using the K101 module as their foundation. The first, launched in October 2008, offers an integrated Level 3 HSC (Adults) NVQ and was developed with the help of resources from successful project bids submitted to the North East Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Project (a HEFCE initiative) and Aim Higher Northumberland, Tyne & Wear. The second route, which came online in May 2009, provides an integrated Level 3 HSC (CYP) NVQ. Its development was supported by funding from the North East Higher Skills Network. Most of the evidence to meet the performance criteria and knowledge specifications of these NVQs is drawn from unit activities within the K101 module. Since students are expected to undertake these unit activities as part of the K101 learning strategy the IVR essentially seeks to reap a second harvest from existing student work. Some of these activities are enhanced to optimise NVQ evidence generation potential and include reflective accounts of care practice.

Approximately one third of the K101 unit activities are used as evidence generation for the integrated NVQs and between one and four evidence generation opportunities are provided for every performance criterion and knowledge specification. This considerable evidence generation opportunity is only possible, however, by specifying the four option units included in both of the integrated NVQs. Congruent with the Leitch Review of Skills (2006), the selected option units were chosen by three stakeholder organisations; Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust, which provides mental health and disability services to a population of approximately 1.4 million people in north-east England (Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust 2011), Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust, which delivers clinical care including general acute and emergency services to over 200,000 people in Wiltshire, Dorset and Hampshire (Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust 2011) and Social Work Information & Interpretation Services [SWIIS] Foster Care Scotland; a not-for-profit Independent Fostering Agency committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for looked after children (SWIIS Foster Care Scotland 2011). Option units were chosen on the basis of their generic application to HSC practice.

In order to fulfil the assessment requirements stipulated for all Level 3 HSC NVQs, there is also some assessor observation of performance in the workplace. The activities from the K101 module provide evidence generation opportunities in respect of every performance criterion and knowledge specification in the eight units within each of the NVQs, however, assessors have considerable flexibility in the competence features they choose to assess by observation of the learner's performance. Although not required by the awarding body, evidence from K101 unit activities used for the NVQ is also confirmed as reflecting the learner's day to day care practice by a 'workplace supporter'. This role is normally performed

by the learner's line manager or a professional care practitioner with whom the learner has frequent contact in the practice setting. Unlike an 'expert witness', the workplace supporter is not providing observed evidence of the learner's practice in a specific situation, but more broadly confirming that their observations of the learner's work as a carer are congruent with the evidence presented in the learner's NVQ portfolio.

In both IVR NVQs a bespoke electronic portfolio is used to record all evidence and thereby demonstrate achievement of competence. Since most of the evidence for these NVQs is drawn from unit activities within the K101 module, cross-referencing of the performance criteria and knowledge specifications in the e-portfolio is largely completed automatically, although assessors can revise this cross-referencing to reflect any variation in the quality of a learner's evidence and add links to evidence derived from their observation of the learner's performance. This structure significantly reduces the workload associated with evidence presentation and assessment of an NVQ. Competencies within the IVR are also mapped to the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework, so the learning programme can be used to help review and plan individual staff performance and development in the workplace.

The IVR NVQ is managed by the OU Vocational Qualifications Assessment Centre (VQAC); whilst the Faculty of Health and Social Care (FHSC) retain responsibility for managing the K101 module. A student registered on the IVR will therefore be supported by both an NVQ Assessor (appointed by the VQAC) and a K101 Associate Lecturer (appointed by the FHSC). OU models of collaborative provision also provide scope for the NVQ Assessor and K101 Associate Lecturer roles to be undertaken by practitioners employed within stakeholder HSC organisations (reducing learner registration costs by up to 30%), although their work in these roles is subject to the same management and quality assurance processes applied to Assessors and Associate Lecturers employed directly by the university. The NVQ Assessor and K101 Associate Lecturer roles are kept entirely separate as a result of the very different assessment requirements for both awards. This reduces the risk that learners are misadvised about any specific aspects of the IVR.

It should be stressed that students can choose to register for the K101 module without completing the integrated NVQ; hence the IVR can be regarded as an 'optional extra' which may be of interest to some HSC practitioners considering K101 study. Students in the first IVR cohort completed their programme in the summer of 2009.

### **IVR Benefits**

The IVR may provide a number of potential benefits compared to completion of a freestanding Level 3 HSC NVQ. In the IVR there is no need for the learner to master the language or complex structure of an NVQ before being able to generate evidence for their award and the cross-referencing of most of this evidence (normally a very time-consuming and tedious task) is greatly reduced, since all the evidence derived from K101 unit activities is pre-mapped within the e-portfolio. By making the generation and recording of NVQ evidence more user-friendly, both for the learner and the assessor, it is anticipated that achievement rates will be higher and the time required to successfully complete an NVQ will reduce (arguments supported by initial student performance data). Indeed, it is possible for the full IVR (the *Certificate in Health & Social Care* and the Level 3 HSC NVQ) to be completed in nine to twelve months; less time than it takes many learners who are only registered on an NVQ to complete their award.

Since the IVR offers two qualifications which are attractive to employers, it can improve the learner's career prospects and offer them better preparation for progression to qualifying routes, such as nursing and social work. It may also assist those individuals seeking to take up more senior health care support worker roles. Moreover, because the K101 module is a component of the OU Social Work and Pre-Registration Nursing programmes, IVR students aren't just gaining an entry qualification for professional education and training - they are actually acquiring credit transfer in respect of these programmes. From an HSC employer perspective, the IVR can help meet the qualification requirements in the National Minimum Standards, provide a relevant and efficient staff development opportunity beyond Level 3 and offer a means to determine an employee's commitment to, and capability in respect of, a professional education and training programme before they commit to sponsoring such learning.

Individual student registrations for the IVR have been made by residents in all four UK nations and, to date, corporate bookings placed by NHS, local authority and independent sector care providers in north-east England, north-west England, Scotland and Wales.

### **IVR Challenges**

Although many academic colleagues in the OU were committed to the IVR proposals, organisational structures presented considerable challenges in the design of this learning provision. Whilst the VQAC had been delivering HSC vocational awards for many years they had never previously embarked on a collaborative project with the FHSC. Similarly, the OU Awarding Body, responsible for awarding the NVQ within the IVR, had no previous experience of working with the FHSC and was eager to ensure that this new approach to evidence generation would not adversely affect either the quality of the award or the learning experience. New systems for student registration also needed to be established and agreed with the university's Student Registration Services. As a result of these factors an IVR Working Group was established to examine the implications of delivering the IVR and agree protocols in respect of its management.

The process of providing IVR briefings both to internal staff, such as academic colleagues and information, advice and guidance teams, as well as key external HSC stakeholders, including employers, professional bodies and trades unions was extremely demanding. Since the programme was to be offered in all four UK nations this was a necessary, but time-consuming, process. The OU has thirteen regional and national centres, so briefings were held in all these centres and complemented by external stakeholder events in Belfast, Cardiff, Dunfermline, Durham, Edinburgh, Hailsham, Lerwick, Leeds, London, Manchester, Sheffield and Stevenage. Papers on the IVR were also presented at conferences in London, Sedgefield, Taunton, Warrington and York.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in respect of the IVR, however, was funding. Offering an integrated programme with both a Level 3 and a Level 4 award in all four UK nations meant that the nature and level of funding, support and/or study allowances available to assist students in meeting the cost of the IVR was not only affected by the FE and HE dimensions of the provision, but also variations between different UK nations and within the English regions. Moreover, for those students supported by their employer, the opportunity for the IVR tutor and/or assessor roles to be undertaken by staff within an HSC partner organisation added further price variables. In combination, these factors resulted in IVR student registration fees ranging from zero to over £2000 dependent upon the student's personal

circumstances and geographical location; hence providing information on the cost of the IVR was a far from straightforward task!

On programme, overall student satisfaction levels were very high, but focusing on the K101 study components and related evidence generation for the integrated NVQ in the early stages of the programme led some learners to be unclear about the nature of the NVQ component. Similarly, despite the considerable evidence generation opportunities for the NVQ within K101, a small minority of students still found completion of two awards concurrently too great a burden and chose to defer addressing the NVQ component until after they had completed the K101 module.

### **The IVR for Adult Services in Newcastle City Council - Setting the scene**

The Adult Services department in Newcastle City Council employs 329 staff and provides a range of services including community rehabilitation, emergency and respite placements as well as day care. It has four resource centres providing 24 hour services; one specifically for older people with dementia. The department also provides a 'Care at Home' community service and arranges re-ablement, palliative and complex care packages.

Newcastle City Council is also involved in the *Bridges to Learning* (B2L) Project; a regional initiative funded by the Union Learning Fund which focuses on the HSC sector. The project, developed by UNISON, the OU and the Workers' Educational Association, has created a sector-based model of partnership involving trades unions, learning providers and employers to develop and promote educational progression routes from Level 1 to Level 4 (UNISON 2011). As part of this project Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) in four NHS Trusts and three local authorities have been seconded to facilitate achievement of the project's aims.

In Newcastle City Council, B2L activity has been focused on seeking to engage with harder to reach front line care staff, the majority of whom are mature females. Many of these staff have limited experience of post-compulsory education, display both a distrust and dislike of formal learning and acknowledge a lack of confidence about their own academic ability, despite being knowledgeable, experienced and skilled carers. Nevertheless, a significant proportion has completed a Level 2 HSC NVQ and some have even developed a taste for education and a desire to enhance their work role. For such care workers, however, non-professional career development opportunities are quite limited, whilst the traditional study requirements of professional education and training programmes may act as insurmountable barriers.

Newcastle City Council recognised the limitations of traditional NVQs in terms of career progression and entry into HE and was attracted to the IVR since it provided their care staff with the opportunity to concurrently acquire two vocationally-relevant qualifications, experience flexible HE learning, develop their information technology skills and, if they so wish, progress to further studies leading to a full BA or BSc degree irrespective of their existing qualifications. Newcastle City Council were already sponsoring employees on the OU Social Work degree programme and recognised that the IVR could also be used as a means to assess employee commitment to HE study via the OU's 'supported open learning' model before agreeing to support such individuals on the full social work degree. Furthermore, the IVR was regarded as a valuable component of its new skills development pathway for front line care staff, congruent with the wider aims of the B2L project.

With these factors in mind, Newcastle City Council made a corporate booking for a dedicated student group with thirteen places commencing in October 2009. The value of this

learning provision was to be evaluated with a view to considering further corporate bookings if it was deemed to be effective in helping to meet the training and development needs of the organisation. Seven of these places were for IVR students and the remaining six for K101-only students (for those employees who already possessed an equivalent or higher NVQ to that offered within the IVR).

### **Raising awareness of the IVR and recruiting learners in Newcastle City Council**

ULRs in Newcastle City Council actively promoted the IVR/K101 offer and all eligible employees were included in a mailing which highlighted this opportunity. In addition, several IVR/K101 roadshows, involving presentations and question and answer sessions with OU staff, were held in workplaces and one-to-one consultations, to explore individual employee circumstances, specific study concerns and career aspirations, were offered.

Since it became apparent very early in the process of arranging a dedicated IVR/K101 student group in Newcastle City Council that demand for the places would exceed the number on offer within this initiative, a simple application and interview process which sought to ascertain an applicant's commitment to their learning and development was implemented. Given that the IVR and K101 learning opportunities are open access, in accordance with OU organisational philosophy university staff did not contribute to the decisions of the interview panel, but were available to provide additional information on curriculum and study issues.

To build confidence and more effectively prepare successful applicants for their forthcoming learning experience, several study skills sessions were provided by OU staff in the two months preceding the presentation start of the IVR and K101. The sessions were held at the OU Regional Centre to reduce any anxiety or misunderstandings students might have about studying in a university environment.

### **Newcastle City Council's IVR/K101 experience to date**

The end of module examination for students on the October 2009 presentation of K101 was held in June 2010. Eleven of the thirteen staff within the Newcastle City Council group, five of whom were registered on the IVR, passed this examination on their first attempt and successfully completed the module. Arrangements were made for the remaining two students, for whom English was a second language, to re-sit the examination in October 2010 and both have now passed the module.

The integrated NVQ can be completed alongside or after K101 studies and so whilst some IVR students completed both awards at approximately the same time, others deferred completion of the NVQ until the K101 examination had been completed. All IVR students, however, successfully completed the NVQ component of their programme by the end of 2010.

Overall, managers at Newcastle City Council were impressed by the exceptionally high quality of learning materials and OU Tutor/Assessor support in respect of the IVR. Experience derived from the first IVR/K101 group in Newcastle City Council has, however, made the organisation aware of a range of key issues associated with this learning provision. Funding seemed very complicated with numerous variables affecting the cost of provision. It would therefore be useful if the OU could simplify information on this subject and provide employers with clearer illustrations on different pricing scenarios. The commitment required by learners to successfully complete their studies, not least in terms of their own time, should be neither minimised nor overlooked when promoting the IVR and K101 to staff.

Some carers may also need additional support to prepare for this learning opportunity and to become more familiar with the online aspects of study. Whilst the OU supported open learning model provides a more flexible way to engage with HE, it also requires the student to undertake much of their study alone, rather than in a group setting. Good organisational skills and self-discipline may therefore be much more important in this approach to learning if the student is to achieve their academic goals. Furthermore, it should be recognised that supported open learning is not to everyone's taste. Despite these concerns, the fact that all members of the group successfully completed their studies and were highly positive about this learning experience appears to suggest that the IVR and K101 offered a valuable, stimulating and challenging introduction to HE.

### **Next steps for the IVR and K101 in Newcastle City Council**

Newcastle City Council and the OU have now completed an evaluation of the first presentation of the IVR and K101 which has explored both organisational and learner experiences. In light of this evaluation, a further combined group of front line care staff from Newcastle City Council and Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust commenced K101 studies in February 2011. Some of these staff may also register for the new IVR during their module presentation when this becomes available later in 2011.

Newcastle City Council are now seeking to ensure IVR learners are supported to progress towards professional education in social work if that is what they want. Indeed, since completing their studies, four of the seven IVR students in the first group have so far enrolled on the next module for which credit transfer is available in respect of the OU Social Work degree; namely KYJ113 '*Foundations for Social Work Practice*'. The organisation will be seeking to maximise future funding opportunities for such learning and embed the IVR and K101 as options in the mainstream staff development programme in Adult Services. They also intend to promote the IVR and K101 to front line carers from other service areas, such as those responding to the needs of children and young people.

### **What do IVR students say about their learning experience?**

All the following comments were made by students about their learning experiences on the IVR during presentations in the academic years 2008/2009 and 2009/2010. This data has been drawn from student contributions to the K101 NVQ Student Forum (2009) [a moderated online environment in which IVR and K101 students can post comments and queries about the IVR], formal individual student feedback sought by the OU VQAC (2009) and three commissioned evaluations of the IVR; one undertaken by the OU Institute for Educational Technology (2009), the second by SWIIS Foster Care Scotland (Lawrence 2009) and the third by the OU Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum (2010).

*'I am currently doing the K101 module and the integrated IVR. At the end of this I will have the NVQ3 and an additional work-recognised certificate. The best part of this approach has been that all the activities undertaken during the units in the K101 are then used as the evidence in the IVR. This means very little additional work [is] involved'*

*'Although I had to fund both courses myself, it was the certainty that I would finish with in a set timescale which attracted me. Furthermore having talked to my employer although I need the NVQ 3 they do recognise that the K101 is of a managerial use and appear to be willing to accept it if I apply for a managerial position'*

*'This approach has given me a broader skills base for employability'*

*'I would definitely prefer the IVR route [to a conventional NVQ]'*

*'This route was the most flexible and time productive for myself'*

*'The information in the materials is very good ...everything is explained'*

*'An interesting experience'*

*'Compared to the paper-based approach, you just open up your screen, you can see what you need to do and you can just do it; it's so much easier. My computer skills are basic and I've managed with it fine. I've learnt quite a bit this year'*

*'The IT support of the OU were great as they took me by the hand through any new or difficult technical aspects'*

*'I am enjoying it and I'm glad I'm doing it'*

*'The information in the materials is very good ... everything is explained'*

*'I've really enjoyed it and I can see it being beneficial'*

*'NVQ by this route has been easy'*

*'The activities were written in an accessible way. The way it was worded you knew exactly what they are looking for'*

*'I am very positive about it'*

*'Top class'*

*'It has been so, so good. I've been singing its praises to other people at work'*

### **What happens to the IVR in light of the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)?**

Following successful funding bids submitted to Aim Higher Northumberland, Tyne & Wear and the OU Development Office, a new IVR is currently being developed. This will enable students studying K101 to concurrently register for one of four integrated Diplomas within the new QCF from May 2011; namely the *HSC Diploma (Adults Generic pathway)* [England], *HSC Diploma (Adults)* [Wales and Northern Ireland], *HSC Diploma (Children & Young People)* [Wales & Northern Ireland] and *Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce (Social Care pathway)* [England]. Achievement of a relevant Diploma replaces the equivalent NVQ as a training requirement within the National Minimum Standards for Care.

As with the original IVR, HSC stakeholders from England, Northern Ireland and Wales are all contributing to the development of the new programme; helping to comment on the IVR structure, finalise the selection of the Diploma optional units, scrutinise OU work in respect of evidence generation for the integrated vocational Diplomas and act as critical readers of IVR materials. An IVR consultation event involving six healthcare organisations was held in Belfast in January 2011 and the Aneurin Bevan Health Board (ABHB), which provides in-patient and community NHS services in Blaenau, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen and Gwent (ABHB 2011) and Newcastle City Council are both actively involved in shaping the new IVR to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and practice.

In order to continue providing the IVR for students in Scotland, the OU VQAC has also sought and obtained awarding body approval to offer the *Level 3 Scottish Vocational*

*Qualification (SVQ) HSC (Adults) and Level 3 SVQ HSC (CYP) awards.* Given the identical content of NVQ and SVQ units, however, this new provision will require much more modest re-development of the existing IVR programme.

### **Concluding remarks**

Designing a UK-wide programme of vocational and academic learning located at the FE/HE interface for frontline HSC support workers, involving both inter-departmental collaboration within the university and partnership working with external stakeholders, has been an extremely challenging experience. Bringing together the contrasting approaches to knowledge and skills development inherent within NVQs and a knowledge-based HE module to create a logical, coherent and achievable learning opportunity and managing significant funding variations for the IVR arising from different models of collaborative provision, the student's personal circumstances and their geographical location have been particularly problematic. Nevertheless, extremely favourable feedback on the IVR, both from employers and students, combined with the range of potential benefits such a learning programme provides, would strongly suggest that overcoming these challenges has been a worthwhile activity.

Developing the IVR, however, would have been impossible without the considerable commitment invested in this initiative by colleagues within the OU and external stakeholders, as well as the financial support of Aim Higher Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, the North East Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Project, the North East Higher Skills Network and the OU Development Office. We look forward to launching the new IVR programme, offering pathways which integrate four QCF Diplomas as well as two HSC SVQs, later this year.



## References

- Arblaster G., Streater C., Hugill L., McKenzie M. & Missenden M. (2004) A training programme for healthcare support workers, *Nursing Standard*, Vol.18, No.43, pp.33-37.
- Ashton C., Oliver-Watts S., Holden-Smith J, Townsley S, Cramman J., Willis S., Davies B, Wallace J. & Warriner L. (2005). *ALI Employer Training Pilot Survey*, Research Report No.695, HM Treasury, Department for Education & Skills.
- Castle K. (2004) *Retention and Achievement: Making a difference for NVQs*, The Research & Development Bulletin, Vol. 2, No.3, pp.17-22
- Centre for Advanced Studies (2007) *Training for Multi-Skilling: End of Award Report (excerpts)*. Cardiff University accessed via [http://www.cf.ac.uk/cass/projects/british\\_german.html](http://www.cf.ac.uk/cass/projects/british_german.html) on 20/4/07.
- Department of Health (2001). *Care Homes for Older People. National Minimum Standards and The Care Homes Regulations 2001*. London, TSO.
- Department of Health (2003a) *Care Homes for Adults (18–65) and Supplementary Standards for Care Homes Accommodating Young People Aged 16 and 17. National Minimum Standards. Care Homes Regulations*, London, TSO.
- Department of Health (2003b). *Domiciliary Care National Minimum Standards. Regulations*, London, Department of Health.
- Hester R. & Wood C. (2011). *Faculty of Health & Social Care Committee. Health & Social Care Programme Committee Report*, February. Milton Keynes, The Open University.
- K101 NVQ Student Forum (2009). *K101 08J NVQ Talk. Student Contributions*. April, accessed via <https://msds.open.ac.uk/tutorhome/> on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2009.
- Lawrence J. & Mazey R. (2004) *Report on Innovative Assessment of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) Final Report April 2004*, The Research Centre, City College Norwich.
- Lawrence R. (2009). *The Open University and SWIIS Foster Care [Scotland] K101/IVR Evaluation*, September 2009, Dunfermline, SWIIS Foster Care [Scotland].
- Learning & Skills Council (2004) *Health and Social Care in Bucks, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire: A Largely Desk-Based Scope of the Sector, its Policy Context And Workforce Issues in this Region of the Learning And Skills Council*, accessed via [www.thelearningcampus.co.uk](http://www.thelearningcampus.co.uk) on 22/5/07.
- Learning & Skills Development Agency (2005) *Improving the grade in work-based learning. Making work-based learning work*. London. LSDA.
- Leitch S. (2006). *Leitch Review of Skills. Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. London. TSO.
- Newcastle City Learning (2011). *NVQ Qualifications*, accessed via <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/nvqqualifications> on 18/3/11
- Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust (2011). *Welcome from the Chairman and Chief Executive*, accessed via <http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/section.php?1=0&p=235> on 20/3/11

Rosenfeld V. (1999). The value of Care National Vocational Qualifications: what impact do NVQs have on Care organisations in Hertfordshire?, *International Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 3, No.2, pp.142-155.

Royal College of Nursing (2007) *Becoming a nurse or midwife*, accessed via <http://www.rcn.org.uk/resources/becomenurse.php> on 22/5/07.

Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust (2011). *Did you know?*, accessed via <http://www.salisbury.nhs.uk/Pages/Home.aspx> on 20/3/11

SWIIS Foster Care Scotland (2011). *Welcome to SWIIS Foster Care Scotland*, accessed via <http://www.fostercareScotland.com/> on 20/3/11

The Open University (2011). An introduction to health and social care, accessed via <http://www.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/course/k101.htm> on 20/3/11

The Open University Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum (2010). *Evaluation of Integrated Vocational Route (IVR)*. August, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University Institute for Educational Technology (2009). *Telephone Interview summaries with K101/IVR Students*, April 2009, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University VQ Assessment Centre (2008). *The Integrated Vocational Route (IVR) in Health and Social Care – An overview*. Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University Vocational Qualifications Assessment Centre (2009). *VQ Assessment Centre Candidate Feedback*, August 2009, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

UNISON (2011). *Bridges to Learning Project*, accessed via <http://newcastlehospitalsunisonbranch.web.officelive.com/NewcastleHospitalsBranchLearning.aspx> on 20/3/11.

Warr J. (2002) Experiences and perceptions of newly prepared Health Care Assistants (Level 3 NVQ), *Nurse Education Today*, (2002) Vol. 22, No.3, pp.24-250.

West Yorkshire Social Care Workforce Project (2004) *Workforce Development Needs of the Social Care Sector in West Yorkshire First Report (Interim)* May 2004.

Witton M. (2005) Meeting the holistic needs of dependent older people. *Nursing Standard*. 20, 13, 41-50.

# **EXPERIENCES GAINED WHILE MANAGING AND DELIVERING FOUNDATION DEGREE PROGRAMMES IN EARLY YEARS AND TEACHING IN THE LIFELONG LEARNING SECTOR**

---

**Lesley Faulconbridge, FdA Children and Young Peoples Services and  
Peter Tunnicliffe, FdA Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, University of Derby**

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the notion of flexible learning in terms of a Foundation degree in the children's and young people's service sector delivered in a higher education setting. This study examines the risks, challenges and benefits of implementing flexible modes of delivery. Models of learning are explored with reference to the dichotomy between meeting the demands of market forces to provide flexible modes of delivery and offering a quality learning experience for students. The comparative perspectives of students and their employers are examined to ascertain the efficacy of flexible modes of delivery in meeting the operational needs of employers and the academic aptitude of learners.

The findings suggest that flexibility in course design is fundamental in ensuring that a work-based professional course is accessible to the entire workforce in the children's and young people's service sector. Paradoxically there can be conflict between flexibility in delivery mode and providing a quality learning experience for the student, meeting the business priorities of employers and the culture of academic study patterns in the higher education sector.

## **Introduction**

### **Higher Education as a Vehicle for Change**

Higher education is perceived as a vehicle for delivering the changes in developing the higher level skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for these professional roles in the future (TDA, 2009). Hence the demand for provision at foundation degree level to meet current workforce developments and employer needs has escalated (Nelson, 2006). However, as Government policy (DfES, 2003a; DfES, 2005; DCSF, 2008a) has been the driving force for the remodelling of the workforce, the practicalities and barriers to raising the qualifications of workers in the public sector, who typically hold a level 3 certificate, appear to have been given little consideration.

Although foundation degrees were designed to meet the needs of employers and learners, (Beaney, 2006) it appears current provision is still predominantly based upon traditional delivery patterns in the higher education sector to include an autumn and spring semester encompassing daytime and some evening delivery. Furthermore, some foundation degree programmes are integrated within full Bachelors degree programmes, offering even more restricted access. However, for practitioners in both the children's and young people's services and teaching in the lifelong learning sector, the competing demands of engaging in study whilst working, often on a full time basis, can create difficulties with regard to accessing these modes of study (Gorard et al, 2007). Conversely students in some sectors have working patterns that include long summer breaks and half term holidays when intensive study might take place if provision was available.

Arguably there appears to be a misalignment between the needs of employers, employees and the provision available within the higher education sector (Attwood, 2008). However as the composition of the student population in the Higher Education sector is expected to change significantly in line with current Government policy and market forces, the challenge for institutions is to adapt to meet a broad range of study needs. As the Burgess Higher Education Achievement Report (2007) concludes, a pre-requisite for a thriving higher education is to facilitate lifelong learning and accommodate demographic trends. Evidence suggests that a lack of appropriate provision be a major barrier to progression in some sectors (Kewin et al 2011). Thus a greater choice with regard to the flexibility of delivery approaches appears to be desirable.

## **Flexible Learning**

This paper examines the risks, challenges and benefits of implementing flexible models of delivery when delivering work-based degree courses in higher education. Models of learning are explored with reference to the dichotomy between meeting the demands of market forces to provide flexible modes of delivery to meet the business requirements of employers and offering a quality learning experience for students in employment.

The notion of 'flexible learning' is a difficult concept to define and can include a flexible choice of programmes, the opportunity for the student to determine part of a programme of study within a course and the time frame for completion. There may also be the opportunity to select from alternative modes of study thus allowing the learner to determine when and where study will be undertaken. Nonetheless, all of these approaches are designed to allow students to have greater control of their learning and promote student-centeredness. Hence it could be argued that the student is perceived as a consumer in the market place and flexible delivery is provided according to student demand and need (Attwood, 2008). This model of education can arguably create a tension between maintaining academic standards and meeting business priorities (Fearn, 2009). Nonetheless ensuring that the needs of employers and employees are met in a sustainable way is critical to programme development in order to maximise student recruitment, retention and achievement (Pickford and Tatum, 2008). Flexible delivery has been noted as of paramount importance in overcoming barriers to releasing staff from the workplace. As Kewin et al (2011:24) suggests:

*“the ability to study on a part time basis is essential but the time, day and duration of delivery is also important.”*

Through the publication of the Dearing Report (1997) and subsequently the Review of Skills by Leitch (DfES, 2006), the Government has driven widening participation in further and higher education and the ethos of lifelong learning. This was deemed to be necessary in order to meet future higher level skill shortages and the needs of employers in a world class economy (DfES, 2006).

Access to higher education through the provision of a service that is inclusive and accessible is identified as a key facet to the success of this strategy (DfEE, 2001). Moreover as the Higher Education Review (HEFCE, 2009) indicates 'flexibility' of course design is perceived by employers and employees as an essential facet of successful innovative programme

provision. However despite the plethora of government literature supporting this strategy (DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2003a; DfES, 2003b; DIUS, 2008) the credibility of this approach in raising the qualifications and skills of the workforce in the children's and young people's service and TLLS sectors require further consideration.

The development of vocational Foundation degrees that offer flexible learning opportunities fulfil the aforementioned criteria and were designed to meet the needs of employees and employers. More recently, workforce remodelling in the sector has been intrinsically associated with the development of Foundation degrees to meet the changing needs of the workforce (TDA, 2008). However although the requirements of Government policy are often fulfilled through this type of provision, the needs of the employee, who is the target of reforms in order to meet the requirements of the Government's latest initiative, are often marginalised. Furthermore the business needs of employers and the culture of higher education institutions can be disparate. Almost all employers recognise the importance of positive relationships with Higher Education providers to ensure that barriers to access study at Higher Education are minimised (Kewin et al 2011).

Despite numerous documents highlighting the need for flexible study to include distance learning, e-learning and summer semesters (Flowers, 1993; Fallows and Symon, 2000; DfES, 2003a; DfES, 2003b; Snape et al, 2007; Benyon et al, 2009) in reality most degree programmes still adhere to the traditional evening and day time delivery patterns and a typical academic calendar with a long summer break in teaching. Hence 'flexible delivery' is interpreted as allowing students to complete the programme on a part time basis in two to five years within the prescribed higher education academic year (Foskett, 2005). It could be argued that the HE system in England is incompatible with the widening participation agenda and that the culture and ethos of institutions indirectly hinder flexible learning opportunities such as Saturday or summer school provision which is considered not the norm.

Furthermore the structural flexibility of administrative systems is often unresponsive to the needs of non-traditional students (Read et al, 2003). This evidence suggests that there is a need for change in custom and practice in the higher education sector.

It appears that there is little opportunity for flexible study in terms of accessing modules other than through either daytime and evening deliveries, thus failing in some respects to meet the criteria set by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2000). Hence employers that may or may not offer study leave or flexible working arrangements often inherently determine patterns of course attendance and thus accessibility to the various modes of delivery.

The consequences of these institutional barriers to learning are reflected in the review of widening participation by Gorard et al (2007). Evidence collated in this extensive review of widening participation indicates that barriers to learning such as a general lack of flexibility in course structure with regards to the timing and limits of provision of this nature can impede participation. Furthermore:

*"Many non-traditional students have the unenviable task of balancing the heavy and often conflicting demands of work, family, life in general and the requirements of the course"*

*(Bamber and Tett, 1998, p.469)*

The work of Thurgate et al (2007) that documented the risks and challenges associated with the delivery of a Foundation degree in the social care sector concurs that a 'flexible' model of delivery is perceived as a key attribute for employers in supporting students through Foundation degree programmes and also affords employees the opportunity to combine work and study. Although of some significance, arguably this analysis of the findings of a case study provides only a narrow perspective and oversimplifies the flexibility necessary to meet the diverse needs of Foundation degree students.

Nonetheless flexibility in course structure appears to be crucial in terms of recruitment and retention of non-traditional learners and could be particularly important in terms of raising qualification levels in the field of children's and young peoples' services, as practitioners often work long hours that are not conducive to traditional study patterns. This suggests that:

*"One of the primary goals of providing flexibility in education settings is to help people integrate learning into often complex lives."*  
(Hill, 2006, p.189)

Hence the preferred flexible model of delivery is proffered as enabling students to choose what, where, when and how they learn to meet market demands.

However this blended approach to delivery can be challenging to both facilitators and students. As Bigum and Rowan (2004) argue, 'flexible' learning within educational environments is often perceived as providing better opportunities for learning with little consideration given to the extra demands that this places on teachers and learners. For instance a wide range of alternative resources need to be developed to meet course requirements. In addition, skills associated with on-line resources need to be honed and forums for learners to share their ideas and experiences need to be created to offer parity of experience in line with teaching approaches used in traditional modes of study. Furthermore, as the work of Colvin (2003) indicates, when using a web-based learning environment or modes of this nature, students also need to be aware that outside of core hours access to the support services normally available, including information technology support, may be limited and can prove difficult.

By providing a flexible learning curriculum, there is necessarily a shift from a pedagogical approach; whereby the student is dependent and passive in the learning process, and the mantle of responsibility for learning lies with the teacher, to an andragogic model that emphasises self-direction and gives the student responsibility for his or her own learning. This shift could ostensibly create some difficulties for students returning to study many of whom will only have experienced the former model of teaching and learning. Arguably an approach underpinned by pedagogy might offer students returning to study a clear framework for their studies. Furthermore, an approach that is governed by the teacher might in the early phases of the course give students a structure and the high levels of support that fosters the confidence in learners to engage in study at higher education institutions. Nonetheless it is acknowledged that passive learning of this nature that is teacher dependent is not conducive to adult learning (Reece and Walker, 2007).

It is widely acknowledged that adult learning is distinctly different to that of younger students (Paraskevas and Wickens, 2003; Reece and Walker, 2007; Scales, 2008). Andragogy that emphasises the self direction of motivated students encourages a critical reflective approach to learning, an approach that is fundamental to work-based learning on Foundation degrees. According to Paraskevas and Wickens (2003) the success of this method is inherently linked to the self-knowledge of the students and their motivation to learn. Arguably this paradigm of learning, originally proposed by Knowles (1973) is compatible with the widening participation agenda and the type of student engaged in work-based Foundation degrees who are typically experienced practitioners, intrinsically motivated to learn in order to improve their practice in the setting. Furthermore, as Knowles (1980) argues, adult learners of this nature are predominantly self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions, therefore flexible approaches to teaching and learning need to acknowledge these factors. More experienced practitioners, however, may move beyond the linear approach which is associated with Knowles's concept of andragogy, and prefer the more experiential 'double loop' system of learning as proposed by Hase and Kenyon (2000,p.5) under the heading of 'heutagogy'.

*"Heutagogy includes aspects of capability, action learning processes such as reflection, environmental scanning as understood in Systems Theory, and valuing experience and interaction with others. It goes beyond problem solving by enabling proactivity."*

Nonetheless presenting students with a plethora of choices regarding when, where and how to learn can also be daunting, particularly for those returning to study after several years. Flexible approaches of this nature requires that students create and manage individual learning plans thus shifting responsibility for course design, within set parameters, to learners. In order to construct an individual learning plan, students need to be able to understand the differences between the modes of delivery, recognise the skills necessary to engage successfully with a module delivered in this way and be aware of their personal academic aptitude. However, as Nichols (2007) notes, defining modes of delivery and characterizing delivery approaches is difficult even for practitioners in the field. He argues that an authoritative definition of differing modes of delivery is elusive, particularly in web-based learning options. Thus academic counselling to assist students in understanding the demands of the modes of study and signposting appropriate options to meet their individual needs is of paramount importance, although this in some respects undermines the whole ethos of a flexible approach to learning whereby students determine their pattern of study.

Identifying applicable modes of delivery to meet the individual academic needs of students is particularly difficult in the early phases of a course without routine diagnostic testing on entry to a programme; universal services of this nature are not typically available in the higher education sector. Nonetheless it is crucial that tutors provide advice and guidance for students selecting how they will study, to ensure that appropriate choices are made in order that learners achieve their academic potential and improve retention. Students must also play their part in acknowledging their individual limitations and recognising the overwhelming demands that some modes of study might present particularly in the early stages of a programme.

To engage successfully in flexible modes of delivery, students are also required to have self-regulation, time management and ICT skills. These skill sets are invariably developed as students progress through the course, particularly as many of the learners are mature students returning to study, and may present as a barrier to learning in the early phases of a programme. Thus additional guidance, tutorial support and technical assistance may be required in the initial phases of a programme if learners are to access flexible modes of delivery successfully (Hill, 2006). High quality information, advice and guidance play a critical role in the ultimate success and outcomes for students embarking on study at HE level and in the commitment of employers.

Within this context, flexible learning will encompass a range of different modes of delivery and hence a plethora of teaching methods to facilitate the learning process. Arguably those learners attending the classroom might encounter a different experience to students accessing e-learning materials online or distance learning packages (Smith, Reed and Jones, 2008). Within the higher education classroom there has been a shift towards student-centred teaching methods that emphasise active learning in order to involve learners in the higher-order thinking tasks of analysis, evaluation and synthesis. Hence andragogic teaching methods such as the 'Socratic Seminar' that employs strategies such as discussions, simulations, case studies and role-playing are perceived to be fundamental to the learning process. However, it is difficult to replicate this approach in the virtual learning environment and impracticable in home-based contexts. Furthermore, as the work of O'Donnell et al (2009) suggests the heterogeneity of the student populace requires that we acknowledge the diverse needs and abilities of learners thus 'one size does not fit all'. Hence it could be argued that creating forums for learning that are flexible and inclusive is unattainable. Nonetheless as Hase and Kenyon suggest "*using the internet and intranets may provide superb opportunities for the use of a heutagogical approach.*" (2000,p.8)

The social learning model that encompasses andragogic teaching methods, an idea initially proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) that views learning as a collective process that takes place in a 'community of practice', is considered as particularly pertinent in the teaching of vocational qualifications and Foundation degrees (Doyle, 2003). Learning is seen as occurring when individuals "*compare and enrich interpretations*" (Wenger et al, 2002, p.64) and unconsciously learn from discussion. This particular model concurs with the ethos of the Foundation degree with the emphasis on work-based experiential learning. Wenger (1998, p.73) argues that there are three strands of this approach that enables learning to take place through these communities of practice:

- *Mutual engagement.* Shared practice (the same job and challenges) means that everyone encounters similar issues, ideas and problems thus everyone is keen to engage in the learning process.
- *A joint enterprise.* Community members share a profession thus respond to situations in a similar way and often have shared aims, ideals and challenges and a mutual understanding.
- *A shared repertoire.* Everyone uses the same terminology and has similar ways of doing things that has been adopted by the community hence participation is open to all. (Faulconbridge, 2005, p125)



Hence there may be a tension between the doctrine of how effective learning occurs on work-based degree programmes and the delivery of some flexible modes of study that are predominantly a solitary enterprise.

Employer involvement is an essential feature of the Foundation degree nonetheless it has been well documented that the commitment of employers is disparate (Smith and Betts, 2003; Fearn, 2009). The business needs and organisational aims of employers often appear to supersede the learning needs of students despite the benefits to service provision of well qualified staff (Gleeson and Keep, 2004). It could be argued that the professionalisation of roles in the children and young people's service sector is in some senses being resisted by employers, despite the positive impact that this might have upon the quality of provision and practice (Sylva et al, 2004). Nonetheless it is crucial to secure the commitment of employers as they are the "gatekeepers" to quality work-based learning opportunities and often influence the study patterns of learners. Furthermore it is essential that employers recognise as Smith and Betts (2003, p.234) argue that "*a quality partnership costs employers real money and time*".

A disparity in the priorities of the employer and employee inevitably impacts on the accessibility of the various modes of delivery for students and may also influence the future design of flexible modes of delivery as the 'employer voice' and sector demand is strongly represented in Foundation degree development (Pickford, 2009). Nonetheless, as the study to develop an effective lifelong learning inventory (ELLI Project) found, it is essential to remain student centred with regard to the development of teaching and learning opportunities in order to engage students in the learning process and develop them as learners (Deakin Crick et al, 2004).

To conclude, although there are a plethora of factors that impact upon widening participation, a lack of flexibility in course structure with regard to modes of delivery is perceived to be a contributory factor to precluding participation for the non traditional learner. It is claimed that:

*"Structural flexibility enables students to fit studying around other responsibilities. Changes include ICT and distance learning, off campus delivery, part-time study, timetabling, changing programmes, and extended academic year".*  
(Gorard et al, 2007, p.85)

Hence flexible degree programmes of this nature are required to evolve from "*programme led*" to a "*student led*" culture of programme delivery in higher education" (Hallet,2008, p.33). Thus it is acknowledged:

*"The challenge is to change the curriculum, the environment and the culture so that it meets the needs of the learners, not to change the learner so that it meets the needs of the university".*  
(Layer, 2005, p.3)

To summarise, flexibility of provision is of paramount importance in terms of being responsive to the personal needs of learners and the demands of employers. However flexible delivery can be challenging for students, particularly for those returning to study after

several years. Learners may find the plethora of study options available overwhelming and the shift to a student-led culture daunting.

The andragogic model of teaching that is often adopted in teaching in higher education (particularly on work-based foundation degrees) expects students to take control of their own learning recognising the limits of their knowledge and motivating them to learn. However in practice many students returning to study after an absence of several years might find the shift from pedagogy to andragogy unfamiliar and daunting. Furthermore the Socratic methods of teaching employed in this approach rely upon collaborative relationships between students and may be difficult to effectively re-create in flexible modes of study such as e-learning and distance learning. It is clear that this raises issues regarding the parity and quality of teaching and learning that students might experience when accessing the different modes of learning.

Throughout the demands of the employer and business needs appear to play a fundamental role in determining the study patterns of employees and the design of modes of delivery (Pickford & Tatum, 2008).

## References

- Attwood, R. (2008) Part-time study vital to UK's future economic success, review says IN Times Higher Education 23/10/08
- Bamber, J. and Tett, L. (1998) Opening the doors of higher education to working class adults: a case study International Journal of Lifelong Education Vol 18 No 6 pp465-467
- Beaney, P. (2006) Researching Foundation Degrees: Linking Research and Practice London: Foundation Degree Forward
- Benyon, J. Mckee, B. And Morris, K. (2009) Employers' Engagement with Foundation Degrees Leicester: University of Leicester
- Bigum, C. and Rowan, L. (2004) Flexible Learning in Teacher Education: myths, muddles and models Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education Vol 32 No 3 pp213-226
- Burgess, R. (2007) Beyond the honours degree classification. The Burgess Group Final Report London: Universities UK
- Colvin (2003) Extending the Academic Year for Mature Part-time Higher Education Students using a Web-based Learning Environment Research in Post-Compulsory Education. Vol 8 Number 3 pp393-406
- Deakin Crick, R. Broadfoot, P. and Claxton, G. (2004) Developing an Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory: the ELLI Project Assessment in Education Vol 11 No 3 pp 247-270
- Dearing, R. (1997) Higher Education in the Learning Society: report of the National Committee of Inquiry in Higher Education London: HMSO
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) 2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy London: DCSF
- Department for Education and Employment (2001) Opportunity and Skills in the Knowledge-Driven Economy: a final statement on the work of the National Skills Task Force from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment London: DfEE
- Department for Education and Skills (2003a) The Future of Higher Education London: DfES
- Department for Education and Skills (2003b) Widening Participation in Higher Education. London: DfES
- Department for Education and Skills (2005) Children's Workforce Strategy: a strategy to build a world-class workforce for children and young people Nottingham: DfES
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007) World Class Skills: implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England Available at [www.dius.gov.uk/publications/leitch](http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/leitch)
- Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008) On-line Innovation in Higher Education Available at [www.dius.gov.uk/policy/documents/online](http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/documents/online) Accessed 10 March 2009
- Doyle, M. (2003) Discourses of Employability and Empowerment: Foundation Degrees and 'Third Way' Discursive Repertoires Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Policies of Education Vol 24 No3 pp274-288
- Fallows S. and Symon, G. (2000) Extending the Academic Year: new opportunities for learning Journal of Educational Management Vol 14 No 7 pp308-315

- Faulconbridge, J. R. (2005) Local-global Geographies of Tacit Knowledge Production in London and New York's Advertising and Law Professional Service Firms. PhD Thesis, Loughborough University.
- Flowers (1993) The Review of the Academic Year: A Report of the Committee of Vice Chancellors, HEFCE.
- Foskett, R. (2005) Collaborative Partnership in the Higher Education Curriculum: a cross-sector study of foundation degree development Research in Post Compulsory Education Vol 10 No 3 pp351-372
- Gleeson, D. and Keep, E. (2004) Voice Without Accountability: the changing relationship between employers, the State and education in England Oxford Review of Education Vol 30 No 1 pp 37-63
- Gorard, S. May, H. Thomas, L. Adnett, N. and Slack, K. (2007) Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education York: University of York Higher Education Academy
- Hallet, E. (2008) Flexible Foundation Degree Delivery for Experienced Women Practitioners IN Foundation Degree FORWARD Issue 14
- Hase, S. and Kenyon, C. (2000) From Andragogy to Heutagogy ultiBASE publication
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (2000) Foundation Degree Prospectus Bristol: HEFCE
- Hill, J. (2006) Flexible Learning Environments: Leveraging the Affordances of Flexible Delivery and Flexible Learning Journal of Higher Education Vol 31 No 3 pp187-197
- Kewin, J. Hughes, T. Fletcher, T. Sheen, J. (2011) The Road Less Travelled: experiences of employers that support the progression of Advanced Apprentices to Higher Education Leicester: Skills for Sustainable Communities Lifelong Learning Network
- Knowles, M. (1973) The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species Houston: Gulf Publishing
- Knowles, M (1980) The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy Chicago: Folett
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation New York: Cambridge University Press
- Layer, G. (2005) The Impact of Widening Participation Strategies in the UK and the USA Leicester: NIACE
- Leitch, S. (2006) Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills Norwich: HMSO
- Nelson, A. (2006) Provision and Participation: using quantitative research to explore foundation degree provision IN Beaney, P. (2006) Researching Foundation Degrees: Linking Research and Practice London: Foundation Degree Forward:
- Nichols, M. (2007) Comparing Modes of Study: A Perspective on Hagel and Shaw's "Students Perceptions of Study Modes" Distance Education Vol 28 No 3 pp371-376

- O'Donnell, V. L. Tobbell, J. Lawthom, R. and Zammit, M. (2009) Transition to Postgraduate Study: Practice, Participation and the Widening Participation Agenda Active Learning in Higher Education VOL 10 No 26 pp 26-40
- Paraskevas, A. And Wickens, E. (2003) Andragogy and the Socratic Method: The Adult Learner Perspective Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education Vol 2 No 2 pp4-13
- Pickford, C. (2009) Employer-led Foundation Degrees in Construction Management: building upon practice IN Forward Innovating Workforce Development Issue 17
- Pickford, C. And Tatum, S. (2008) Employer Partnerships and Consortia IN Forward: innovating workforce development Issue 16 October 2008
- Read, B. Archer, A. and Leathwood, C. (2003) Challenging Cultures? Student Conceptions of 'Belonging' and 'Isolation' at a Post-1992 University Studies in Higher Education Vol 28 No 3 pp261-277
- Reece, I. and Walker, S. (2007) Teaching, Training and Learning: A Practical Guide 6<sup>th</sup> ed Tyne and Wear: Business Education Publishers
- Smith, R. and Betts, M. (2003) Partnerships and the Consortia Approach to United Kingdom Foundation Degrees: a case study of benefits and pitfalls Journal of Vocational Training VOL 55 NO2 pp223-238
- Scales, P. (2008) Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector Berkshire: Open University Press
- Snape, D. Parfremont, J. Finch, S. (2007) Evaluation of the Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree Findings from the Final Student Survey London: DfES
- Sylva, K. Melliush, E. Sammons, P. Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report London: DfES
- Thurgate, C. MacGregor, J. Brett, H. (2007) The Lived Experience: delivering a foundation degree in health and social care Journal of Further and Higher Education Vol 31 No 3 pp215-223
- Training and Development Agency (2008) Sector Qualifications Strategy for School Support Staff London: TDA
- Wenger, E. McDermott, R. and Snyder, W. M. (2002) Cultivating Communities of Practice Boston: Harvard University Press
- Wenger, E. Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity New York: Cambridge University Press

## **RESPONDING TO THE 'BIG SOCIETY': FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

---

**Sonia Vougioukalou, Centre for Health and Social Care Research, Canterbury Christ Church University**

### **Purpose**

Under the new coalition government, charities, voluntary groups and a new generation of community organisers are anticipated to be able tackle important social problems and so contribute to the formation of a 'Big Society' that is based upon social responsibility and community action. This paper will examine the challenges of delivering voluntary sector training in health and social care and present new approaches to accredited and unaccredited academic curriculum development to meet the changing needs of employers and volunteers.

### **Design/methodology/approach**

Core methods involved mutualised community partnerships and curriculum co-development. The following tools were used to engage with employers, volunteers and academics: outreach events, evening lectures, research methods workshops, business and organisational skills workshops, mentoring schemes, monthly partner steering committee meetings, and an end-of-year project award competition. Through this process, individual volunteers were empowered as learners in an innovative way that met their needs.

### **Findings**

Developing academic curricula through embedding knowledge exchange and co-development processes into community engagement delivers benefits to all parties involved. It contributes to increased student recruitment and partnership working for the academic institution, increased access to higher education and employability for the paid and unpaid members of the voluntary and community sector involved and enhanced workforce and skills development for the employer organisations.

### **Research limitations/implications**

This scheme requires staff time and resources for dedicated knowledge exchange practitioners, who have skills and experience not only in curriculum development but also community engagement, to successfully manage the diverse network of relationships with external parties. For such a project to be successful and deliver benefits to the voluntary and community sector in health and social care, it would need to be supported by the institution at a senior management level.

**Originality/value:** The paper proposes a new model of curriculum development based on community engagement and knowledge exchange.

### **The 'Big Society' and the voluntary sector**

On 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron clarified his government's vision for the 'Big Society', identifying three key actions: social action, public service reform and

community empowerment (Cameron 2010). The 'Big Society' manifesto of the Coalition government acknowledges the valuable role that the community and voluntary sector offers to community wellbeing and social cohesion. It aims to give communities more powers, encourage people to take more active roles in their communities, transfer power from central to local government, and support co-ops, mutuals, charities and social enterprises (Cabinet Office 2010). While this agenda has been supported by some as a laudable initiative that supplements the limitations of the welfare state (Taylor *et al.* 2011), it has been criticised by others as promoting public sector cuts and diminishing state responsibility for public health (Hunter 2011).

Historically, voluntary organisations have been at the heart of social action and community development in the UK. Voluntary bodies were called upon to substitute and complement government activities in contexts where informal action and commercial enterprise were believed to be inadequate (the Co-operative Movement and Rochdale Pioneers being a flagship initiative). However, these expectations were not informed by a clear consensus of what the voluntary sector comprised, how it was financed, or how it linked with government, commercial or household sectors (Kendall & Knapp 1995).

Over the last decade, the voluntary sector has had a demonstrated impact in the fields of social exclusion, poverty, the environment, social capital, and employment (Haugh & Kirtson 2007). In the context of financial crises and job losses, public health is expected to be adversely affected, contributing to mental health or addiction problems, the adoption of less healthy lifestyles (smoking, drinking, poor diet), and compromised disease management resulting from overburdened health-care services (Stuckler *et al.* 2009). Strained public services create new roles and functions for the non-profit sector as it is not isolated from the rest of the economy. Because of the interdependency of all sectors, public actions directed at nonprofits affect other parts of the economy as well (Weisrod 1988: 84).

It is anticipated that the voluntary sector can prevent significant increases in the disruption of community cohesion, family breakdown and anti-social behaviour. However, the voluntary sector does not have the frameworks, benchmarks, infrastructure and resources available to statutory organisations, to support higher-level learning that meets the needs of employers and employees while maintaining high-level quality.

This is particularly pertinent as voluntary and community organisations depend heavily on public trust. They need to exude competence and inspire confidence if they are to be first preference providers of services, reliable contractors to government agencies and responsible recipients of donations (Knapp *et al.* 1995: 22).

To deliver the 'Big Society', civil society organisations will need to recruit, train and support increasing numbers of volunteers. Taylor and colleagues identify the following challenges for the 'Big Society' agenda:

- supporting and developing skills in social enterprise
- demonstrating effectiveness to commissioners
- supporting local enterprise while mindful of inequality
- guarding against the third sector losing its dynamism
- and using volunteers to replace or complement existing services

(Taylor *et al.* 2011).

Our approach to supporting skills development for the voluntary sector in health and social care was to develop a process of business and community engagement through knowledge exchange to deliver:

- i) work-based learning projects
- ii) unaccredited CPD events and
- iii) accredited Foundation Degree in Volunteering programme (forthcoming).

These initiatives were funded by the Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) and the Higher Education Innovation Fund 4 (HEFCE) between January 2010 and July 2011.

## **Knowledge exchange, community engagement and curriculum development**

### **Context/background**

Universities have an acknowledged role in lifelong learning and employability. Examples include educating the middle manager so that he or she can manage more effectively or 'upskilling' the teacher or process worker and facilitating the development of active citizenship. Employability is never solely limited to young recent graduates. All professionals are concerned with employability as conditions within the labour market are constantly evolving and changing within a dynamic political context (Yorke, 2006). Adult learners and professionals are not passive recipients of academic materials; they use research knowledge in combination with their existing technical and social knowledge (Meager et al. 2008: 165). The transition of externals from passive recipients of knowledge to collaborators requires a different level of engagement than the didactic skills used in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

Knowledge transfer activities within the context of higher education were initially focused on technology transfer, innovation, the commercialisation of intellectual property, patents and commercial links with businesses (Howlett 2010). Knowledge transfer more widely refers to 'a wide variety of activities linking the production of academic knowledge to the potential use of such knowledge in non-academic environments'. However, notions of knowledge transfer within higher education are rooted in traditional rational-linear models of research use. Such models require two disparate communities – research producers and potential research users – and cast the problem as one of a lack of connectivity between these two communities (Davies et al 2008: 188). The term 'knowledge transfer' is being seen as outdated and therefore replaced by the term 'knowledge exchange'. Increasingly, the design of undergraduate and postgraduate courses has input from external organisations. In some cases, industrial advisory groups advise on course content, particularly for courses such as engineering and applied sciences.

The Higher Education – Business and Community Interaction surveys (HE-BCI) provide some evidence on the extent to which structures have been put in place to systematically seek input from external organisations. The following figures were reported in the HE-BCI 2006-2007 survey: just over a third of HEIs regularly consulted with employers and other partners for curriculum development. Almost 20% had some dialogue with employers and



other bodies about the nature of the courses, but it is limited for example, to specific vocational areas or as one-off exercises. 46% of HEIs engaged somewhere in between these two positions. As would be expected, given the highly vocational nature of the courses, and number of practitioner-lecturers, specialist arts HEIs were the most likely to engage systematically with employers and other partners; relatively, fewer of the higher research HEIs engage employers and other partners in such a systematic way for curriculum development (PACEC 2008: 24).

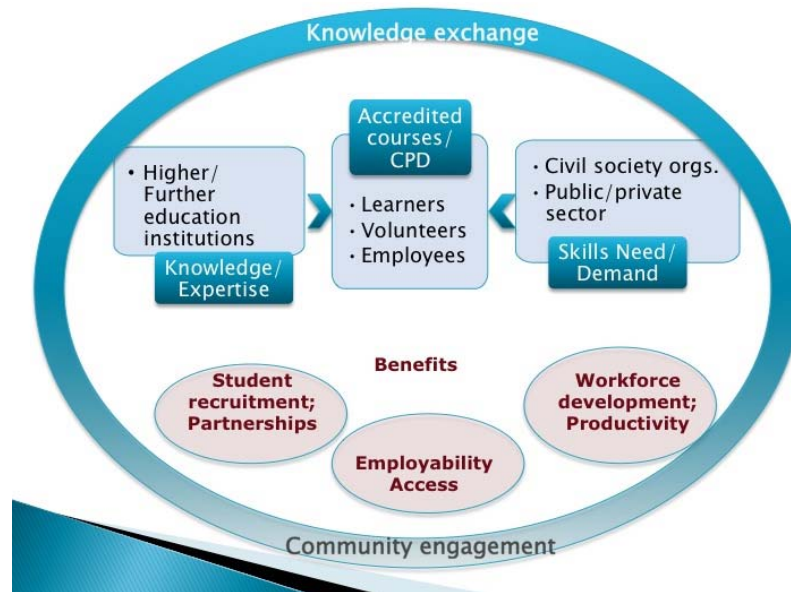
### **Our approach: Knowledge exchange and curriculum co-development**

This paper proposes a new model of curriculum development based on community engagement and knowledge exchange. Typically, materials for accredited courses such as degrees, access courses and CPD as well as unaccredited courses such as public lectures, training events and museum exhibitions are developed *within* higher/further education institutions (HEI/FECs). They are often produced exclusively by members of these institutions who have specialised knowledge and expertise. Learners are taught within these institutions and then progress into employment. The result is a gap in skills that employers need, which in turn compromises graduate employability. The co-development model is based on the notion that HE/FE can drive the knowledge economy through embedding processes of business and community engagement into academic curriculum development (a review of international examples is provided by Trani and Holsworth 2010).

The knowledge exchange process involved internal and external processes. Internally, we activated a network of academics, researchers, staff and students that were interested to work with the voluntary and community sector. Externally, we formed a steering committee with members of the Canterbury City Council and Canterbury District Community Alliance who were responsible for recruiting volunteers and voluntary sector managers. Work-based learning projects consisted of projects carried out *by the* volunteer *for the* voluntary organisation with guidance from an academic supervisor. Non-accredited Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events consisted of evening lectures, research methods and business and organisational skills workshops where volunteers were trained as community researchers. Through this process members of the voluntary and community sector were supported to work with their managers and produced materials that highlighted the social and economic impact of their organisations. Adult learners were active participants in the development of these curricula, chose session themes and evaluated outcomes.

This process bridged the gap between employers, volunteers and educators; promoted work based learning and offered participating voluntary and community organisations a much needed tool - skills to produce an impact evaluation conducted by members of the organisations. It also offered university members of staff an opportunity to re-engage with current developments in the community by directly supervising students or delivering CPD events.

Our experience developing academic curricula through embedding knowledge transfer/exchange processes into community engagement delivered benefits to all parties involved. It contributed to increased student recruitment and partnership working for the academic institution, increased access to higher education and employability for the volunteers involved and increased workforce development and skills for the employer organisations in health and social care (figure 1).



**Figure 1: Schematic representation of distributed benefits of curriculum development through community engagement**

### **Approach: design, methods and processes**

Volunteer engagement served as an innovative approach to bringing together volunteers and employers in the Canterbury District; through a partnership between the Canterbury District Community Alliance – an umbrella organisation that supports all voluntary organisations in the Canterbury District, the Community Development Unit of Canterbury City Council, the Department of Social Work, Community and Mental Health and the Centre for Health and Social Care Research at Canterbury Christ Church University to design and pilot the framework of a Foundation Degree in Volunteering and Capacity Building for the Voluntary Sector CPD courses to support work-based learning.

Between January 2010 and June 2011 the following tools were used to engage with employers, volunteers and academics:

- outreach events
- evening lectures
- research methods workshops
- mentoring schemes
- monthly steering committee meetings
- an end-of-year project award competition

Volunteers were paired up with suitable research supervisors and worked with their employers to produce a report that reflected the social and/or economic impact of their organisation. Individual supervision sessions were supplemented with research skills seminars on data gathering, qualitative and quantitative analysis, ethics and report writing. Non-accredited CPD courses were delivered on dementia, mental health, working with children, legislation and health improvement through the use of the natural environment. Business and organisational skills workshops were delivered on leadership development, cultures of effectiveness in the workplace, evaluation, bid writing and business engagement. Through this process each individual volunteer was empowered as a learner in a unique

way. Volunteers and managers also provided feedback on the module content of the CPD courses and the forthcoming Foundation Degree in Volunteering.

## Results

### Volunteer profile and employer engagement

The work-based partnerships involved a total of nine volunteers and five supervisors. Five volunteers completed an end-of-project report for their organisation. Their projects had a varying impact on the volunteers involved, their organisation and the university. The following two case studies highlight the complex and diverse impact of lifelong learning on the volunteers, their organisations and the HEI.

#### Case study 1

A member of staff of a leading care home provider for the elderly (Male, age 55, highest qualification: Diploma) undertook a study as a volunteer to identify how his organisation would better make use of volunteers. He designed and distributed questionnaires to care home managers, staff and volunteers across all care homes in the region. Results were tabulated and presented to the Board and senior management of the organisation. His report changed the way the entire organisation engaged with volunteers and he was promoted to the new post of Volunteer and Community Manager. He is now in charge of developing a more outward-facing organisation that actively engages with schools and community groups in the area. This project was selected as the winner of the £100 end-of-project award. The cash prize was used by the volunteer to host the first community engagement garden party in one of the care homes. Furthermore, the engagement with this organisation led to the development of new apprenticeship opportunities for university students in the Faculty of Health and Social Care. He reported:

*“In my current role as Community Engagement Manager within my organisation, the opportunity to share in this project was very timely. I had just begun a piece of work to scope a project to develop and expand the involvement of volunteers with the work of my organisation in its 17 residential care homes across Kent, Medway and also the London Boroughs of Bexley and Greenwich. I found the project to be of great value in helping me to undertake this task, particularly the sessions with my supervisor.... Through this course I have been introduced to the basic principles of surveying and the various methods involved, as well as the design, delivery, collection and analysis of the data.... I now feel ready to present proposals to the Board and senior management with strong evidence for the development of volunteering within our organisation, especially in the residential care homes to both add great value to the range and quality of care to our elderly service users and to greatly increase my organisation’s investment in social capital in giving something back to the local communities where our services operate.”*

#### Case study 2

A post-natal depression peer supporter at a Sure Start Children’s Centre (Female, Age 46, highest qualification: HND) undertook a study to identify which would be the best strategy to reach out to isolated women with post-natal depression (PND). She first joined the centre as a service user having experienced post-natal depression four times and then moved on to become a peer supporter. She developed interview templates for service managers, health staff, volunteers and service users on strategies reaching out to women with post-natal

depression. She tabulated the data and produced graphs. Her project identified that these women withdrew from services and were at high risk of social isolation. Her findings were linked to NICE policy guidelines and she secured funding and institutional support to design and print a leaflet reaching out to this excluded and hard-to-reach group. This leaflet is currently being disseminated by health visitors in the Canterbury district. Furthermore, this project boosted her confidence in developing academic skills and she enrolled for an access course and plans to continue her studies to a Bachelor level at Canterbury Christ Church University. She was also invited to attend the university's volunteer forum and sits on the steering committee for the Voluntary Sector Impact Analysis project where she advises on the Foundation Degree in Volunteering. She was also nominated for the Big Society Awards 2011. She reported:

*'Women with PND are withdrawing; they either marginalise themselves voluntarily or by not having the knowledge to access the appropriate care pathways. All members of multidisciplinary teams have a responsibility to closely follow and implement the NICE Guidelines that there is a specialist multidisciplinary peri-natal service in each locality, which provides direct services, consultation and advice to maternity services, other mental health services and community services (NICE, 2007) and to ensure that all lines of communication are open and utilized effectively through an adequate network of care pathways. An agreement between the writer and the writer's organisation has been reached wherein the project will continue; ensuring a comprehensive report can be submitted in the long term. A meeting with the marketing department at Canterbury City Council is set for the beginning of November. This meeting will decide on the title, content and images to be used for the leaflet. Publication of the leaflet will follow shortly after. Ensuring that in the future women within Canterbury and surrounding coastal districts, will have access to this leaflet, along with multidisciplinary team professionals within statutory and non-statutory services allowing a unique signpost for women to access a PND care pathway within their local community.'*

Other projects looked at the evaluation of the local Volunteer Centre's transport scheme, the need to maintain a chaplaincy service and an examination of attitudes of faith ministers to mental health.

The consecutive non-accredited CPD programme consisted of 10 seminars delivered at the university premises. Speakers included lecturers, service managers and service users. Five events were delivered by university staff members and five events were organised jointly with members of external parties such as NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent, Kent County Council, Canterbury City Council, Avante Partnership, Blackthorn Trust, Family Investment Homes, St Peter's Methodist Primary School, Multi-agency Cascade Services, Age Concern and Canterbury District Community Alliance. These events were attended by a total of 102 people representing 31 different organisations.

## **Impact**

Participants developed as lifelong learners and benefited through these projects in a wide range of ways. As community researchers, event participants and speakers, they have reported that these experiences provided them with an opportunity to assess and reflect on their practice, work with their organisation on a tangible project, secure additional funding, receive promotion to a higher position, secure additional funding for the organisation and pursue studies in higher education.

The organisations benefited from self motivated and well trained members of staff and volunteers that produced useful reports and brought in new skills and new contacts for project development. Their higher-level skills contributed to the sustainability and competitiveness of the organisations. New opportunities have also opened up between the university and the voluntary and community organisations in the form of further collaborations for student placements and volunteering opportunities.

Researchers and lecturers who supervised volunteers and delivered workshops gained valuable knowledge on current developments in the community sector. These projects strengthened the links between the university and the voluntary sector opening up opportunities for new consultancy contracts, joint bids and research projects. Furthermore, the process of knowledge exchange strengthened a network of already engaged potential students from non-traditional backgrounds thereby widening participation and increasing student numbers.

### **Conclusion and policy implications**

The diversity of engaged individuals from the voluntary and community sector raises questions on the nature and constraints of volunteering within 'the Big Society' in a context of economic crisis. The project participants were academics employees, pensioners, part-time students and single parents who engaged with the voluntary and community sector in a very wide range of ways. Each participant gained different kinds of direct and indirect benefits from this experience. A school teacher volunteered to create a school garden because she believed that schools needed gardens, a former sufferer of post-natal depression wanted to give something back to the organisation that supported her, a micro-brewer with a degree in medicinal horticulture wanted to use his passion for medicinal plants to help people with mental health issues in his local charity and an octogenarian lay priest wanted to cater for the spiritual needs for those in terminal states of life. These individuals are fine examples of beacons of public engagement and citizens who contribute to the amelioration of the wellbeing of vulnerable members of their communities in a very direct and profound way. Osborne posits that in Western society, organised voluntary action is often considered as an essential component of democracy because it allows sectoral and minority interests to have a voice, by keeping a check on the state, and by adding diversity in service delivery (Osborne 1996: 10). Understanding the nature of volunteers and contemporary context of volunteering is a necessary step in addressing the training needs of the voluntary sector.

Empowered and knowledge enfranchised volunteers can be reconceptualised as a 'gift givers'. Features of 'gift giving' such as superordination/subordination, identity creation, status maintenance and enhancement add up to a potent means of social control. Leat argues that to describe volunteering as gift giving is to assert that the volunteer has rights in relation to the client and that the client has duties in relation to the volunteer. One (superordinate) person helps a (subordinate) client (Leat 1977: 24-25). This proposition challenges the stereotype of the volunteer as an unpaid, under-skilled worker.

Flexible curriculum development was used as one way to ensure that training met the changing needs of the community and voluntary sector. The co-development of evaluative practice delivers benefits for civil society organisations, volunteers and HEIs alike. It cultivates a culture of critical reflection in public bodies and charities and promotes shared

learning and shared growth. Members of the voluntary and community organisations were engaged not only as 'knowledge receivers' but as 'knowledge givers' as well. Through this process all involved parties become more knowledge enfranchised. An outwards facing engaged university through the processes of community engagement and knowledge exchange can help develop a sense of responsibility and a sense of shared ownership and connected citizenship.

The aforementioned methodology and educational outputs provide a model for flexible service delivery that can be adopted by other HEI/FEIs to engage with voluntary and community organisations in their area to promote work-based learning in a manner that meets the requirements of employers and individual learners while maintaining academic quality as well as applied transferable skills. This contributes to a new kind of scholarship whereby HEI/FECs, enriched by co-developed learning and knowledge opportunities, can contribute to community development not only by training work-based learners but also supporting social work and health care organisations to improve their own impact in a collaborative way. The outcome is an engaged academic institution that contributes to the social and economic regeneration of its region and delivers added benefits to its students, staff and external collaborators.

## References

- Cabinet Office (2010) Building the Big Society. London <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society> (last accessed 5/5/11)
- Cameron D. 2010. Big Society speech, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/07/big-society-speech-53572>. (last accessed 5/5/11)
- Davies H., Nutley S. & Walter I. (2008) Why 'knowledge transfer' is misconceived for applied social research. *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*, 13 (3), 188-190
- Haugh H. & Kitson M. (2007) The Third Way and the third sector: New Labour's economic policy and the social economy. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31 (6), 973-994
- Howlett R.J. (ed.) (2010) *Innovation through Knowledge Transfer*. Springer: New York
- Hunter D.J. (2011) Is the Big Society a Big Con? *Journal of Public Health*, 33 (1), 13-14
- Kendall J. & Knapp M. (1995) *Voluntary Means, Social Ends*. PSSRU, Canterbury
- Leat D. (1977) *Towards a definition of volunteer involvement*. The Volunteer Centre, Berkhamsted
- Meagher L., Lyall C. & Nutley S. (2008) Flows of knowledge, expertise and influence: a method for assessing policy and practice impacts from social science research. *Research Evaluation*, 17 (3), 163-173
- Osborne S.P. (1996) *Managing in the voluntary sector. A handbook for managers in charitable and non-profit organisations*. International Thompson Business Press, London
- PACEC (Public and Corporate Economic Consultants) 2008 Understanding the Knowledge Exchange Infrastructure in the English Higher Education Sector. A report to HEFCE. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc/buscom/3stream/research.htm> (last accessed 5/5/11)
- Stuckler D., Basu S. & Suhrcke M., (2009) The public health effect of economic crises and alternative policy responses in Europe: an empirical analysis. *Lancet*, 374 (9686), 315-323
- Taylor B., Mathers J., Atfield T. & Perry J. (2011) What are the challenges to the Big Society in maintaining lay involvement in health improvement, and how can they be met? *Journal of Public Health*, 33 (1), 5-10
- Trani E.P. & Holsworth R.D. (2010) *The Indispensable University: Higher Education, Economic Development, and the Knowledge Economy*. American Council on Education/Rowman & Littlefield
- Weisbrod B. (1988) *The Nonprofit Economy*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge
- Yorke, M (2006) Employability in higher education: what it is – what it is not. Higher Education Academy, [www.heacademy.ac.uk/.../employability/id460\\_embedding\\_employability\\_into\\_the\\_curriculum\\_338.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/.../employability/id460_embedding_employability_into_the_curriculum_338.pdf) (last accessed 5/5/11)







**For further information, please contact:**

University Vocational Awards Council

Tel: 01204 903355

Email: [c.j.mckevitt@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:c.j.mckevitt@bolton.ac.uk)

Website: [www.uvac.ac.uk](http://www.uvac.ac.uk)