



Progressing from Labour Market Intelligence to Higher Education Level Provision that is Well Supported by Employers

A good practice review forming part of the **National HE STEM** programme

MARCHMONT OBSERVATORY
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**Progressing from Labour Market Intelligence to Higher Education Level Provision that is Well Supported by Employers:
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Glossary

| | |
|------|---|
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development |
| CRM | Customer Relationship Management system |
| FE | Further Education |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| HLSP | Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Project |
| ONA | Organisational Needs Analysis |
| SME | Small and Medium-sized Enterprise |

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This literature review is part of a wider project¹ that will research and test different approaches to employer engagement within Higher Education (HE), specifically with regard to workforce development in the engineering sector and the development of higher level skills. The project will focus on the role of market intelligence within this context and, in particular, how it is collected and used to inform decisions about provision. Using a small number of case study examples drawn from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the project will:

- describe how each institution engages with engineering employers in the provision of higher level workforce provision;
- review how market intelligence is captured within this process and the extent to which it is subsequently used to inform delivery;
- test new approaches both to gathering and using market intelligence, and promoting more effective employer engagement with the engineering sector;
- synthesise the key messages learned from this activity and disseminate the findings widely.

The six case study projects are described below:

- The University of the West of England will research the scale and nature of workforce development needs within the engineering sector and how these are currently identified. It will also assess how well employer engagement activities are connected across the university and produce Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training for staff to enable them to market and respond to employer engagement opportunities. It will also explore why some courses fail to attract learners despite considerable input from industry in their design and development.
- Recognising the difficulty in matching employer needs to the right offer within universities or even finding the right person to speak to, the University of Exeter will develop and trial an employer engagement toolkit. The toolkit will help staff understand: employer needs; how the University can help address these needs; and offer practical advice on facilitating employer engagement. In doing so, it will

¹ Progressing from Labour Market Intelligence to Higher Education Provision that is Well Supported by Employers that is researching and testing good practice in HE-employer engagement and in particular how LMI is collected and utilised in this process.

suggest how communication processes and pathways to engagement can be formalised.

- Similarly, the University of Plymouth will develop protocols for employer engagement but will extend this work to include those for responding to market intelligence and assessing risk when making decisions about provision.
- Weymouth College will trial a toolkit to help staff within Further Education (FE) identify opportunities for higher level skills provision when they are communicating with employers. The toolkit will be complemented by a customer relationship management system (CRM) capable of being shared across FE and HE institutions.
- Petroc College will interrogate its CRM database in order to describe the scale and nature of employer engagement across STEM industries in the South West and provide leads for further work. The College will also develop an organisational needs analysis (ONA) tool to help employers identify their workforce development needs.
- FE and HE collaboration is also a feature of the University of Bath case study. Working with Wiltshire College and Swindon College, the University will gather market intelligence from engineering employers across the region, map current FE and HE provision and suggest ways in which the sector can work collaboratively in order to meet employers' needs.

Very broadly, the activities can be grouped into two: those that are primarily concerned with gathering information about employer needs (this includes the University of the West of England, the University of Exeter and the University of Plymouth) and those that seek to implement new approaches for employer engagement (the University of the West of England, Petroc, Weymouth College and Bath University).

Key themes and areas of mutual interest across the case studies include:

- techniques and approaches for identifying employers' workforce development needs (University for the West of England, Petroc College, and University of Bath);
- mapping employer engagement within the institution
- processes and systems for storing and sharing market intelligence (Weymouth College, Petroc College and University of Bath);
- CPD tools for HEI staff on making engagement happen (University of the West of England, University of Exeter, University of Plymouth and Weymouth College);

- techniques for evaluating market intelligence and protocols for risk assessment and using intelligence in business planning (University of the West of England and the University of Plymouth).

1.2 The evidence base

The good practice review draws primarily on discussions with and materials produced by the Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Projects (HLSP) in the South West (SWHLSP), the North West (NWHLSPP) and the North East (NEHLSP) and their successors². These projects aimed to find ways of connecting employers and HE on a regional basis and, as such, generated a wealth of information that is relevant to this project. Briefly, for context:

- The SWHLSP funded specialist intermediaries to test methodologies in engaging employers and helping HEIs and FE colleges to respond to demand-led higher level skills development. The intermediaries were hosted by HEIs – predominantly in faculties or departments with a remit for business development – and worked closely with both employers and HEI staff to identify and fulfil employers' higher level training needs. The project also incorporated a significant capacity-building fund to finance the creation of new provision, and the development of an accreditation and credit transfer framework. The following materials were published as part of the project:
 - Higher Skills Employer Engagement Toolkit (Resource A) <http://ee-toolkit.oucpld.com/> (see section 3.2 for further details).
 - Strategies for Effective Employer Engagement Powerpoint Presentation (Resource C)
 - Employer Engagement and Learner Outcomes Powerpoint Presentation (Resource D)
- In addition, three research reports were commissioned to explore and interpret existing employment engagement activity in order to identify barriers and drivers:
 - Bolden, R. and Petrov, G. (2008) [Employer Engagement with Higher Education: A Literature Review](#). Compiled for the South West Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Project on behalf of HERDA South West (Resource E)
 - Bolden, R., Connor, H., Duquemin, A., Hirsh, W. and Petrov, G. (2009) [Employer Engagement with Higher Education: Defining, Sustaining and Supporting Higher Skills Provision](#): A Higher Level Skills Report for HERDA South West and HEFCE (Resource F)

² The SWHLSP is creating an electronic risk-modelling tool to help HEIs to evaluate the likely success of proposed employer demand-led higher level skills training provision (See Resources I and J) and the NEHLSP has secured funds for a Higher Level Skills and Brokerage project that will provide additional capacity to support brokers and other intermediaries (see Resource R).

- Bolden, R., Hirsh, W., Connor, H., Petrov, G. and Duquemin, A. (2010) [Strategies for Effective HE-Employer Engagement](#). A South West Higher Skills Pathfinder Research Report (Resource G)

A full evaluation report will be published shortly although lessons learned from the project are captured in:

- Winwood, D. And Bolden, R. (undated) Building a Cross-Boundary Team: Lessons from the South West Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Project (Resource H)

Building on the work of the HLSPPs, Universities South West is currently developing a Demand-Led Higher Skills Training Risk Modelling Tool³. The tool will help HEIs to 'evaluate the chance of success when presented with an opportunity to provide employer demand-led higher skills training provision'. The model will build on data obtained from the HLSPP, individuals' HEI CPD development activity, HEFCE co-funded projects and any other relevant employer demand-led HE training activity. Two resources are currently available describing this work⁴:

- Risk Modelling Tool project description (Resource I)
- Risk Modelling Tool data collection form (Resource J)
- The [North East](#) HLSPP also funded staff hosted within employer-facing units within HEIs (and FE colleges) but in this region the 'Gateway' staff focused solely on building capacity within their host organisation. This was supplemented by 'back office' support to Gateway and other staff and a substantial development fund to finance demand-led provision. The project's 'back office' support helped Gateway staff to develop proposals for bespoke training and provided tools and support to existing intermediaries - for example those in Business Link and Sector Skills Councils⁵. Published resources of particular interest to this project include:
 - Staff development schedules (Resources K1 and K2) and Commercial Development programme (Resource K3)
 - CPD training and development for intermediaries and business-facing staff within HEIs (Resource L)

³ Contact Deborah Winwood for further information about this project. Tel: 07886 494259
email: Deborah.winwood@universities.ac.uk

⁴ The risk modelling tool will be hosted on the JISC InfoNet site later in 2011.

⁵ Referrals to the universities from Business Link were so small that this source became less important to the project. Further funding was subsequently secured to tackle this activity was later abandoned due to the closure of RDA and Business Link.

- Methods for providing information to intermediaries about the current Higher Level Skills offer including a [web-based information tool](#)⁶ (Resource M).
- Training Needs Analysis for Gateway staff Powerpoint Presentation (Resource N)
- Flexing qualifications and responding to employer demand through the curriculum: One-day training session (Resource O)
- Sparrow, W. (Undated) Proposal for the development of STEM academic staff in business engagement within North East Higher Skills Partnership Institutions (Resource P)

A full evaluation report and summary of lessons learned has been published:

- Final evaluation report (Resource Q)

The North East HLSPP was succeeded by the Higher Level Skills and Brokerage project. This provided additional capacity to support brokers and their intermediaries by equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to identify employers' higher skills needs and access suitable provision from HEIs. The project included: CPD events for Business Link and other advisers; work with the Trades Union Congress; the production of a 'comprehensive repository of higher level skills opportunities [...] and an effective mechanism for matching business requirements to the higher level skills offer'; generic and sector-based materials; policy briefings and effective working protocols.

- Business Case for the Higher Level Skills Brokerage project (Resource R)

Case Study 1

Focus on...North East Higher Level Skills Pathfinder (NEHLSPP) Staff Development Programme

A wide-ranging training programme was provided for business-facing staff with the region's HEIs. This included:

- Initial training needs analysis.
- Formal programme covering: Business Impact, Negotiating Skills, Project Management, Market HE to Business, Skills Diagnosis and Engaging with Clients.

⁶ http://www.unis4ne.ac.uk/files/HE_products_and_services%20_November_2010.pdf

- Monthly 'Community of Practice' meetings.
- Four-part Commercial Development Programme for staff with responsibility for CPD and employer-focused training.
- Full day session on uses of Labour Market Information.

- In the [North West](#), seven sector specialists⁷ were recruited to work within the North West Universities Association. The advisers offered 'back office' support to Business Link brokers and other intermediaries - for example, providing them with information about the HE offer – but the main focus was on supporting HEIs in responding to the training needs articulated by businesses. The project also provided finance for the development of new programmes. Project materials included:

- [Protocols](#) for intermediaries working with Train to Gain brokers (Resource S)
- Database of HE provision in the region, [Discover HE](#)⁸ (Resource T)
- Guide to HE in the North West (Resource U)
- Higher Level Skills Training Materials for Business Link Brokers (Resource V)
- Foundation Degrees Training Materials for Business Link Brokers (Resource W)

A full evaluation report has been completed but is awaiting publication.

Other useful sources of information on employer engagement include:

- *Employer Engagement* (February 2008). This substantial report, commissioned by the Skills for Business network, provides a holistic review of employer engagement by defining and classifying it, identifying drivers and understanding the main processes and relationships (Resource X)
- JISC Business and Community Engagement Programme (2009): Employer Engagement – Supporting Study and Synthesis (Resource Y)

⁷ Advanced engineering and materials, bio-medical, business and professional services, construction, creative and digital, energy and environmental technologies, food and drink and the Redundancy Response Fund.

⁸ www.nwua.ac.uk/discoverhe

- Coopers Consulting Solutions Ltd. (2011) [A regional examination of current practice: Employer engagement strategies that influence the learning experience for students](#). Research commissioned by the Midlands and East Anglia Spoke of the National HE STEM Programme (Resource Z)

1.2 Structure of this report

The rest of this review is divided into two sections:

- Section 2: highlights general messages from the research about the nature of employer engagement and its drivers and inhibitors; and
- Section 3: presents good practice messages for the specific sub-project.

2. GENERAL MESSAGES FROM THE RESEARCH

2.1 What is 'employer engagement'?

Over the last few years employer engagement has come to mean different things within higher education and remains somewhat of a contested area.

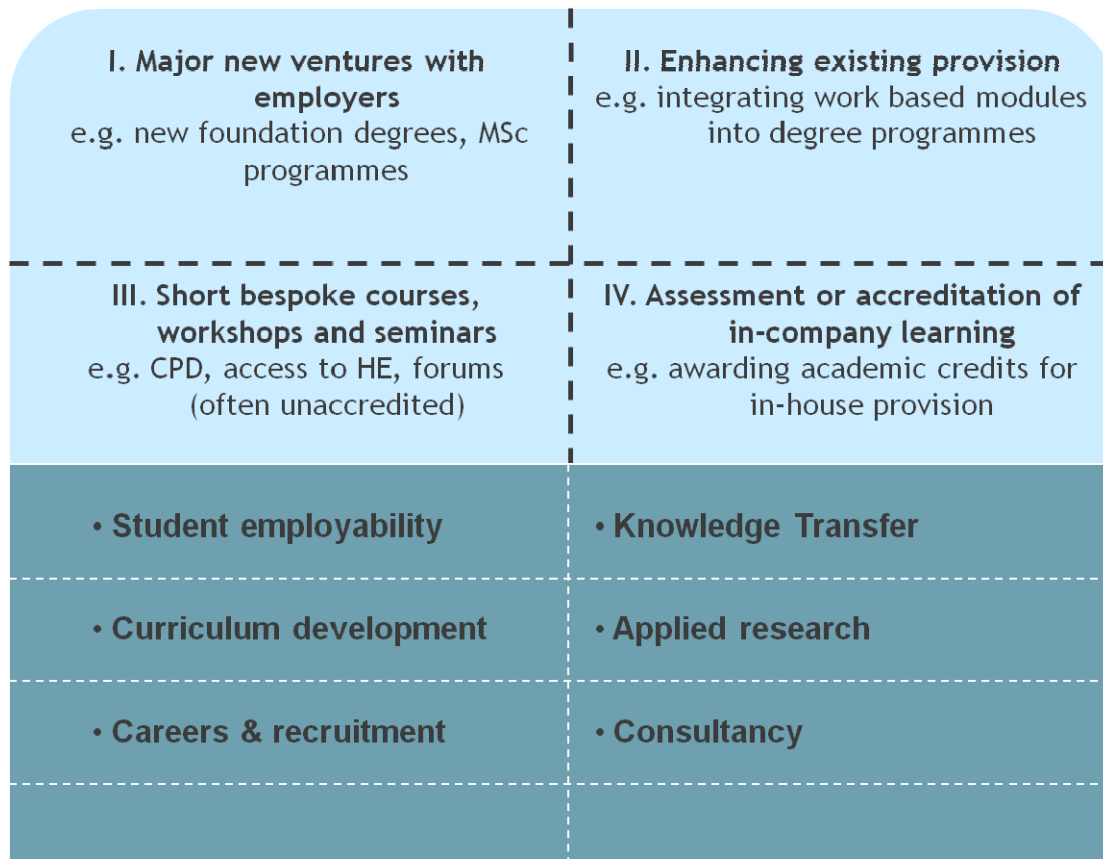
(Bolden et al, 2010)

Given its contestability, it is perhaps useful at this early stage to consider what is meant by the term 'employer engagement' in this context. The project's focus is on the provision of higher level skills development for the existing workforce, but this forms only a relatively small component of a much broader range of employer engagement activities within HE. It will be important for the sub-projects to be aware of this broader context of their work, especially those (for example, the University of Exeter) that are particularly interested in providing staff with a comprehensive picture of the universities' 'offer' to employers.

Employer engagement can take five main forms (Bolden et al, 2010):

- *Workforce development* for people in employment (as detailed in the four light blue boxes in Figure 1).
- *Accrediting existing workforce development*, that is, awarding credits for in-house provision and/or work-based assignments.
- *Employability activities* such as securing employer commitment to offering work experience/placements to undergraduates, direct inputs to teaching and/or course materials and careers work, often linked to recruitment activity.
- *Curriculum development*; and
- *Research, innovation and/or knowledge transfer activities.*

Figure 1 Types of Employer Engagement



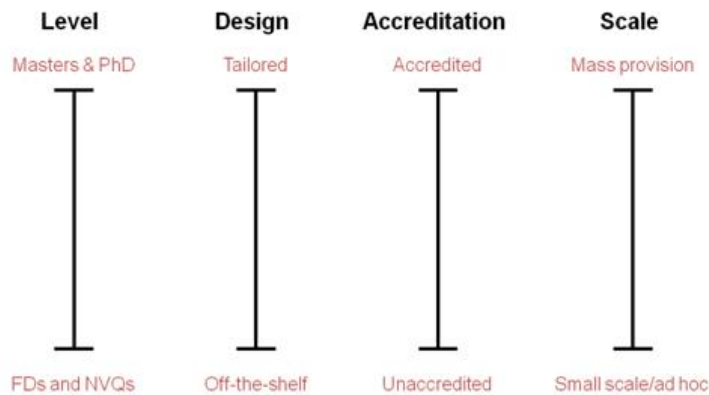
Source: Presentation on Good Practice messages written by Deborah Winwood and Richard Bolden

Figure 1 suggests that the workforce development aspect of employer engagement can take four forms:

- Major new ventures with employers.
- Enhancing existing provision.
- Short bespoke courses, workshops and seminars.
- Assessment or accreditation of in-company learning.

Further distinctions can also be made (Figure 2) in terms of the level of provision, how it is designed (that is, tailored to a specific employer or industry or ‘off-the-self’), whether it is accredited or not, and the scale of provision (to a large number of learners or small groups).

Figure 2 Characterising workforce development within HEIs



Source: Presentation on Good Practice messages written by Deborah Winwood and Richard Bolden

These categories may be useful in producing the proforma needed to capture information about the nature of employer engagement in partner HEIs.

2.2 Drivers of engagement

The first project aim is to ‘identify the key drivers (from the viewpoint of employers and employees in the engineering sector) for effective and sustainable workforce engagement with HE level provision’. The material reviewed as part of this report identifies several employer benefits to engaging with HE.

These are perhaps best summarised by Bolden et al (2009) in their review of 27 HE-employer engagement case studies:

The main drivers for employers to engage with HE in such initiatives are to improve the supply of graduates and enhance productivity and/or ways of working. Additional drivers include widening access through lifelong learning; helping to create and apply new knowledge, developing enterprise and encouraging innovation; and motivating staff and building/strengthening relationships with business.

An earlier literature review of employer engagement in HE undertaken by Bolden and Petrov (2008) - also as part of the SWHLSP - concluded that, “Businesses will invest in higher-level vocational training/qualifications that are specific to the roles of their employees or that can deliver measurable bottom-line benefits to the organisation”. Other research highlighted in the report suggests that:

- Investment in higher level skills training is primary for strategic reasons – such as improved retention, increased staff motivation and reward or in order to meet business strategy goals such as increased sales, productivity and profitability – rather than as a short-term response to market demands.
- Employers see the following benefits of working with HEIs: improving the skills base and flexibility of the workforce; enabling each member of staff to contribute to business goals; recognising, rewarding and incentivising staff; and supporting employee recruitment.
- Businesses engaged with HEIs in research and learning reaped a number of business benefits, including: access to new ideas of all kinds, international networks of academics, the latest research and cutting edge technology; the ability to achieve excellence across a wider range of disciplines and through a much larger gene pool than an individual; a chance to spot and recruit the brightest young talent; and access to specialised consultancy and continuing professional development for staff and management.

Employers engage with HEIs for numerous reasons and these are normally inter-linked. Reasons for their involvement varied widely but the main ones were:

- It was company policy to be involved in that type of activity.
- To address a specific business issue the company had identified.
- Because of participant's own interest.
- They were approached and it seemed like a good idea.

The availability of capacity-building funding within the HLSPPs was undoubtedly a major driver of this activity, although the South West project reported that to be successful the partnerships needed also enthusiasm on both sides to see the project through. Some of the non-funded provision succeeded because: an academic had a particular interest in working with the employer and topic and drove it forward; the flexibility of FE colleges to provide single accredited modular delivery from their portfolios, and emerging and strengthening institutional priorities and internal processes for responding to demand.

The SWHLSP found that employer engagement was only successful when there was: a fit in terms of values, ethos and ways of working; a real business need; the HE was best placed as the learning provider and delivered benefits that the learners would easily recognise. The project identified benefits to learners, employers and the education institutions. For learners, the benefits of employer-HE engagement included opportunities to: taste learning at HE level; access bite-sized learning using flexible delivery methods; accumulate credits for whole qualifications if required and the option for accreditation, or not. For employers, engaging the intermediaries gave them the opportunity to identify the workforce development implications of their business strategies; commission training

tailored to their business priorities; access expert knowledge and emerging technologies, and establish a new or renewed relationship with HEIs. The Pathfinder also identified significant opportunities for HEIs including the potential for increased part-time learners, the opportunity to update academics' knowledge of the latest industry practices and develop new relationships with businesses that have potential for other collaborative activity.

2.2 Barriers to engagement

The project's second aim is to 'identify the barriers that employers in the engineering sector face in engaging with HEIs and the risks associated with planning STEM provision based on employer engagement'. The literature contains numerous messages about the barriers employers face in engaging with HEIs. Cooper et al (2008) found 'the most common barrier to employers continuing to engage in various activities identified by employers is the availability of time'. Employers who had previous experience of engagement were more likely to be receptive to other forms of engagement, with bad experiences acting as a deterrent. Examples of bad experiences related to lack of impact or action as a result of their involvement, poor relationship management, not being provided with feedback, and frustration with bureaucracy and use of jargon. The review found, "no evidence to suggest that an employer's sector had any specific relationship to their general propensity to engage".

Bolden et al (2009) found other barriers to engagement:

The financial and operational implications of releasing people from work for study can be a major barrier to engagement. When combined with a concern that employees may subsequently leave the organisation there is a real need for reassurance and an effective model of engagement. Many employers tend to be most focused on short-term financial and operational issues – the benefits of higher skills investment, however, are generally less easy to quantify and with a delayed impact. A reluctance to invest may become yet more significant as the 'credit crunch' continues and employers reduce investment in anything not deemed 'core'.

The nature of HE itself can act as a barrier to participation:

It could be argued that one of the main barriers to effective workforce development by HEIs remains the impact of the traditional academic year. Resource structures, workload models and job contracts are still heavily informed by the academic year, making it difficult to engage academics in activities that fall outside this framework.

The academic performance and reward system can also hinder engagement since it encourages academics to spend time on research, rather than employer engagement.

Bolden and Petrov (2008) cite financial risk as a structural barrier to engagement:

In comparison to the traditional 18-21 year old full time undergraduate market, investment in employer-led provision is a risky endeavour. HEIs face significant up-front costs in setting up courses and risk being unable to recoup these from fees that employers are willing or able to pay.

Other significant financial risks include: competition from other work-based learning providers; unproven nature of the markets; market volatility; and delayed return on investments.

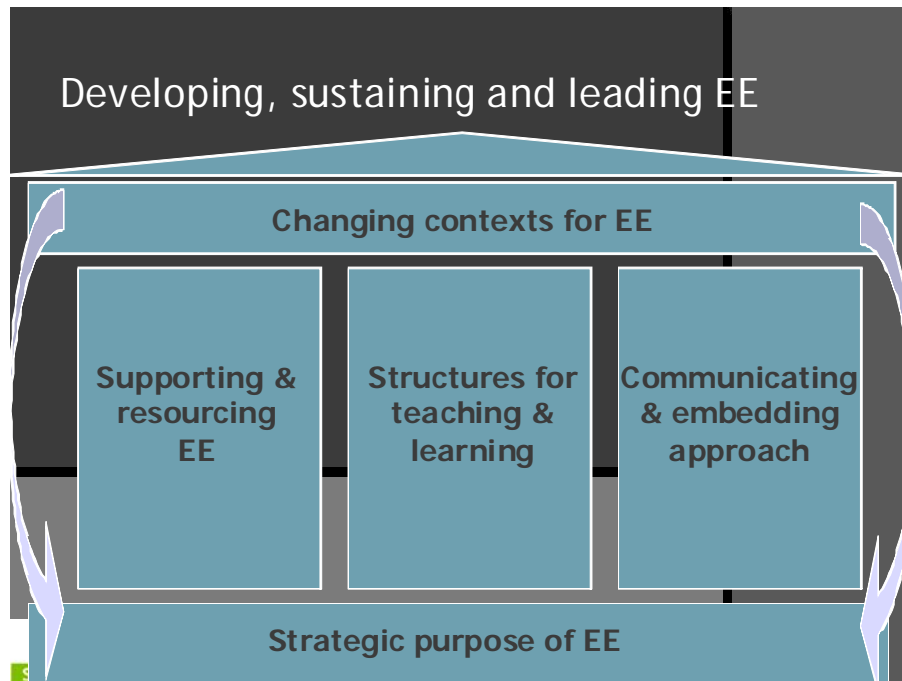
See section 7.1 of Bolden and Petrov (2008) for a more detailed discussion of the cultural and structural barriers that “*need to be address before engagement becomes a widespread and mainstream activity within the HE sector*”.

Evidence from the SWHLSPS revealed a variety of reasons why engagement stalled or failed. Some employers withdrew from the project because of changing business priorities, lack of time and constraints on resources due to the recession. In one case, the academic experience became unavailable and, occasionally, problems resourcing or managing the curriculum development led to unacceptable delays in getting the learning ‘to market’. Some of the non-funded potential provision failed to come to fruition due to: reluctance of the employer to fund the delivery; insufficient potential learner numbers to make the programme viable; the inability of the intermediary to locate an interested institution; incompatible timescales; the employer’s changing business priorities; changeover of intermediaries.

2.3 Mechanisms for engagement

The third aim of the project is to “*identify mechanisms by which institutions can more effectively sustain their relationships with engineering employers over the longer term*”. In the absence of a complete conceptual model of engagement, the analytic framework adopted by Bolden et al. (2010) in their final report for the SWHLSPS provides a useful starting point. It identifies the strategic mechanisms or ‘levers’ that might facilitate or frustrate employer engagement activity.

Figure 3: Developing, sustaining and leading employer engagement



Source: Strategies for Effective Employer Engagement Powerpoint Presentation (Resource D)

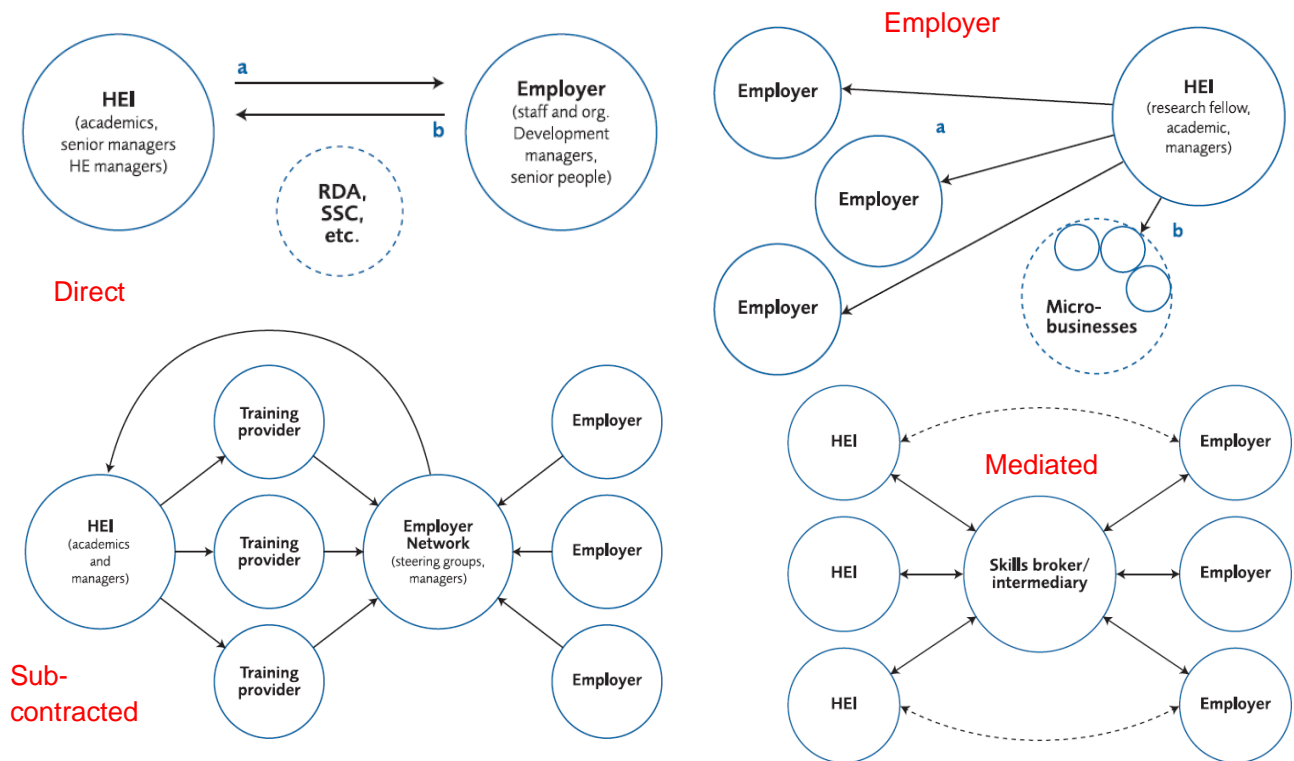
The report, *Strategies for Effective HE-Employer Engagement* (Resource H), identifies a set of structural, process and resourcing issues that need to be addressed to facilitate effective employment engagement. These are considered in detail (in the report) with distinctions made between the following:

- the support infrastructure for the expansion of employment engagement activities into the core ways in which HEIs operate (including organisational structures of responsibility and support for employer engagement and resourcing of employment engagement activities);
- factors related to how teaching and learning is designed and delivered; and
- 'soft' cultural issues such as building relationships with employers, communicating the HEI offer, and how institutions support, reward and recognise academics for working with employers.

Different models of employer engagement are observed (Figure 4). The direct model involving a single HEI and a single employer was the most common type found in the Bolden et al. (2009) review of 29 case studies. From the HE side, these relationships could be initiated by individual academics, HE managers or members of the senior management

team who are driven either by personal or professional interests or in response to specific requests or tenders. From the employer side, people initiating relationships with HEIs are typically either managers responsible for staff and organisational development or senior organisational managers. Variants of the direct model include instances where a single employer engages with two or more HEIs who either work collaboratively or independently of one another. The employer group model describes HE-employer engagement between a single HEI and two or more employers on the same initiative. This model is particularly popular for HE initiatives that seek to engage Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses due to economies of scale. A variant of this is when two or more HEIs collaborate to provide workforce development to two or more employers. The sub-contracted model involves a range of training providers (for example, FE, HE and private providers) and a network of employers.

Figure 4: Models of engagement



Finally, the mediated model describes situations in which the dialogue and relationship between partners is established or managed by the broker or intermediary even though the initial idea may have come from elsewhere. The vast majority of these intermediaries operate through mainstream services such as Train to Gain, Business Link independent brokerage service, Jobcentre Plus, Lifelong Learning Networks and the HLSPPs (in the South West, North West and North East).

The report concludes with a series of tips and advice from interviewees. These are to:

- promote the value of employer engagement from the very top of the institution;
- secure senior level support from employers;
- be responsive to employer expectations;
- educate, support and recognise staff;
- focus on your strengths and priorities;
- build and maintain relationships;
- put key contacts and relationship structures in place.

Finally, key lessons and points for consideration were that:

- employer engagement is core to the purpose of HE and always will be;
- the 'student' experience is a key driver for employer engagement within all types of HEI;
- the success of employer engagement is dependent on putting appropriate support systems in place;
- workforce development is just one aspect of employer engagement and not a priority for all HEIs;
- the involvement of academics is key to successful employer engagement;
- employer engagement requires culture change, but not the kind so often assumed;
- achieving successful employer engagement is a major leadership challenge for HE.

The next section of this report considers the main messages from the research for the sub-projects.

3. SPECIFIC MESSAGES FOR THE SUB-PROJECTS

3.1 Introduction

This final section of the review focuses on good practice messages as they relate to the core activities of the sub-projects. The lessons learned have been obtained through telephone interviews with the Pathfinder project directors (or most senior manager), and analysis of project materials and research or evaluation reports. All the pathfinder projects have either published or expect to publish formal evaluation reports in the next few weeks⁹ and the North East is in the process of finalising a 'key messages' report (due at the end of July). These resources will be forwarded to sub-project managers when they are available.

3.2 Identifying and communicating employers' workforce development needs

The key to addressing higher level skills needs is an ability to accurately assess learning and skills requirements at organisational, team and individual levels – this is not something organisations are usually very experienced at.

(Bolden and Petrov, 2008)

Several of the sub-projects intend to develop and trial new approaches in helping employers identify their workforce development needs. The literature reveals that employers must see how the higher level skills training will generate real benefits to the business, and a systematic organisational needs analysis is an obvious way to do this. The pathfinder projects found that while Business Link advisers have tools to help them to do this, it is not clear to what extent these sufficiently draw out and facilitate a discussion about higher level skills needs. The South West HLSPP designed and tested an employer engagement toolkit to support intermediaries through all stages of the employer engagement process (Resource A see <http://ee-toolkit.oucpld.com/>). The toolkit provides explanatory notes and guidance to the five-stage brokerage process and some of the proforma used to record and define higher skills training needs and solutions. The five-steps are:

1. Approaching employers – identify lead, research and qualify lead and contact employer.
2. Analysing needs – engage employer, analyse need and define training need.
3. Brokering solution – engage provider, specify solution and agree solution.
4. Monitoring delivery – commission and deliver solution.

⁹ We have a copy of the draft North West Evaluation Report but cannot reference it in this document.

5. Managing the relationship – evaluate with employer and provider and maintain client relationship.

The tool kit includes the following resources:

- Using the employer engagement toolkit (Resource AA)
- Guidance on conducting an ONA. (Resource AB)
- Organisational Higher Level Skills Scan – a quick method to engage an employer with the concept of higher skills. (Resource AC)
- Higher Level Skills Organisational Folder – used to collect and contain all relevant and necessary information relating to the full ONA. (Resource AD)
- Business Improvement Skills Needs Analysis – used during the ONA to record information that helps identify where higher level skills gaps might exist and the personnel involved. (Resource AE)
- Higher Level Skills Employer Summary – to be left with the employer. (Resource AF)
- Higher Level Skills Outline Summary – outline training specification to be used as a basis for engaging with HEI. (Resource AG)
- Record of training solution (Resource AH)

3.3 CPD tools for HEI staff

It is equally critically important to develop communication between employers and academics. Employers are usually deterred by ‘academic’ language and potential opportunities are constrained by the manner in which they are discussed.

The SWHLSP tool kit offers hints and tips for approaching employers and maintaining the relationship (Resource A). The project identified a range of essential skills, knowledge and attributes required by intermediaries (Resource C). These included:

- effective communication and credibility with business leaders, other regional brokers and with HEI/FE managers and academics;
- business development skills, including an understanding of marketing and the sales process;
- analysis of organisational training needs – necessitating a knowledge of business and management, together with an understanding of training and education delivery and outline course specification;
- knowledge of the HE and FE sector.

A full CPD programme was put in place by the project to equip individuals with the unusual combination of skills. The NEHLSPP provided substantial CPD to the Gateway staff it sponsored within HEIs' business development units. This started with formal needs analysis and led to the development of a specialised course covering Business Impact, Negotiating Skills, Project Management, Marketing HE to Business, Skills Diagnosis and Engaging with Clients. The programme was complemented by monthly community of practice meetings and a four-part commercial development programme for staff with responsibility for CPD and employer-focusing training. The project also ran a one-day course on the uses of Labour Market Information (training materials have been requested for all these courses). The bulk of the training was delivered to Gateway staff with the intention that knowledge would cascade across to their colleagues. The project director has indicated that, with hindsight, the project should have spread the training across departments with less concentration on single individuals.

A training programme for academics in STEM subject areas to support them in engaging effectively with external organisations has also been developed (Resource Q). The process involves personal reflection, training workshops, group consensus workshops, peer-to-peer learning and informal encounters.

3.4 Formalising routeways to engagement

In order to facilitate closer engagement between HE and employers, appropriate channels for communication and dialogue are required. Traditionally much HE-employer engagement has been based on personal relationships between key individuals. For this provision to be expanded, it requires a more formalised and scalable model of engagement. The extent to which this is possible without compromising the quality of relationships and provision is, as yet, unproven.

(Bolden, 2009)

A differentiation can be drawn between routeways into employers and routeways into HE. With respect to the former, the North East Pathfinder's evaluation concluded, "*our experience as a Pathfinder has been that employers are not 'banging on the doors' of institutions wanting to access provision, but rather, there is a focus on relationships with provision being developed through networks and/or subject areas that institutions are keen to explore*". All the pathfinder project managers agreed that there was no "silver bullet" or "winning way" to employer engagement and no one route-way in.

In the SWHLSPP, the employer-HE intermediaries introduced themselves to employers as representatives of all the HEIs in the region, seeking a brief meeting to understand the business and see if the universities could help. Higher skills development was not necessarily at the forefront of the discussion and employers were not 'sold to'. If there was sufficient interest, a subsequent meeting was scheduled to discuss opportunities for collaboration. If it was with a large company the second meeting was often conducted with someone from personnel. If required the intermediary would conduct an ONA and develop training specifications that could be used to source the training. Three approaches to

engaging employers were initially adopted (depending on the preferences of the individual broker):

- an employer-by-employer basis;
- identifying an existing area of interest for employer-HE collaboration; and
- to a lesser extent, capitalising on existing or emerging relationships with professional bodies in order to respond to skills gaps already identified by them.

A sub-regional approach was subsequently adopted to, “*collate training needs and to pool demand from employers such that the development of new provision became viable. This helped address the problem that many of the employer training demands identified by intermediaries were of insufficient magnitude to attract HE providers to respond*”. The Project Director later reflected that ‘one of the key factors in [the brokers’] success in converting potential delivery to actual delivery was the willingness of the regional HEIs to collaborate and their understanding of why they were being asked to respond”.

Informal feedback from the NWHLSPP suggests there is, “*no winning way*” to engagement and no single route way in. The project confirmed the findings from the South West – that courses become more financially viable if they have scale – and therefore most of the courses funded by the Pathfinder were group endeavours. Sector Skills Councils Employer Groups, or regional employer forums were particularly helpful in identifying the workforce development needs and sounding out demand. For the engineering sector, the project had some success engaging with large employers and accessing the supply chains.

3.5 Processes and systems for storing and sharing market intelligence

Bolden et al. (2009) acknowledge that “often relationships take a long time to develop and are based on informal, personal relations rather than formal institutional arrangements. The multi-faceted nature of relationships means that it is difficult for HEIs to maintain a shared and updated client database and that relations are placed at risk when key people move or change role”.

The NWHLSPP abandoned its plans to create a cross-partner Project Management and Customer Management System based on the existing Knowledge House Information System. The evaluation report explains, “*Partners were concerned about the need to share information with other providers on their employer links and in addition, as the bespoke tool was being created, partners were developing their own data capturing systems for skills and other activity*”.

The NWHLSPP had access to the Business Link customer relationship management system but used spreadsheets to record details of contacts and learning programmes developed.

3.6 Techniques for using market intelligence in business planning

The HLSPPs encountered various approaches within HE to using market intelligence in business planning. Some departments had formal procedures for evaluating proposals for new provision with the likelihood of success determined largely by the commercial viability of the enterprise. More often, however, departments were reasonably relaxed about making resources available to fulfil the brief if the training was in an area they were interested in, and there was funding to support the development of the programme (the HLSPPs provided development funding). Occasionally, a department will tolerate a 'loss leader' if the training develops a longer-term relationship with a new employer in the expectation of higher rewards further down the line.

The absence of development funding may renew interest in formal techniques for evaluating risk. Universities South West is currently developing a Demand-Led Higher Skills Training Risk Modelling Tool (see section 1.2) to help decision-makers evaluate the risks associated with developing new provision. A data collection form has been developed to collect the information that will underpin the model (a copy of this Excel spreadsheet is available upon request). The model differentiates between risks associated with the development of the material and risk associated with delivery. See Annex B for the full list of risks and factor that are contribute to each risk. Briefly, risks associated with learning development include:

- funding for development is reduced or withdrawn;
- employer changed support for the programme;
- development over-ran planned timescale;
- development overspend on budget;
- curriculum misaligned with employer demand – requiring revision of original planned scope or failure of programme;
- delivery mechanism misaligned with employer demand;
- planned accreditation not achieved.

Risks associated with successful learning delivery include:

- low learner numbers on first delivery;
- learners did not complete programme;
- delivery costs not recovered;
- delivery not repeated.

ANNEXE A: FURTHER RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

This section highlights some useful resources to supplement the main content of this review.

Bibliography

Bolden, R. and Petrov, G. (2008) [Employer Engagement with Higher Education: A Literature Review](#). Compiled for the South West Higher Level Skills Project on behalf of HERDA South West

Bolden, R., Connor, H., Duquemin, A., Hirsh, W. and Petrov, G. (2009) [Employer Engagement with Higher Education: Defining, Sustaining and Supporting Higher Skills Provision](#): A Higher Skills Report for HERDA South West and HEFCE

Bolden, R., Hirsh, W., Connor, H., Petrov, G. and Duquemin, A. (2010) [Strategies for Effective HE-Employer Engagement](#). A South West Higher Skills Pathfinder Research Report

Winwood, R. And Bolden, R. (undated) Building a Cross-Boundary Team: Lessons from the South West Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Project

Web resources

The website for the National Higher Education STEM programme also contained several resources on the theme of employer engagement. These were:

- [Strengthening, extending and embedding employer engagement](#), University of Bath
- [Professional and Industrial Degrees \(PaID\): shaping curricula through improved employer engagement](#), University of Exeter
- [Innovation in the Academic/Vocational Interchange: Developing and Achieving Good Practice in Employer Engagement](#), University of Aston
- [Enhanced employer engagement with WBL modules in Engineering Foundation Degrees](#), University of Hull
- [Developing Employer Engagement in STEM through Career Mentoring](#), Sheffield Hallam University
- [CPD for HEI staff in outreach and employer engagement](#), Wales Institute of Mathematical and Computational Sciences

- [Practices and Approaches for the Integration of Teaching and Research](#), Imperial College London
- [Greening STEM](#), University of Bradford
- [Becoming a STEM Practitioner: Sharing Practice with Students and Staff](#), University of Exeter

The Higher Education Academy [employer engagement](#) pages

Royal Society of Chemistry [employer engagement](#) pages

[Royal Academy of Engineering](#)

[Institute of Mathematics and its Applications](#)

National **HE STEM** Programme. Spokes [London and South East](#) at University of Southampton, [South West](#) at University of Bath, [Midlands and East Anglia](#) at University of Birmingham, [North East](#) at University of Bradford, [North West](#) at Manchester Metropolitan and [Wales](#) at Wales Institute Mathematical and Computational Sciences.

ANNEXE B: DATA COLLECTION TOOL FOR THE SOUTH WEST HIGHER LEVEL SKILLS RISK ASSESSMENT MODEL

| Risk that materialised | Factors that caused or contributed to the risk materialising |
|--|---|
| Funding for development reduced or withdrawn | External funding support changed due to strategic policy changes |
| | Internal funding support changed due to strategic policy changes |
| | Employer funding changed due to strategic changes |
| Employer changed support for programme | HEI has no processes for maintaining employer engagement during development |
| | Employer has no prior involvement with HE |
| | Employer sector market not buoyant |
| | Declining Company profit/turnover |
| | Employer goes out of business |
| | Changes to employer internal training strategies |
| | Changes to employer staffing structure |
| | No approval from senior management to engage with curriculum development |
| | No approval from senior management to commit learners to final programme |
| | Employer felt out of the process |
| | Employer unclear about delivery |
| | Inadequate business case |
| Other - please explain | |
| Development over ran planned timescale | Curriculum material being sourced from another provider - IPR issues |
| | Use of other provider - HEI approval issues |
| | Curriculum material being sourced from Employer |
| | More than one provider developing material (contract issues) |

| | |
|---|---|
| | More than one provider developing material (IRP issues) |
| | HEI resources (academic) not available as planned - please state reason e.g. Unable to buy out academic due to.... |
| | Partner resources not available as planned - please state reason |
| | Project management not available as planned |
| | HEI restructuring with no staffing contingency planned |
| | Physical resources not available |
| | Increase curriculum scope (not originally planned) |
| | Difficulty getting employer input |
| | Changed delivery requirements |
| | HEI strategy unclear |
| | Poor initial time planning |
| | Detailed ONA/TNA process unclear |
| | Other - please explain |
| Development overspend on budget | No original financial provision to buy out academic time |
| | Consultants had to be used to stay in timescale |
| | Employer driven increase to curriculum content |
| | Employer driven changes to delivery mechanism |
| | Poor initial financial planning |
| | Other - please explain |
| Curriculum misaligned with employer demand - requiring revision of original planned scope or failure of programme | TNA inaccurate (Employer's process) |
| | TNA inaccurate (HEI process) - please explain what, e.g. Incorrect level, content, size and why, e.g. Insufficient academic input |
| | Employer(s) did not maintain input via steering group |
| | Employer(s) did not maintain input via direct curriculum input |
| | Changed employer requirements - recession linked |
| | Initial ONA provided as business case inaccurate due to quality of information - please explain what might have contributed |

| | |
|--|---|
| | Initial ONA provided as business case inaccurate due to quantity of information - please explain |
| | Other - please explain |
| Delivery mechanism misaligned with employer demand | ONA inaccurate |
| | Resource availability |
| | More effective methods identified and agreed |
| | Employer agreement not initially provided |
| | Other - please explain |
| Planned accreditation not achieved | No process to approve bite size learning |
| | Unable to meet professional body's requirements |
| | Final curriculum/assessment did not meet HEI quality requirements - please clarify, e.g. Level, size, content |
| | Insufficient funding planned into budget |
| | Employer pressure to not accredit |
| | Other - please explain |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Low learner numbers on first delivery | No contracted learners with employers at outset of development |
| | Marketing to other employers not effective within timescale |
| | Late delivery leading to employer loss |
| | Employer unable to fund (or individual for sole trader/self employed) |
| | Employer will not release learners to attend - please explain why |
| | Learners reluctant to register (where employer support is present) |
| | HEI registration process too slow |
| | Venue not attractive |
| | Other - please explain |
| Learners did not complete programme | No clear APEL policy and process |
| | Learners did not have sufficient time to complete assessment (employer cause) |

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| | Assessment not completed due to insufficient opportunity (WBL) |
| | Prior learning levels |
| | Misalignment between delivery and assessment (staff) |
| | Cost of assessment |
| | No perceived value in assessment |
| | Other - please explain |
| Delivery costs not recovered | |
| | Pricing model incorrect |
| | Contract issue with employer |
| | Run as a loss leader |
| | Insufficient places sold |
| Other - please explain | |
| Delivery not repeated | One employer specific -so further investment necessary to revise to more generic |
| | Marketing not properly planned or executed |
| | Changed industry requirements |
| | Loss of employer contact due to staff changes in employer |
| | Loss of employer contact due to staff changes in HEI |
| | No clear indication of who owns programme/ where it sits within HEI faculties |
| | Predicted employer repeat delivery failed - please explain why |
| | HEI no interest |
| Other - please explain | |

This activity forms part of the National HE STEM Programme, details of which can be found at www.hestem.ac.uk