



The Lifelong Learning Network for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Surrey

Enhancing Employer Engagement: a project guideline

Progress South Central's aim is to support progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education.

We have funding available to support employer engagement activities in curriculum development and have recently supported a trial project with Abingdon & Witney College. Detailed guidance regarding this project can be found below.

We invite other colleges to use or adapt this model. Upon submission of a project proposal form, Progress South Central may be able to offer funding to support appropriate projects.

For further information and a project proposal form please see our website:

<http://www.progresssouthcentral.org.uk/what-we-do/how-to-apply-for-funding.html>

Enhancing Employer Engagement: a project guideline

Background

In 2009 Abingdon & Witney College requested Progress South Central project funding to address a recommendation made by the IQER review team; *that the College should look to enhance employer feedback for currently running Foundation degree programmes.*

The aims of the project were as follows:

- To enhance the quality of Foundation degree curriculum and to ensure that the content of these existing programmes is relevant to the employability demands of course graduates.
- To ensure that programme content meets employer needs.
- To check that work placements and work-based assessments are operating well, are appropriate to the mode of study and follow sector skills councils' national occupational standards.
- Increase employer awareness of and involvement in HE programmes.
- Encourage enhanced support from employers for employees attending HE programmes.

Methodology

1/ A course representative from each currently running Foundation degree programme surveyed a minimum of 10 employers using the questions below as a guide.

2/ 18 hours was set aside for the course representative to undertake surveys and 2 hours to write up their findings.

3/ Findings were also verbally communicated during an HE staff development day.

4/ A report was produced for Project South Central.

Questions for employers currently engaged in franchised programmes:

Course content

- Is the course content on the HE programme vocationally relevant?
- Has there been a particular module that you feel your organisation has benefited from?
- Do you have suggestions for additional useful course content?
- Do you have ideas for future HE programmes?
- Do you feel the assessments are appropriate?

Operational comments

- How are the work placements operating?
- Are you fully informed on what is required from students/employees?
- Are you fully informed as an employer as to what the college expects for your role, and responsibilities?
- Do you have a Workplace Handbook, if yes is it helpful, if no what would you like to see in it?

- Is the Course Team in regular contact with you, if not would you want to be contacted regularly?
- Do your employees feedback to you about their experiences on the course, if so what are their general comments?
- Are you aware of the students' learning opportunities?
- Have work-based projects students have undertaken been used to improve your organisation?

Questions for new employers:

Course content

- Are you aware of what a Foundation degree is?
- I would value comments on the relevance of the course content to your industry.

Operational comments

- Do you have any employees currently studying for a Foundation degree?
- What are your views regarding the course structure?
- What is your attitude as an employer towards this course?
- Would your organisation be prepared to meet part or all of the fees costs on behalf of eligible employees?
- Foundation degree learners usually require mentoring and support from more experienced colleagues. Would this be appropriate or a problem in your organisation?
- In an ideal world what arrangements would suit you for releasing your employees to attend a FD (e.g. half day, full day or even blocks of learning during the summer)?
- How many employees could you envisage sending per year?

Suggested actions and project time-line:

The Course Representative responsible for carrying out the surveys should:

Action	Deadline
Contact the HE Coordinator for an individual brief on the research project	Mid-January
Identify ten employers to contact and confirm with HE Coordinator (HE Coordinator to check that the same organisation is not being surveyed several times)	Early February
Carry out research	Mid-March
Write brief report from research and produce a Presentation with PowerPoint and handouts	End March
Share findings with colleagues at the HE Staff Development Day. Give HE Coordinator report and presentation on a CD-rom.	April

The HE Co-ordinator should:

Action	Deadline
Sort out hourly paid contracts (including travel expenses)	February
Produce a final summary report of lessons learnt in each HE programme for Progress South Central (PSC will provide template).	May 2010

Report contents:

Progress South Central would expect any partner undertaking this project to produce a final report, providing information under the following headings:

- industry names of all employers interviewed (including information the size of the business and whether they are employers currently engaged in the programme or new employers)
- summary of employer feedback
- key findings (including what is working well and what could be improved/added).
- plans for future course content amendments
- plans for how the HE programme will implement employer surveys in the future

Disseminating Findings:

Abingdon & Witney College produced a report and also verbally presented findings at an HE staff development day. All members of the course team were able to discuss the findings and also share contacts across subject areas.

Outcomes

Abingdon & Witney College have reported back that the project has been invaluable. The following outcomes are being taken forward in individual subject areas following the employer research project:

- Identification of 'stand-alone' modules from the Foundation degrees employers would like to be on offer to their staff.
- Revised programme content.
- Links with new employers who have offered to provide guest lectures/ field trip venues.
- Revised employer handbooks.
- Better links with the module tutor.
- Foundation degree 'release day' moved to better suit employers.
- Suggestions for other possible Foundation degrees to develop.
- Redesign of the work placement project.
- Code of conduct for students to discuss their programme handbook with their employer.
- Revised college marketing material.