

# LLN Research: Securing the Legacy

Presented by:

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## Vocational Learner Retention: the regional picture

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Chris Brownless (Consultant)



'The thing that I find very upsetting is the thought that someone is actually brave enough to come into the university, when we work in it you see we forget, we do forget, for me, I hate it when people come in and they leave. Not on the basis, obviously financially that's not good for the university; just actually put that to one side. It's that that can mean that that person lives with that for the rest of their lives, that feeling of failure, the humiliation they have when they go back to their family and say that I haven't succeeded. So this is why, I think, when we fling the door open encouraging people to come in, we've got to make sure we've got our acts right to support those people, because they're more vulnerable and actually then turning away, they'll never come back again.'

(HE strategic stakeholder)



## Introduction

- The project has built on work done in the LLN exploring the baseline data around retention.
- The baseline data provided a statistical evidence base for differential retention rates amongst vocational and work-based learners, at level four and above.
- We have this explored some of the reasons for these differences using a combination of questionnaire and focus group/interview techniques with current and withdrawn learners and Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) staff.




## Methods and Results

- 55 participants were involved in focus groups and interviews.
- We have also received seventeen questionnaires from withdrawn learners.
- The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics.
- Qualitative data were thematically analysed in order to identify the common themes, which were also reflected in the questionnaire data:
  - Differences and Similarities between Groups
  - Motivation to Enrol
  - IAG Accessed Before the Course
  - IAG Accessed During the Course
  - Study Skills
  - Withdrawal
  - Solutions



## Recommendations



- That the LLN works closely with HEIs and colleges to raise awareness amongst admissions tutors, admissions teams and admissions policy makers of the successful performance of vocational entrants within the area's higher education institutions
- That the LLN links with existing student service and teaching and learning support networks and offers funding to improve the visibility of sources of study skills support and IAG for learners so that vocational and work-based learners who may need additional support are better able to access this support.



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# LLN Research


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## Emerging themes

- ADVICE AND GUIDANCE
- APL
- PROGRESSION
- TRANSITION
- WORKPLACE LEARNING
- CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
- OTHERS






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## Advice and Guidance

IAG values  
Engaging with hard to reach learners  
Engaging with the private voluntary sector



This research is widespread and varies in scale.

Some areas have monitored small case loads of students entering into HE, to evaluate the advice and guidance received through the process of finding out about, applying, and then entering a university.

Other research projects produced IAG materials which could be used to promote HE. The materials usually included case studies and were aimed at colleges where progression was low or HE courses that did not recruit well.

Sussex Learning Network developed Learning Opportunities in the South-East from their research. At the annual National Career Awards presentations in Blackpool on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2009, the learning and work information service at Learning Opportunities in the South-East was the outright winner in the category "Working with Adults". In addition, Maureen Haywood the project manager received a "Highly Commended Award" in the category "Careers Practitioner of the Year 2009".

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight LLN looked at engaging with hard to reach experienced workers in construction; this resulted in IAG sessions and a follow up destination survey.

Other LLNs looked at the quality of IAG, how it was received, and the effect on learners' decision making.

## APL

Admissions policies and procedures

Assessment – proposed alternatives to portfolio assessment

Competency lexicon

APL and credit have been thoroughly researched through surveys of current practice.

The main conclusions are that APL is rarely practiced because it is a time consuming process.

Competency lexicons have been established where competencies in subject areas have been mapped against course outcomes.

Mapping exercises from NVQ 4 to Foundation Degrees have successfully established APL Progression Agreements, which negate any further involvement of admissions tutors to work through portfolios that are submitted by potential students. The agreements are subject to annual or periodic reviews.

## Progression

### Barriers

Understanding HE potential

Study skills

Employer engagement

Curriculum development to fill skills gaps

Research looked at what stops Level 3 learners from going onto HE, as well as an examination of their expectations.

Much of this research led to course development where there was limited progression available.

Bridging courses, study booklets, and VLEs have all been produced to support NVQ 3 and 4 students, apprentices, and mature entrants to HE.

HE potential was discussed at length in many papers, resulting in web tools for guidance or leaflets for potential students.

Some research into current routes and “gap analysis” has taken place within specific sectors (e.g. animal related sector)

## Transition

Understanding transition issues

Bridging courses

Blended learning

Early leavers

Current transition practices were researched, giving a wide variety of recommendations.

Transition research also looked at mature learners and difficulties that they may have encountered on entering HE.

This subject area produced bridging modules and summer schools.

Recommendations to improve retention in many subject areas were made, much of which included cultural changes in HE.

## Work Place Learning

Employability skills

Employer perspectives

Employer engagement

Researched employer's views on staff having higher level training, and considered ways in which employees could be engaged in /accredited with bite sized learning.

Some of this is "supply and demand" research.

Outcomes will provide valuable models for developing employer engagement which may be beneficial in developing FDs.

## Curriculum Development

Bridging courses

Foundation Degree development

CPD for business

The lack of GCSE numeracy was a great concern to childcare practitioners.

Some LLNs researched and then produced bridging courses and study packs for teachers, to build confidence in their numeracy skills.

Post graduate level specialist courses were developed for employees in the media and the construction industries.

## Others

HE in FE

The impact of the LLNs

Social return on the HEFCE investment



## Introduction

### Apprenticeships and the work of the Lifelong Learning Networks

- A report, commissioned by fdf, to capture the extent, nature, effectiveness and transferability of LLN work with apprentices





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## Points from the report 1

- It was not perceived that apprentices lack aspiration or motivation to progress
- Worklife timing was identified as an important issue as was experience as a 'qualified' practitioner
- Many LLN's identify the lack of relevant and specific IAG available to apprentices concerning progression to HE



Comments are based on information from LLNs.



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## Points from the report 2

- Employers were not identified as a major barrier to progression
- But many LLN's had not focussed on the employer view and few had involved employers in the development of progression routes
- As ever, where employer involvement was recorded, it was the larger employers who contributed



No employers were interviewed for the report.



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## Points from the report 3

- Further and Higher Education curriculum matching and the development of bridging courses was a major focus
- Massive variation in the length, content and currency of bridging programmes
- Creditworthiness of bridging programmes
- Effective curriculum matching will involve national action and will raise fitness for purpose issues



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## Points from the report 4

- Progression agreements (Apprenticeship to HE) seen as an important factor
- Local situations often more important than national policy





## Points from the report 5

- Institutional frameworks may not promote progression (separation of HE and FE staff in FEC's)
- The role of HE admissions staff and normalising the apprenticeship award in entry criteria
- A broader coalition needs to be developed



## Conclusion 1

### What can be done to improve the progression of apprentices to HE?

- Making the case – talk to apprentices and employers
- Articulating the benefits to:
  1. Government
  2. Apprentices
  3. Employers



The first conclusion of the report is that the Apprenticeship framework should not be altered.

## Conclusion 2

- Develop an apprenticeship strategy (LLN Workstrand) with clearly identifiable goals:
  1. Curriculum matching
  2. Tariff and Funding
  3. Progression agreements and guaranteed places in HEI's
  4. National mapping of demand and provision
  5. Broader Partnerships (National Apprenticeship Service)



## Question, Answer, and Comments Session

HEIs do not tackle the issue of a lack of maths skills, this is because of the amount of money and time required to do so. Maths teachers, and also science teachers are not doing this, but Apprentices need maths skills.

HEA have developed an online maths course as they found that students could not do maths and would not admit it.

Online tools are difficult to use and students require a range of learning options. Most students would like contact, so mentoring is needed.

LLNs need to be informed by fdf of their desired outcomes of joint projects and linkage.

Apprentices should be able to choose to do a Foundation Degree or an Honours Degree; currently Honours Degrees are not easy to access so they are encouraged down the Foundation Degree pathway.



Part-time routes are not an option.