

Introduction

The lead partners, Southampton Solent University and Brockenhurst College have been working with local employers in the retail sector to assess and respond to their skill and training needs. Progression to level 2/3 is currently delivered through the Retail Skills Shop, hosted by Southampton Solent and delivered by Brockenhurst College.

Our proposal is to develop an integrated set of progression ladders that provide clear pathways via credit accumulation and transfer for Retail from level 1 through to level 7. Provision will be highly flexible, allowing for professional development to progress in line with employer and learner need, by providing 20 CAT professional development units that can be accumulated for progression to higher levels. We will be working with the Retail Consortium led By Manchester Metropolitan, to utilise the National Retail Foundation Degree with a level 6 top-up and ultimately, level 7, from Southampton Solent, if there is sufficient demand.

Achievements

The initial groundwork in terms of obtaining and beginning to work with the National Retail Foundation Degree materials have been completed and Solent staff now have live access to the materials via the commercial provider MyKnowledgeMap (MKM) and are in process of proceeding through the QA processes that need to be followed before the Degrees and Units can go to validation.

The Brockenhurst team and Solent have been working together on familiarising themselves with the material, whilst Solent have been progressing the validation process as it is believed there was little value added in Brockenhurst being full participants in this process.

This is the first time that the University will have validated materials that are not of its own design and development and time is being spent with QA and the Faculty QA teams to ensure they provide support and guidance at an early stage.

IT integration with MKM materials is also underway.

Meetings have been held with the Retail Skills shop in Southampton and four significant national employers, but our most likely national candidate has also been undergoing restructuring and we have been advised to hold back on contact until November. In the interim, fruitful meetings have taken place with Director of Marketing and the National Training Manager. Relationships with this employer continue through significant other work packages.

The Level 7 provision has been under discussion with five major employers who have acted as sounding boards for the type of content that should be offered. This is being built into the course development.

Working across the FE/HE interface.

This relationship appears to be working well. Brockenhurst and Solent are represented at all project team meetings and a full face to face update has been provided to the VP Brockenhurst and the DVC Solent. When the first students come on stream it has been decided that the Solent and Brockenhurst tutors will deliver together. As the Brockenhurst tutor has not delivered blended provision, this will be a development opportunity for her.

Working with Other Agencies.

In early July we had what appeared a very productive meeting with Skillsmart in London with their Head of Qualifications and Standards, our Regional Consultant and a Retail Academy representative, with particular interest in Level 7 development. The development of credit accumulation to work through to a degree level qualification was thought to be innovative and of potentially great interest. This promised to open a number of doors with employers and potentially a seat at the table of a working group for Level 7 provision.

However after a “quiet” summer, where we thought we may have misjudged what seemed a warm reception, we heard from SkillSmart that they were to be disbanded and join forces with People 1st – the sector skills council for tourism and hospitality.

As positions and structure are at present unknown, we have been unable to progress further, although the feedback from those remaining within the organisation is that they would like to re-engage with us as soon as there is a more settled position.

In the meantime we are seeking out staff in both institutions, who may have strong connections with People1st and are seeking to keep our networking with SkillSmart staff .

What else have we learnt from working with other agencies – firstly that other “parties” appeared to work with a rather more “relaxed” timetable than we wanted. “Interesting” delays were put in the way of progress, which needed, let’s say, tenacity to overcome, but it has modelled for staff ways of working that can overcome this.

The materials from the national degree appear to need a little maintenance, which is promised, but we have no definite time scales associated with them. However as part of the Consortium we feel that we will be able to contribute to moving this forward.

Key Learning Outcomes

Recruitment of learners from employers was initially phased outwith the teaching year and validation process but with our target employer and sector skills council undergoing some turbulence, we are examining the need to bring in specific short term resource that can focus on working with employers to generate learners. This resource had already been identified as part of the risk mitigation for the project.

The key learning is to work through mitigation early on but also be alive to opportunities. The move to People 1st may be a positive development for us- we both have tourism and hospitality in our portfolios.

Emerging Themes

Employers are keen for skills development but not to pay, although time for study is seemingly encouraged. If we are to engage with employees and employers we need to explain and provide material regarding part time funding and loans.

One of our additional developments will therefore be a booklet on funding that explains future funding in HE and FE, and how and what they will need to repay.

Does anyone in the CoP have one? We have comprehensive materials for undergrads but not for this group.