

Community of Practice February Update

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

Solent and Brockenhurst staff have undertaken the further training and familiarisation for the on-line Fd from the Consortium and we are now able to show employers what this would look like. We are awaiting a date for meeting of the Universities Retail Fd Consortium, which is important as one of the objectives of this group is to keep the Fd. material current. Validation documentation at Solent has been completed.

We have continued to enter into dialogue with key sector players regarding the future landscape, funding situation and employer thinking. At present this is moving quickly both nationally and regionally.

Our single booklet to explain future funding in HE and FE, for learners in full time work is nearing completion and will be put out on test drive to our students at Brockenhurst and our NHS cohort. We will make this booklet available as an output from the Project

Working across the FE/HE interface.

We are holding a regional half day (March 26th) for other Colleges, who offer Retail/Customer Service provision to Level 3, both with or without Retail Skill Shop involvement. This is about awareness raising and enabling them to see the offer and possibly recommend potential students. The Regional Advisors for the new sector skills council People 1st have been invited.

Working with Other Agencies.

As indicated we started with employers again post the New Year sales; some promising developments and we have a target list of nationals to pursue.

A networking evening for retail and associated businesses is planned involving the City Council and other luminaries.

Key Learning Outcomes

As stated in the last CoP document, the key learning has been to work through mitigation early on and keep alive to opportunities. The short term resource we have utilised comes with easy access to key industry players, so we are gaining this intelligence rapidly. Our new Enterprise Centre Manager also arrived with strong local contacts and we have quickly “engaged” him in the project.

Emerging Themes

The local network is on target to be initiated but the vital piece of the jigsaw for us is how to ensure that we are at the table with the many and multifaceted discussions that are on-going in the sector. Not only is this in the publicly funded FE/HE space but private providers are also actively taking an interest.

Undoubtedly there is a perception that “professionalization” of retail would be a “good thing”, but who takes this forward, who will fund its development and how does our offer fit, a fascinating scenario.

Making contacts with other colleges in our region to ensure their students and staff understand the progression opportunities however remains an immediate objective.