

## Community of Practice April 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 to date

All the academic pieces are now in place and we have been able to demonstrate the branded on line material for the Fd to interested parties.

Manchester Met are setting up a date for meeting of the Universities Retail Fd Consortium, as there are new national developments coming into the frame.

We along with two other HEs and an FE involved in Higher Level Apprenticeships were invited to meet with the National Skills Academy with respect to development of a nationally recognised framework for higher level retail skills. This will now be constituted as a Working Group and the next meeting will be in June. The NSA is linked to employers and the British Retail Consortium and the breaking of qualifications into professional development units and reconfiguring these to provide an accent on various aspects of the offer is very attractive to them. APEL and accreditation of employer training is another aspects that is particularly attractive.

We delivered our first marketing unit to our employer who is a strategic target for us and high level contact at Executive level is being established.

Our single booklet to explain future funding in HE and FE, for learners in full time work is completed and will be put out on test drive after Easter to a variety of learners in our partner colleges and our NHS cohort. We will make this booklet available as an output from the Project.

### Problems/Challenges of developing CATS

An established process of APEL and the Quality processes associated with credit accumulation and transfer are in place within the University. Developing the Professional Developments units to Certificate, Diploma or Degree level has not presented us with any operational or quality problems. Bridging units from Level 3 to 4 and 4 to 5 were developed in 2009/10 and have been road tested on apprentices making the transition to higher level education and can be deployed to support appropriate learners as they come forward.

## **Working across the FE/HE interface.**

We arranged to hold a regional half day (March 26<sup>th</sup>) for other Colleges, who offer Retail/Customer Service provision to Level 3, both with or without Retail Skill Shop involvement. This was to be about awareness raising and enabling them to see the offer and possibly recommend potential students. We had a low response rate from outside the City with the Regional Advisors for the new sector skills council People 1<sup>st</sup> cancelling the day before. The representative from Highbury College (who runs the Retail Skills Shop) handed in her notice prior to attending and the College did not have a replacement to field. We therefore cancelled this meeting and will take the show to them and will arrange individual college meetings after the Easter break.

## **Working with Other Agencies.**

As indicated the progress with the National Skills Academy agenda is an exciting development as it will allow us wider access for our provision.

However it is a slow build with employers especially on a national scale and we now have to be cognisant of the being part of a National effort with the Skills Academy.

A networking evening for retail and associated businesses is still in 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 demise of the Sector Skills Council and the pause whilst the new arrangements came into place feels it may have impacted the Colleges running the Skills Shops. We probably should have engaged with them earlier in the process, which may have involved them a little more in being enthusiastic about the opportunities.

The short term external resource the bid has enabled us to utilise has been invaluable as he comes with an outstanding list of contacts, which would have taken us years not months to develop.

## **Emerging Themes**

Last time we commented that

*“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. “*

We now have the answer to these questions and now are part of a group with direct access to the National Skills Academy and the Sector Skills Council;