

## **Community of Practice December 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 now have live access to the Fd materials via the commercial provider MyKnowledgeMap (MKM) and will be undertaking further training and familiarisation in the New Year. Development of validation and collaborative provision documentation continues. This is the first time that the University will have validated materials that are not of its own design and development and we continue to spend time with the Faculty QA teams to ensure they understand this different type of provision.

Because of the Sector Skills Council closing we have entered into dialogue with key sector players to better understand the future landscape, funding situation and employer thinking. They remain highly supportive of the offer, which they think is right for the industry but can offer no further support at this time.

Neither our Partnership Manager nor the CoP threw up any information on a single booklet to explain future funding in HE and FE, and how and what mature students will need to repay. Therefore we have started work on this internally and will make this available as an output from the Project

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

The documents for Collaborative Provision needed by Solent for the validation process are probably quite daunting for FE if experiencing them for the first time and our FE contact felt these needed to be referred on within the College for completion. However in a similar vein they are equally challenging for an HE Lecturer taking them on for the first time. In this case both parties are new to the experience but are working through the process.

### **Working with Other Agencies.**

A developing situation and one in which we need to expend effort to stay in touch. At present we have targeted 8 key players in the industry, although our main local supporter and key contact with local employers has left the sector.

We start with employers again post the New Year sales; retail has a rhythm into which we must fit.

## **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.

On the academic front, HE validation – Collaborative provision and the Due Diligence can initially look rather heavyweight if the FE partner has not worked through this before. Setting aside time early on to look at “one we did earlier” and engage senior staff might be helpful.

By the same token HE teams engaging in Collaborative provision for the first time may also need to go through a learning process and time and resource should also ideally be set aside to do this.

## **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 find more opportunities to explain face to face how this offer can benefit employers and how we can tune this to their requirements, especially as this cannot be fulfilled by Skillsmart.

An existing and thriving HRM network run by the University will be targeted as a vehicle for promoting the pathway and possible development of a parallel local network of retailers on the back of the Retail Skill Shop may also be tried..