

## **Annex C/Link (QAA Academic Benchmark info for Foundation degrees)**

### **Employer involvement**

Foundation degrees integrate academic and Work-based Learning through close collaboration between employers and programme providers. It is a defining characteristic of Foundation degrees that programmes are designed to satisfy the needs of both employers and learners. Employer involvement in design of programmes ensures that the content of the award meets the needs of the industry and that there is an appropriate balance between work-related specialist skills and academic learning. Experience from a range of sectors also indicates that where employers have been involved from the outset they are most likely to fund or support employees through an Foundation degree. It is therefore important that employers are involved from the start of the design phase of an Foundation degree. Highlighting the clear business benefits of Foundation degrees will help to engage employers and ensure their continued commitment. Employers will wish to be provided with appropriate information about the Foundation degree and institutions may wish to consider the production of an employer handbook for this purpose.

Following the development phase of an Foundation degree, the close collaboration between providers and employers continues in the delivery and review of the programme. One of the design features of Foundation degrees is that where possible, employers play an active part in delivery. This may take many forms, including participating in the delivery of work-based modules, the provision of student placements, provision of guest speakers, allocation of work-based mentors/supervisors and the assessment of the students within the workplace environment.

### **Reference: Employer Engagement**

A briefing for learning providers published by Foundation degree Forward

<http://www.Fdf.ac.uk/files/INBRIEFEmployerEngagement.pdf>

### **Accessibility**

Foundation degrees are intended to make a valuable contribution to life-long learning by providing access to higher education for learners from different starting points and with different entry qualifications, for example, apprenticeships, Access programmes, and NVQs.

It is important that recognition is given to the knowledge, skills and understanding that an applicant for an Foundation degree has already developed. Such knowledge, skills and understanding can include certificated, non-certificated and experiential learning. Foundation degrees should operate with flexible admissions procedures which cater for all these types of learning. Admissions policies and regulations should not be limited to traditional entry qualifications, but designed to be applicable and attractive to students from different backgrounds, with diverse experiences and qualifications, including vocational and occupational qualifications.

Foundation degree providers should have transparent, rigorous, fair and flexible systems in place to allow for the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). This will apply both to the entry requirements of the programme and for the partial or total exemption of certain parts of the programme.

### **Accreditation of prior (experiential) learning (AP[E]L)**

Learners entering Foundation degrees with skills and knowledge acquired before embarking on the programme may seek to have these acknowledged through the award of credit. Their learning may have been gained through formal programmes of study (APL), or through experience in a range of contexts (APEL). Claims for AP(E)L will have to be assessed by the providing institution in order to judge whether it merits credit and, if awarded, the credit may be used to exempt the learner from part of the programme, or as a substitute for modules or parts of modules.

### **Reference: QAA guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning**

The guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning set out a series of principles that HEIs can consider in their admissions process of students who seek admission onto a programme from a range of backgrounds and experiences.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/default.asp>

### **Reference: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)**

A briefing for learning providers published by Foundation degree Forward

<http://www.Fdf.ac.uk/page12.html>

### **Articulation and progression**

All Foundation degrees are validated in the context of an identified progression route for learners who wish to continue their academic study. This is usually a BA(Hons) or BSc(Hons), and the awarding institution should make clear where automatic progression routes lie. However, remaining in HE is only one form of progression. Learners may use their success on a Foundation degree to seek professional or vocational qualifications, to move to a new job, to seek promotion within their place of work, or to stay in their current post in the knowledge that they are better equipped to do their job well. Progression should therefore be seen as a matter of personal choice, and not pinned to a notion of moving through the hierarchy of higher education qualifications.

### **Progression onto and within an Foundation degree**

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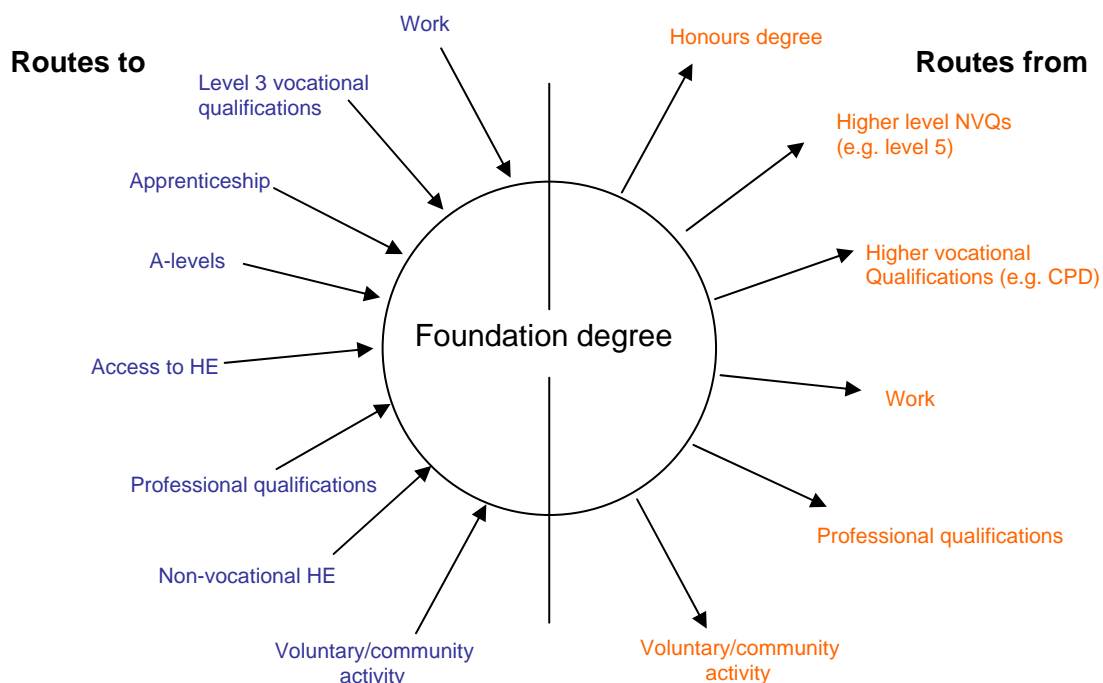
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### Progression from an Foundation degree

An Foundation degree is a stand-alone qualification. However, Foundation degree graduates may wish to progress to higher qualifications. The FDQB states 'it is important that a clearly articulated progression route exists between the Foundation degree and other qualifications, both those validated by higher education institutions as well as by professional and other educational bodies'. Such routes should be established when Foundation degrees are validated. The arrangements for progression are determined by the awarding bodies through their admissions policies and procedures, and should be implemented consistently and fairly. The identification of explicit progression arrangements should be available to learners on Foundation degree programmes through course handbooks and prospectuses.

A learner may be able to gain additional professional accreditation and/or qualifications in the course of studying for an Foundation degree. In such cases, institutions will include the requirements of professional and vocational bodies as part of the validation process.



### Credit Accumulation and Transfer

On successful completion of an Foundation degree, students will normally be awarded 240 credits. These must be a combination of level C (Certificate) and level I (Intermediate) modules, with a minimum of 120 at Intermediate level. Credit awarded for WORK-BASED LEARNING components of a programme should be subsumed in the 240 credit total and not additional to it.

### **Reference: QAA guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning**

The guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning set out a series of principles that HEIs can consider in their admissions process of students who seek admission onto a programme from a range of backgrounds and experiences.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/default.asp>

### **Reference: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)**

A briefing for learning providers published by Foundation Degree Forward

<http://www.Foundationdegree.ac.uk/page12.html>

### **Reference: Learner Progression**

A briefing for learning providers published by Foundation Degree Forward

<http://www.Fdf.ac.uk/page12.html>

## **Flexibility**

Foundation degrees are designed to reach people in a range of learning and work settings. They should therefore be delivered and assessed in such a way that learners can access appropriate learning and support according to their needs. This implies that delivery modes should make use of premises close to the learners themselves, and offer provision through evening, day, weekend and block attendance and e-learning in combinations which allow maximum access.

Foundation degrees have the potential to drive innovation in delivery methods. Successful programmes are delivered through a variety of means appropriate to the learning outcomes of the programme and take account of the needs of the learner. Programme providers need to be conscious of the fact that students who join the programme are likely to come from a variety of educational backgrounds so the early stages of programme delivery may place greater emphasis on tutor support and traditional teaching and learning methods.

Flexible delivery modes are crucial to the appeal of Foundation degrees to both students and employers. Programme providers must consider the work patterns of the sector in order to develop and sustain marketability.

There are a number of modes of delivery which may be considered including:

- Part-time study
- Evening/weekend only
- Distance or off-site learning with tutor/mentor support
- Work place delivery
- E-learning
- Day/block release
- Full-time study
- A combination of full and part-time study
- Blended learning (ie. a mix of the above)

## **Online and distance learning**

Online and distance learning often offers substantial flexibility for students, especially if they are in work or have other commitments. Online and distance learning can assist students to improve their ICT skills and allow students to learn at times that are convenient to them and their employers. In addition it can facilitate access to a range

of information and materials to support learning and encourage students to engage in interactive learning with tutors and/or other students. However, when choosing to adopt these methods it is important to acknowledge that students will have varying levels of ICT skills and access to IT resources.

### **Partnership**

Partnership in developing Foundation degrees involves further and higher education working in partnership with employers and employer bodies. All parties should be considered equal in terms of their input and influence over the design, delivery and review of programmes, although the final authority for validation rests with the awarding higher education institution.

Partnerships between employers, higher education institutions (HEIs), further education colleges (FECs), Sector Skills Councils and professional bodies are central to the concept of Foundation degrees, and vital in providing programmes that are relevant, valid and responsive to the needs of learners and employers. Effective partnerships, which are strategic and sustainable, foster broad acceptance of the Foundation degree, reinforce ownership of the qualification among all stakeholders and establish the currency of the award. It is important that partnership agreements clearly identify the needs and expectations of all parties.

#### **HEI and FEC partnership**

Foundation degrees are validated and awarded by an HEI or other body (such as the Open University Validation Service) with legally defined degree-awarding powers. The validating institution is accountable for the standards of the award, and also for ensuring that the quality of the learning opportunities leading to its awards are managed effectively, even when delivery is delegated to a partner. It is important that all involved recognise the primary responsibilities of the awarding HEI for the standards and quality of the degree programmes offered under its powers.

#### **Reference: The Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (QAA)**

Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning).

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp>

#### **Reference: HE in FE colleges: Indirectly funded partnerships: codes of practice for franchise and consortia arrangements**

HEFCE publication (00/54)

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2000/>

#### **Reference: HE and FE Partnerships**

A briefing for learning providers published by Foundation degree Forward

<http://www.Fdf.ac.uk/page12.html>

### **Work-based Learning (WBL)**

Work-based Learning is a key characteristic of Foundation degrees. It may involve learners going on placements or engaging in consultancy or project work for employers, or it may use the learner's own workplace as a source of learning. It should be fully integrated into the whole programme, with defined and assessable

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learning outcomes, and should not be seen as a 'bolt-on' to academic study. Employers are expected to support learners as they learn in the workplace and sign up to a tripartite learning agreement between themselves, the learner and the university or college which outlines the work which will be undertaken and the learning outcomes which will be assessed.

Work-based Learning must be fully integrated into the design, delivery and assessment of all programmes.

There are two types of Work-based Learning

- Work-based Learning is integrated into a programme which is essentially college or university based, where learners spend a period of time at work carrying out specific tasks for an employer
- The learner is already in work and is using his or her work place to frame and apply the knowledge and skills learned during the programme

Whichever is the case, the Work-based Learning element of the programme must be of sufficient duration and suitably structured to enable the learner to demonstrate all the agreed Work-based Learning outcomes.

Those involved in the design and development of an Foundation degree will need to ensure that, along with the other elements of the programme, the WBL aims and learning outcomes are set at the intermediate level on the Framework for Higher Education qualifications (FHEQ). Learning outcomes for WBL should relate to technical skills, vocationally relevant knowledge, personal and interpersonal skills. Tutor-led, work-related modules delivered within the FEC/HEI may also enhance the learning experience of Foundation degree students, but will not generally be considered a substitute for learning in a live work setting.

Work-based Learning should be designed so that it contributes to the business objectives of the employer. The process involves the development of higher-level learning within both the providing institution and the workplace. It should be a two-way process, where learning in one environment is applied in the other. WBL requires the identification and achievement of defined and related learning outcomes. Experience at work is not in itself sufficient to qualify for credit within an Foundation degree. It is the learning that derives from work that will be assessed as part of the Foundation degree programme.

In order to support learning in the workplace, employers may need:

- Information on how the Foundation degree can support business objectives
- Induction into the provision and management of workplace learning or mentoring
- Mentor/supervisor training
- Help in managing learning activity in the workplace
- Assistance in understanding assessment procedures
- Agreement with the education institutions on the breadth and timescales of their involvement in Work-based Learning and mentoring

These needs should be taken into account during the design phase of the Foundation degree.

Employers should be invited to participate in the regular review of Foundation degree programmes. Review procedures should ensure that evaluation of the provision of all WBL is undertaken as part of the review, and involves feedback from all WBL

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providers. Students also need opportunities to comment on their WBL experiences, and feedback should be part of the annual monitoring processes.

Students should be heavily involved in the design and location of Work-based Learning and this will form an essential part of their personal development plan. WBL should enable learners to take on appropriate roles within the workplace, giving them an opportunity to learn and apply the skills and knowledge they acquire as an integrated element of the programme.

### **Reference: The Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (QAA)**

Section 9: Placement learning

It is strongly recommended that programme designers and delivers consult this document in respect to the assurance of quality and standards of provision of placement learning.

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp>

### **Reference: National Standards for Work Experience**

The National Council for Work Experience website provides information on national standards for work experience

<http://www.work-experience.org>

### **Reference: Work-based Learning**

A briefing for learning providers published by Foundation degree Forward

<http://www.Fdf.ac.uk/page12.html>

### **Reference: Learndirect – Learning through Work**

<http://www.learndirect-ltw.co.uk/ep/web/home/ltwhome/homepage/>

### **Learning agreements**

Learning agreements for use within Foundation degrees are tripartite agreements between the Foundation degree provider, the employer and the student. These are not required to be long or detailed documents; however they will highlight how the proposed activities and projects to be undertaken by the student meet the business objectives of the employer and the learning outcomes of the Foundation degree.

Learning agreements outline the roles and responsibilities of individual students, higher or further education providers and employers, in the provision of learning, support and assessment. This is seen as particularly important to the management of the work-based element of a programme and where distance learning is a key feature of the delivery mode.

Within the context of Work-based Learning the student, employer and Foundation degree provider have clear roles and responsibilities. A [learning agreement](#) should be developed prior to undertaking each WBL activity. Well-planned activities and work-based projects will provide positive outcomes for both the student and the employer.

### **Support for students**

Students require adequate support for WBL. Work-based mentors or supervisors fulfil this role in the workplace. Mentors/supervisors have an important part to play in facilitating the delivery of Foundation degree programmes, with good support increasing the chance of a successful learning experience for the student.

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The arrangements for providing work-place support to students may differ between sectors and individual employers. In some workplaces students may be supported by a number of individuals who have responsibility for different aspects of the support. In other organisations support may be provided by a single individual.

Mentors/supervisors will be members of the organisation who are equipped with the skills and experience to facilitate student learning and development and the support they provide will potentially include:

- Acting as the main point of contact between the student and the HE/FE institution during periods of WBL
- Playing a key role in providing both academic and pastoral support
- Responsibility for assessing some elements of the WBL particularly engagement in formative assessment processes that can facilitate the link between WBL and the application of academic knowledge and understanding

As mentors/supervisors will be expected to work alongside the tutor in supporting the student the work place it is important that programme providers consider the development and training needs of this role in order to underpin quality and consistency of provision.

### **Reference: Supporting Learning by Mentoring in the Workplace**

A unit from the Learning and Development NOS

<http://www.ukstandards.co.uk/>