



Higher Education and Skills for Business:

Collaborative working between higher education providers and Sector Skills Councils





Foreword

Through the Leitch Review and supported by Government, a responsive, demand-led skills system is being developed and refined, with employers holding the key to creating a high skills environment.

This happens through their engagement with one of our 25 Sector Skills Councils, which help employers to identify the skills they need, so that a ready supply of people with those skills is available. Once needs have been articulated, the learning and education provision sector turns these into learning events and programmes.

However, of the £33bn spent by employers annually on training and education, only about £5bn of this is spent within the higher education sector. There are several reasons for this, which include the fact that many employers may not be fully aware of what universities have to offer or that not all universities provide a sufficiently flexible offer to employers. It is up to all of those organisations and individuals who work within the skills infrastructure, to ensure that employers and potential learners understand more about the benefits of a higher education and how it can help to increase both personal and business returns.

This document forms one of a number of solutions to foster closer working between the Sector Skills Councils and the higher education institutions, as outlined in our Skills for Business Higher Education Strategy. The two already work well together on a number of shared strategies and activities but we need this effort to increase in order that the Leitch ambition is realised.

Collaboration between universities and employers, through Sector Skills Councils, will help to grow the demand for higher level skills from both individuals and business and this can only be to the benefit of us all. I am very pleased to endorse this publication as one of a number of steps which are taking us forward to the higher ground.

Mark Fisher

Chief Executive, Sector Skills Development Agency

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1. What are Sector Skills Councils?

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are independent, employer-led organisations licensed by the government. Their role is to improve the productivity and performance of UK industries by developing strategies to address skills gaps and shortages in their sectors. Each of the 25 SSCs represents employers in a specific, UK-wide, employment sector (see Appendix 1 for a list of SSCs) and so they are able to provide expertise and guidance related to employer demand for knowledge, understanding and skills. Known collectively as the Skills for Business network, SSCs cover 85 per cent of the UK workforce.¹

SSCs are licensed and part-funded by government. They are independent companies limited by guarantee and led by boards of employers from across their sector footprint.

A key goal of SSCs is to improve learning provision, including higher education, to meet the needs of employers in their sector.

Key contacts within SSCs for HE providers are those responsible for Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs). Some SSCs also have dedicated Higher Education (HE) specialists.

SSCs are concerned with lifelong learning – from initial education and training to facilitate entry to the workforce through to the continuing development of workforce skills at higher levels. With skills needs on an ever-upward trajectory, higher learning to Level 4 and above is a key priority for the Skills for Business network as a whole.

There are a number of occupations and business sectors that are outside the Skills for Business Network. Information about these organisations and the sectors that they represent can be found on the Sector Skills Development Agency² (SSDA) website.

What do SSCs do?

The central role of SSCs is to represent the skills needs of employers in their sector and to encourage learning provision to be available at the right level to meet those needs. SSCs articulate this demand-led approach in the **Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs)**. These are developed in consultation with employers and other stakeholders, including colleges and universities.³

The current activities of SSCs support the development and delivery of their Sector Skills Agreements. Key areas of development work are:

- **Research programmes**, focused particularly on sector labour market information, skills intelligence and learning provision
- **Consultations and representations** to ensure the skills needs of their sector employers are understood by stakeholders and their views on skills heard by policy-makers
- **Qualifications strategies** to ensure that qualifications meet the changing needs of their sector

¹ Details of the organisations representing occupations and business sectors outside the Skills for Business network are available at www.sdda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=102

² In 2008 the new UK Commission for Employment and Skills will become fully operational, at which point the SSDA will cease to exist.

³ Sector Skills Agreements are examined further on page 13.

- **Information, advice and guidance** on skills, qualifications and careers in their sectors
- **National Occupational Standards (NOS)**, to incorporate into working practices and qualifications, including Foundation degrees where appropriate and other qualifications at the HE level
- **Training and qualification frameworks**, including Apprenticeships. SSCs are also funded by *fdf* to develop Foundation degree frameworks and sector research and development projects related to Foundation degrees
- **Collaborative programmes and partnerships with stakeholders**, including Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the Higher Education Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Academy's Subject Centres and *fdf*
- **Skills Academies** to deliver, broker or accredit learning provision approved by the sector
- **Vocational and work-based progression routes** enabling Apprentices, for example, to progress to higher education and professional accreditation.

In July 2007 the government produced its implementation plan⁴ in response to the Leitch Review of Skills published in December 2006. This indicates the government's intention to re-focus the remit of SSCs. It is envisaged that the future remit of SSCs will be focused on three strategic objectives:

1. Ensuring that the supply of skills and vocational qualifications is driven by employers

- SSCs will have role in reforming and approving QCA-regulated vocational qualifications such as NVQs
- in England SSCs will advise the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) on which qualifications to fund

2. Raising employer ambition and investment in skills

- in England SSCs are to consider whether there is support within their sector for the introduction of levy schemes

3. Articulating the future skill needs of their sector

- to lead on collating and communicating labour market information
- to be the authoritative voice about the skill needs of their sector

⁴ Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007) *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*



There are many good examples of employer and higher education collaboration, often prompted by SSCs.

Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills (2006)

We must ensure that HE programmes are designed and delivered in a way that best helps students gain the skills that employers need... We will strengthen the links between SSCs, universities and colleges so that SSCs can help design degree programmes, identify those HE programmes which best meet sector needs, and invest in university facilities which provide the best sector-based programmes.

Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work (2005)

Skills for Health (SfH) have led a number of initiatives in partnership with HEIs.

Examples include:

- Supporting fifteen HE demonstrator sites across the UK which are developing and evaluating the nature of the collaborative partnerships between employers and education providers. The work focuses on developing competence based approaches to education design and qualification reform and will inform and shape the sector qualifications strategy.
- Development of the National Competence Framework for the new role of Emergency Care Practitioner (ECPs). 14 universities have developed new programmes based around the framework. This has resulted in 900 new ECPs over the last 3 years – and an estimated 1 million reduction in admissions to Accident and Emergency Departments.

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2. The higher education sector

The UK's HE sector is extensive and diverse. It consists largely of 130 HEIs – universities and higher education colleges with degree-awarding powers uniquely conferred by statute. They are independent bodies with a high degree of autonomy.

Many universities are long-established; others were polytechnics linked to local education authorities until 1992, when they were accorded independent university status and powers to award undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. In addition, there are Colleges of Higher Education, usually smaller and more specialist in nature, as well as University Colleges, a number of which have now been granted degree-awarding powers and full University title.

As well as deriving income from student fees, HEIs in England are funded by the HEFCE. Funding is allocated mainly on the basis of student numbers, as a block grant.

HEFCE also directly or indirectly funds HE provision in further education colleges (FECs). Some 10 per cent of HE is delivered in further education colleges. As colleges do not currently have degree-awarding powers, their degree courses are validated by HEIs. Whilst delivery of HE by private training providers is currently unusual, it could become more commonplace in future, especially where work-based learning is concerned.

HE standards and quality are defined by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) through its Academic Infrastructure, comprising the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, a Code of Practice to guide institutions in developing higher education that maintains accountability for standards and quality of learning opportunities, Subject/Discipline Benchmark Statements, Programme Specification and other guidelines.⁵ QAA quality-assures HE provision through Academic Review, Institutional Audit and Audit of Collaborative Provision.

The wide-ranging accountability of the HE sector includes extensive engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. This has led to concerns in the sector that the burden of regulation is creating a risk-averse 'compliance culture' in HE. Responding to these concerns and following on from the work of the Better Regulation Review Group⁶, the sector has brokered a commitment from the principal agencies to work towards less burdensome quality assurance while reinforcing the accountability of institutions.⁷ Moves towards "risk-based light-touch regulation"⁸ should have a positive impact on HEIs' ability to work innovatively with employers and Skills for Business.

Universities are responsible for developing and delivering their own courses. Institutions, rather than exam bodies, award degrees, including Foundation degrees, and postgraduate qualifications. Therefore to influence content, employers and their SSCs have to develop direct relationships with universities.

Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills (2006)

⁵ Details of the Academic Infrastructure are available at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure

⁶ Further information about the Better Regulation Review Group and the implications for higher education can be found on the HEFCE website at www.hefce.ac.uk/lgm/account/brrg.asp

⁷ Details of the progress of the Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG) can be found at www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/hereform/improvingregulation

⁸ Professor David Eastwood, HEFCE Chief Executive, HEFCE Annual Conference 2007

Higher education and the national skills agenda

The UK must commit to achieving by 2020, world class high skills, exceeding 40 per cent of the adult population qualified to Level 4 and above.

Leitch Review of Skills: Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills (2006)

The Leitch Review of Skills⁹ acknowledged the enormous progress made in the UK to increase the participation of young people in HE. However, our growing need for higher-level skills¹⁰, coupled with an ageing population, demand broader participation across the entire workforce. Leitch called for a target of 40 per cent - plus of the UK's adult population qualified to Level 4 and above by 2020 – a significant increase from the current level of around 30 per cent.

The Leitch Review of Skills echoed government policy that expansion should not mean 'more of the same' because of a mismatch between the needs of industry and programmes offered by universities. Expansion should rather be based on new types of programme, such as Foundation degrees, offering rigorous specialist knowledge underpinned by a broad base of academic learning and opportunities for integrated work-based learning.¹¹

Leitch and other commentators have pointed to the opportunities for expansion offered by engagement with employers and their SSCs in developing the workforce. It is estimated that around only six per cent of employer expenditure on developing workforce skills is invested with HEIs, perhaps indicating the short-term nature of much of this existing training in relation to job-specific skills.¹²

To assist HEIs to address this market, employer engagement is a key priority of the HEFCE, which, through its Strategic Development Fund, is currently supporting a range of projects. In addition to this, the government recently announced¹³ that it has HEFCE to develop a new funding model for HE that is 'co-financed with employers, achieves sustained growth in employer-based student places and introduces the principle of employer demand-led funding'. HEFCE has been asked to support an additional 5,000 employer co-funded student places in 2008-09, with support for at least an additional 5,000 additional student places each year until 2010-11.

⁹ Commissioned by HM Treasury and published in 2006. Available at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm

¹⁰ The term 'higher level skills' refers to the knowledge, understanding and skills required to undertake new and developing roles aligned to the Certificate (C) and Intermediate (I) levels of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications which are broadly equivalent to levels 4 and 5 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). See http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_5967.aspx for further details. It should be noted that there are some differences between the QAA Level Outcomes in the FHEQ and those identified by QCA as Levels 4 and 5 of the NQF.

¹¹ Higher Education White Paper (2003).and the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration (2003)

¹² King, M. (2007) *Workforce development: how much engagement do employers have with higher education? A review of the evidence on employer demand*, Council for Industry and Higher Education

¹³ Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007) *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*



A growing area of engagement between HE, employers and SSCs involves the Higher Education Academy's Subject Centres and Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning (CETLs) - particularly those CETLs focused on engagement with employers. A more employer-led approach is being made through the Higher Level Skills Pathfinders, which are exploring how HE can be linked into regional brokerage systems including Train to Gain.

Lifelong Learning Networks - partnerships between FE and HE providers to improve opportunities for vocational learners to progress to HE - are increasingly engaged with employers and SSCs in designing curriculum which facilitates flexible demand-led learning.

Overall, HE in this country is a success story...But in all this, we want to ensure that the flow of HE- level skills and qualifications aligns well with the current and future needs of employers.

Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work (2005)

Sector Skills Councils have a key role in bringing together universities and employers, and in helping employers to act as intelligent customers of universities so that courses that have the needs of employers at heart are developed and successfully marketed.

The future of higher education (2003)

3. The benefits of collaboration

BENEFITS TO SSCs

“Successful partnerships between SSCs and Higher Education are essential to develop a world-class workforce with the economically valuable skills needed to keep the UK globally competitive.”

Sector Skills Development Agency

- Key partners in delivering Sector Skills Agreements
- Access to HE expertise, facilities and scholarship’
- Access to HE networks and contacts, including Subject Centres and Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning (CETLs)
- Access to HEFCE funding for employer engagement
- Opportunity to influence HE provision and encourage innovation
- Development of HE provision that better meets the needs of sector employers
- Opens up vocationally-orientated progression routes and links to professional accreditation
- Helps meet targets for higher-level skills
- Route to more highly skilled and flexible workforce – fewer skills gaps and shortages, improved performance and competitiveness

BENEFITS TO THE PROVIDERS

“SSCs offer a way for HEIs to work with employers, understand skill needs and develop learning programmes that deliver the skills learners need in specific sectors.”

University Vocational Awards Council

- Access to authoritative sector labour market information and skills intelligence
- More access to sector employers
- Opportunity to contribute to and influence the skills agenda
- Informed employer contribution to vocational programme development helps to ‘future-proof’ provision
- Development of programmes such as Foundation Degrees that better meet employer needs
- Curriculum innovation – integration of academic and work-based learning
- Enhanced graduate employability
- Growth – tapping into the market for higher workforce development increases enrolments and income
- Helps meet Widening Participation targets
- Authoritative careers information, advice and guidance

BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUALS AND EMPLOYEES

“Students who do well on this type of degree programme [ITMB, developed with e-skills UK] should be much more marketable to prospective employers. I only wish we’d had something like this in my day.”

Ford Motor Company

- Access to higher education through work
- New opportunities to gain nationally recognised, high status qualifications
- Provision tailored to own and employer’s needs
- Courses and qualifications approved by employers
- Builds on existing knowledge and skills
- Combination of practical and academic learning
- Enhanced confidence, motivation and job satisfaction from higher level knowledge and skills
- Improved career prospects and earning potential
- For younger learners, enhanced employability and ability to ‘hit the ground running’
- Access to sector-specific careers information and advice
- Springboard to further achievement – higher qualifications, professional accreditation

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4. Collaboration in practice: research, strategies and action plans

We will encourage SSCs and HE institutions to extend their collaborations, while recognising that HE institutions are autonomous awarding institutions.

World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England (2007)

Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs)

Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs) are strategic action plans that are fundamentally altering the way skills are demanded, delivered and developed throughout the UK. They map out what skills employers in their respective sectors need their workforces to have now and in the future, and the learning provision required to respond to those needs.

Some SSAs point to a disjunction between the supply and skills of graduates and the needs of employment.

It is vital that courses at degree level improve the relevance of learning with a view to the challenges that will face newly recruited graduates. The SSA gives Higher Education a framework to help prepare their undergraduates for the workforce.

Sir Howard Newby, former Chief Executive, HEFCE

The demand-led approach of Sector Skills Agreements underpins the national skills agenda. Access to public funding for skills development will increasingly be determined by the demand and supply identified in the Agreements. HE providers therefore have a key interest in their development and delivery.

SSCs develop the Agreements in consultation with employers and partners on both the demand and supply sides, including HE. It is a rigorous, five-stage process:

1. A detailed assessment of each sector's needs to cover the long-term, medium-term and short-term, mapping the drivers of change in the sector for the next 5-10 years and seeking to determine appropriate skill needs
2. A review of the range, nature and employer relevance of current learning provision across all levels
3. An analysis of the main gaps and weaknesses in workforce development, leading to agreed priorities to be addressed
4. A review of the scope for collaborative action – engaging employers to invest in skills development to support improved performance
5. A final agreement of how the SSC and employers will work with key partners to secure the necessary supply of learning.

Each SSA contains benchmarks and milestones that are negotiated with the key delivery partners. The Agreements will be continually updated to ensure they respond to the changing needs of business and public services.

Four SSCs – Skillset, ConstructionSkills, E-skills UK and SEMTA – were designated pathfinders for Sector Skills Agreements in 2005. All SSCs are expected to have published their SSAs by Spring 2008.¹⁴ A range of SSA supporting documents on skills needs and learning provision are being developed and published in the interim.

The Sector Skills Agreement for audio-visual industries developed through Skillset was the first SSA to forge a partnership between an SSC and HEFCE. The partnership “reflects the mutual aims of the two organisations to support quality higher education provision which will benefit individuals HEIs and the industry.”¹⁵

In the first stage of the partnership Skillset and HEFCE agreed that:

- they would work together to develop the Screen Academy Network, with HEFCE inputting expert advice as well as funding¹⁶
- Skillset course kitemarking and accreditation arrangements¹⁷ would incorporate HEFCE funding criteria
- Skillset would support HEFCE work on the strategic development of HE provision for the sector they would meet quarterly to review progress and agree future collaboration.

Research underpinning **ConstructionSkills'** Sector Skills Agreement identified that the construction industry needs to recruit over 36,000 professional workers every year to 2010. To help increase applications to construction and built environment-related degree courses the SSA action plan includes 'Inspire Scholarships', a £1m collaborative employer sponsorship programme. In 2006, the scheme attracted over 700 applications for 120 student undergraduate scholarships of up to £9,000. The programme also provides scholars with on-site experience with top employers, as well as the possibility of a permanent job after graduation.

HEFCE is identified as a key partner in **SEMTA's** SSA Action Plan for England. Collaborative actions include:

- links to **Aimhigher**, the national programme to widen participation in HE
- working with the **Higher Education Academy's** appropriate Subject Centres
- endorsing exemplar HE courses
- encouraging HEIs to draw on National Occupational Standards and sectoral market intelligence
- developing frameworks for higher-level skills
- developing credit arrangements and a model for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

¹⁴ Details available at www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=813

¹⁵ Letter of Agreement, May 2005, www.skillset.org/uploads/pdf/asset_5938.pdf?1

¹⁶ More details on page 21

¹⁷ More details on page 21



Underpinning research and analysis

Key strands underpinning SSAs are sector skills intelligence and qualifications strategies to develop and deliver learning programmes which meet the needs of sectors in appropriate volumes at the right time. Many SSCs publish underpinning research and analysis as self-standing documents in a three-stage cycle:

- Skills needs assessment
- Gap analysis
- Assessment of current provision.

Some SSCs publish separate documents by industry and/or region. All this information is available free-of-charge via SSC websites. The SSDA also provides free access to a comprehensive range of labour market information and skills intelligence data through its Sector Skills Matrix.¹⁸ HE providers are increasingly using SSC skills research and analysis to inform course development.

HEIs may wish to contact SSCs for specific information or advice that cannot be obtained from existing documentation. Where this is the case, focussed enquires might be routed to regional staff, or staff with a remit for higher education. The directory that accompanies this publication provides contact details.

227 people from 145 HEIs requested copies of **e-skills UK's IT Insights** research of the sector's skills needs.

Primary research with HE providers made a key contribution to **Cogent SSC's** feasibility study of Foundation degrees for its industries (chemical, nuclear, oil and gas, petroleum and polymers). Interviews were held with five HE providers of existing Polymer and Chemical Technology Degrees, and with a further university on the development of a Foundation degree in Nuclear Decommissioning. The work was funded and supported by **fdf**.

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¹⁸ Available at www.ssdamatrix.org.uk

The sector qualifications strategy of **Skillfast**, the SSC for clothing, footwear and textile, highlights the key role of collaboration with the **Higher Education Academy's** Subject Centres in implementing two major proposals in its SSA.

Skillfast is working with the Subject Centre for Art and the UK Centre for Materials to engage HEIs in:

- **'Walk the Talk'** – a programme to signpost HE courses that provide design students with the technical and commercial preparation needed for employment in the sector
- **'Career catalyst'** – a fast-track programme to convert science graduates into technologists with industry-specific skills and knowledge.

A further action is to establish a Higher Education Strategy Group drawn from the sector's **New Technology Institute**, the **HE Academy**, **fdf** and **Lifelong Learning Networks**.

Consultation

SSCs have limited capacity to work with HE providers individually. It is important, however, that universities and colleges provide input to SSC strategies and plans. Consultations on Sector Skills Agreements have been carried out through regional consultation events, and online through 'Have your say' portals. In some cases a dedicated HE group has provided input to SSA development.

Several SSCs have convened higher education forums to engage with the HE sector. One SSC, Skillset has established regional Education Focus Groups of colleges, universities and training providers.

71 people from higher education institutions provided input to the online consultation on **e-skills UK's** Sector Skills Agreement. Eleven Vice-Chancellors attended a consultation meeting with e-skills board members. A further 15 HEIs, New Technology Institutes and HE agencies attended consultation events.

Skills for Justice held a very successful first HE Forum in March 2007, when the 100 places available proved insufficient to meet the demand. The event included a 'café conversations' exercise to unpick issues around partnership working. More such events are planned.

5. Collaboration in practice: qualification frameworks

Foundation Degrees

The Leitch Review implementation plan¹⁹ describes Foundation degrees as an ‘excellent example of collaborative working between universities, FE colleges, employers and SSCs’. Introduced in 2001 to meet a growing need for professional and higher technician-level workforce skills, Foundation degrees deliver a flexible blend of academic and work-based learning. There were 61,000 Foundation degree students in 2006-7, and numbers continue to grow.

To help HEIs design and deliver Foundation degrees that are attuned to the needs of employers, SSCs have developed Foundation Degree Sector Frameworks. More than 20 frameworks are available, with more in the pipeline.²⁰

The frameworks follow a template²¹ developed by *fdf*, the latest version of which is structured under these headings:

- **Generic Information**
 - Introduction to Foundation Degrees
 - Tools and Reference Points
 - Partnership
 - Flexibility
 - Work Based Learning
 - Progression and Articulation
 - Assessment.
- **Sector Specific Information**
 - Business Context
 - Education, Skills and Training
 - The Student or Employee
 - Employer Engagement
 - Content
 - Delivery
 - Work Based Learning
 - Progression and Promotion.

The frameworks aim to provide detailed guidance based on expert industry knowledge without being over-prescriptive. Comprehensive indicative content offers course developers a head-start while leaving plenty of room for manoeuvre. Quality marks based on the frameworks are being developed by SSCs with *fdf*.

SkillsActive’s Foundation Degree Sector Framework complements generic sector information and guidance with a series of detailed sector-specific frameworks for Health and Fitness, Leisure Management, Sports Development, Coaching and The Outdoors. Each sub-sector framework covers knowledge and understanding, intellectual skills, professional skills, key skills and career skills.

Indicative content is listed by skills area and mapped to relevant National Occupational Standards (NOS). There is a small number of core mandatory units of NOS at Level 3 in the Health and Fitness framework; otherwise course developers are free to tailor the Foundation degree to their needs, selecting from the indicative content offered as appropriate.

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¹⁹ Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007) *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*

²⁰ A list of Foundation Degree Sector Frameworks is available at www.fdf.ac.uk

²¹ Foundation Degree Forward (2006) *Guidance for the development of Foundation degree frameworks*. Available at www.fdf.ac.uk



Work-based progression and Higher Apprenticeships

SSCs are involved in developing work-based progression routes to HE, providing Advanced Apprentices, for example, with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills to Level 4 and higher through Foundation degrees. For employers such progression helps to meet their increasing need for graduate-level skills by 'growing their own graduates'. For HEIs prepared to develop or adapt their provision to meet the need of these non-traditional learners and their employers, it opens up a new market for HE – workforce development. There are many examples, particularly in the engineering sector, of Apprentices embarking on Higher Nationals or degrees in the latter stage of their Apprenticeship.

Two SSCs, SEMTA and e-skills UK, have developed Higher Apprenticeship frameworks to build a new pathway between Apprenticeships and Higher Education.

In March 2007 18 engineers at **Airbus UK** were the first in the UK to complete a Higher Apprenticeship programme. **SEMTA** worked with Airbus to develop a prototype Higher Apprenticeship and then worked with other employers to develop the model into a national programme that would attract government funding and accreditation from the Institution of Engineering and Technology.

Achieving the Higher Apprenticeship involved gaining a BTEC National Certificate, five Key Skills at Level 3, an Institute of Leadership and Management Level 3 qualification, a Level 4 NVQ and a Foundation degree. All the apprentices progressed to the third year of a full honours degree in aeronautical engineering. The programme is delivered by **Deeside College** in partnership with **North East Wales Institute of Higher Education**.

Honours degrees

SSCs are involved in the development of honours degrees in a variety of ways – in the context of progression from Foundation degrees, perhaps as part of a Higher Apprenticeship, through the development and incorporation of NOS and through links to professional accreditation. More details are given below and in subsequent sections.

A new honours degree framework, the Information Technology Management in Business (ITMB), addresses the need for business-oriented technology graduates who can demonstrate problem-solving, project management, team-working and communications skills. The ITMB framework has been developed by **universities and e-skills UK** in partnership with a consortium of leading companies that include **BT, Ford, IBM, Morgan Stanley, Norwich Union** and **Unilever**. It was supported by the (former) DfES and HEFCE. By 2008, the degree will be available in 12 universities, supported by 30 employers.

14-19 Diplomas

SSCs are leading the development of another new progression route to HE – from the new applied Diplomas to be introduced from 2008. Diploma Development Partnerships include HEIs, whose participation is crucial to ensuring that the Level 3 Diplomas are accepted as HE entry qualifications.

Higher education has been closely involved in the development of the Creative and Media Diploma led by **Skillset** with the two other SSCs, **Skillfast** and the **Creative and Cultural SSC**. The Diploma will be allocated appropriate UCAS points when the Diploma grading is finalised.

SSCs and their partners have designed the Level 3 Diploma to be intellectually rigorous, with an emphasis on critical thinking as well as higher knowledge and functional skills. The Extended Project, which will also be a requirement of A-Levels, is expected to be of particular interest to university admissions tutors because it will be an opportunity for students to demonstrate the highest levels of achievement and potential.

To support the development of the 14-19 ICT Diploma, **e-skills UK** is working with universities to explore support to a National Resource Bank of teaching and learning materials, and to devise 'stretch' content to challenge and motivate the most able students.

6. Collaboration in practice: standards, endorsement and academies

Using National Occupational Standards

A key role of SSCs is to define and kept up to date NOS, the UK's recognised standards of workplace competence. In essence NOS set out what people in their respective occupations should know and how they need to apply that knowledge in the workplace to do their jobs well. The standards focus on specific occupations and cover virtually every industry and area of employment.

NOS form the basis of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and have many other applications in learning programmes. Described by Leeds Metropolitan University as “industry-credible components of learning”²², National Occupational Standards provide ready-made tools in most vocational disciplines for integrating academic and practical learning and ensuring that HE programmes meet the needs of employment. The standards are increasingly used by professional bodies as benchmarks for professional accreditation and continuing professional development. SSCs are currently seeking to work more closely with a greater number of professional bodies.

“The standards are written in terms that practitioners would recognise as reflecting real industry practice, and that gives them credibility”

Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication

Use of appropriate National Occupational Standards supports a range of HE priorities, including graduate employability, widening participation and employer engagement. Incorporation of the standards – in Foundation degree and other programmes is increasing as awareness of the benefits grows. Reference is made to NOS in the QAA code of practice, guidelines and subject benchmark statements, and the standards are an important aspect of Foundation Degree Sector Frameworks.

NOS are available free-of-charge from the respective SSCs and at the Sector Skills Development Agency's mini site dedicated to National Occupational Standards, www.ukstandards.org

Leeds Metropolitan University's FdSc in Health-Related Exercise and Fitness incorporates over 50 active leisure and management National Occupational Standards at levels 3 and 4. At the time this was a was a time-consuming task, but **SkillsActive's** Foundation Degree Sector Framework now does much of the mapping spadework for course developers, so that they can concentrate on tailoring provision to the needs of learners and employers, rather than starting from scratch.

Leeds Met is one of a number of HEIs that are helping SkillsActive to develop high-level occupational standards across the active leisure sector.

Endorsement

SSCs may wish to recognise specific programmes as particularly relevant for the employers in their sectors. Some SSCs have developed schemes specifically for this purpose.

Skills Academies

In partnership with their SSCs employers are developing sector-based National Skills Academies. While some are concentrating on addressing skills gaps at shortages up to Level 3, others encompassing higher skills are being developed in consultation with HEIs. The first such venture, the Fashion Retail Academy, was established by a partnership between the Arcadia Group and the University of the Arts. Skillset's Screen Academies (below) offer a different, institution-based model with a focus on higher-level skills.

The **Skillset Screen and Film Business Academy** network is a group of further and higher education institutions that have been recognised as centres of excellence in film education in the UK. It aims to provide the highest standard of vocationally orientated education, training and development, endorsed as relevant by the UK film industry, at a further, higher and postgraduate level. All the institutions have been approved by the industry through Skillset's approval scheme.

The Film Business Academy at the **Cass Business School** is developing the world's first Executive MBA in Film Business. Another innovative programme is the new online MA in Film Production and Business Management offered by **Skillset Screen Academy Wales**. The MA is designed for freelancers wanting to take their skills to a higher level in order to set up their own businesses.

Skillset has been instrumental in leveraging substantial funds to support the academy network. The Screen Academies will share £4.3m of funding over two years from the Skillset Film Skills Fund.

Appendix 1

Sector Skills Councils - the Skills for Business network

SSC	SECTOR SKILLS	CONTACT
Asset Skills	Property services, housing cleaning services and facilities management	t: 01392 423399 w: www.assetskills.org
Automotive Skills	Retail motor industry	t: 020 7436 6373 w: www.automotiveskills.org.uk
Cogent	Chemical, nuclear, oil and gas, petroleum and polymer industries	t: 01925 515 200 w: www.cogent-ssc.com
Construction Skills	Construction	t: 01485 577577 w: www.constructionskills.net
Creative & Cultural Skills	Advertising, crafts, cultural heritage, design, music, performing, literary and visual arts	t: 020 7089 5866 w: www.ccskills.org.uk
Energy & Utility Skills	Electricity, gas, waste management and water industries	t: 0845 077 9922 w: www.euskills.co.uk
e-skills UK	Information technology, telecommunications and contact centres	t: 020 7963 8920 w: www.e-skills.com
Financial Services Skills Council	Financial services industry	t: 020 7216 7366 w: www.fssc.org.uk
GoSkills	Passenger transport	t: 0121 635 5520 w: www.goskills.org
Government Skills	The Civil Service (including executive agencies), non-departmental public bodies and the armed forces	t: 020 7276 1611 w: www.government-skills.gov.uk
Improve Ltd	Food and drink manufacturing	t: 0845 644 0448 w: www.improveltd.co.uk
Lantra	Environmental and land-based industries	t: 0845 707 8007 w: www.lantra.co.uk
Lifelong Learning UK	Community learning and development; further education; higher education; libraries, archives and information services; work-based learning and development	t: 0870 757 7890 w: www.lifelonglearninguk.org
People 1st	Hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism	t: 0870 060 2550 w: www.people1st.co.uk
Proskills UK	Process and manufacturing, coatings, extractives, glass, building products and printing industries	t: 01235 833 844 w: www.proskills.co.uk
SEMTA	Science, engineering and manufacturing technologies	t: 01923 238441 w: www.semta.org.uk
Skillfast-UK	Apparel, footwear, textiles and related businesses	t: 0870 120 6197 w: www.skillfast-uk.org

SSC	SECTOR SKILLS	CONTACT
Skills for Health	Health sector across the UK	t: 0117 922 1155 w: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk
Skills for Justice	Custodial care, community justice, court services, prosecution services, policing and law enforcement	t: 0114 261 1499 w: www.skillsforjustice.com
Skills for Logistics	Freight logistics industry	t: 01908 313360 w: www.skillsforlogistics.org
SkillsActive	Sport and recreation, health and fitness, outdoors, playwork and caravans	t: 020 7632 2000 w: www.skillsactive.com
Skillset	Broadcast, film, video, interactive media and photo imaging	t: 020 7520 5757 w: www.skillset.org
Skillsmart Retail	Retail	t: 020 7399 3450 w: www.skillsmartretail.com
Skills for Care & Development	Social care, children, young people and families	t: 0113 241 1251 w: www.skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk
SummitSkills	Building services engineering	t: 01908 303 960 w: www.summitskills.org.uk

For more information

Two recently-published companions to this guide provide complementary information and advice on collaboration between higher education and employers. Both are available as downloads at www.fdf.ac.uk.

- **Higher education and employers: Directory of relevant organisations (2007).**
A who's who of organisations supporting HE/employer collaboration. Each entry contains links to relevant information and advice available.
- **Developing higher skills in the UK workforce: A guide to collaboration between higher education and employers (2007).**

Higher Education and Skills for Business: Collaborative working between HE providers and Sector Skills Councils



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