

(1) Identification of best practice

Newcastle College works closely with industry through the development of Foundation Degrees and our HND/C provision. An example of excellent collaboration has been through the Chartered Institute of Wastes Management, who are eager to develop level 4 skills within their workforce. Having identified the College as a suitable partner, we have collaborated in developing a Foundation Degree in Sustainable Wastes and Environmental Management. Local employers have influenced the curriculum development of this provision to ensure meet the needs of their future workforce. This type of activity is replicated through our Foundation Degree provision. Most of the College's business contacts are developed through course team activity. It is extremely rare that either the RDA (ONE NE) are involved. Given the emerging picture of the Sector Skills Councils, it is too early to establish the impact that they will have with this provision.

(2) Barriers to relationships

At present, the RDA does not view Higher Education within Further Education Colleges as a key priority and therefore the support and infrastructure to collaborate with business is restricted. Given that the College supports the widening participation agenda and has flexible curriculum approaches to assist business we are in an excellent position to aid business collaboration. Furthermore, there is a view within business that higher education is the preserve of Universities, particularly with respect to research and development. This view will need to be changed if Further Education Colleges are to have an input into business collaboration.

(3) Graduate and postgraduate skills

As our Foundation Degree provision has involved local and regional businesses within the design of the curriculum, there can be few issues about the quality of graduate recruits. The majority of our HE students are employed within the first three months after graduating. However, there are areas where it is extremely difficult to obtain business input, particularly within the SME sector.

(4) Financial arrangement

As identified above, the SME sector is notoriously difficult to engage. Most employers will only involve themselves with education if they can clearly ascertain the extrinsic benefit for that collaboration. If it involves staff time or additional resources then often SMEs find it extremely difficult to identify net benefits. Mechanisms need to be identified act as an enticement for SME engagement, perhaps along the line of tax credits, but relating less to R&D and more to curriculum involvement.

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