



Lifelong Learning Network

Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

This guide has been compiled by the Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Lifelong Learning Network, funded by HEFCE from 2007 – 2011. The content is intended to be useful to the region's employers and employees beyond the LLN's lifetime.



www.llnstaffordshireshropshire.org


Putting **you** in the picture

Lifelong learning to help you, your organisation and your employees



A guide to Higher Education in Staffordshire and Shropshire

Contents

- 1** Foreword
 - 2** A picture of the region
 - 4** What is a Lifelong Learning Network?
 - 5** What is Higher Education?
 - 7** Where can you do it?
 - 8** What are the options?
 - 10** Your route into and through Higher Education
 - 12** How much will it cost?
 - 14** Who can advise me about Higher Education?
 - 16** What are Progression Agreements?
 - 17** Accrediting work based learning
 - 18** What are employers saying about HE?
 - 19** Frequently Asked Questions by Employees
- 



Foreword

“Increasing numbers of organisations nationwide are recognising the benefits of building stronger working relationships with their regional network of universities and colleges.

This guide demonstrates how higher education (HE) can help your people meet the challenges within today’s workplace. It highlights how local universities and colleges can work with you to provide flexible, cost effective people development solutions that deliver tangible business results.

A successful organisation needs people with up to date higher-level skills, skills that matter to individual businesses and to the region as a whole. Harnessing the expertise of over 20 institutions, the Network tailors its offer to the region’s organisations - developing innovative new curriculum, collaborative delivery, mutual credit recognition and new progression pathways - so people can experience the best from further and higher education, often learning in the workplace, with a minimum of fuss and bureaucracy.

This guide will help you explore new ideas and opportunities and, whether already working with one of the Network institutions, or thinking about it, you will discover how HE can make a greater difference to your organisation’s performance.

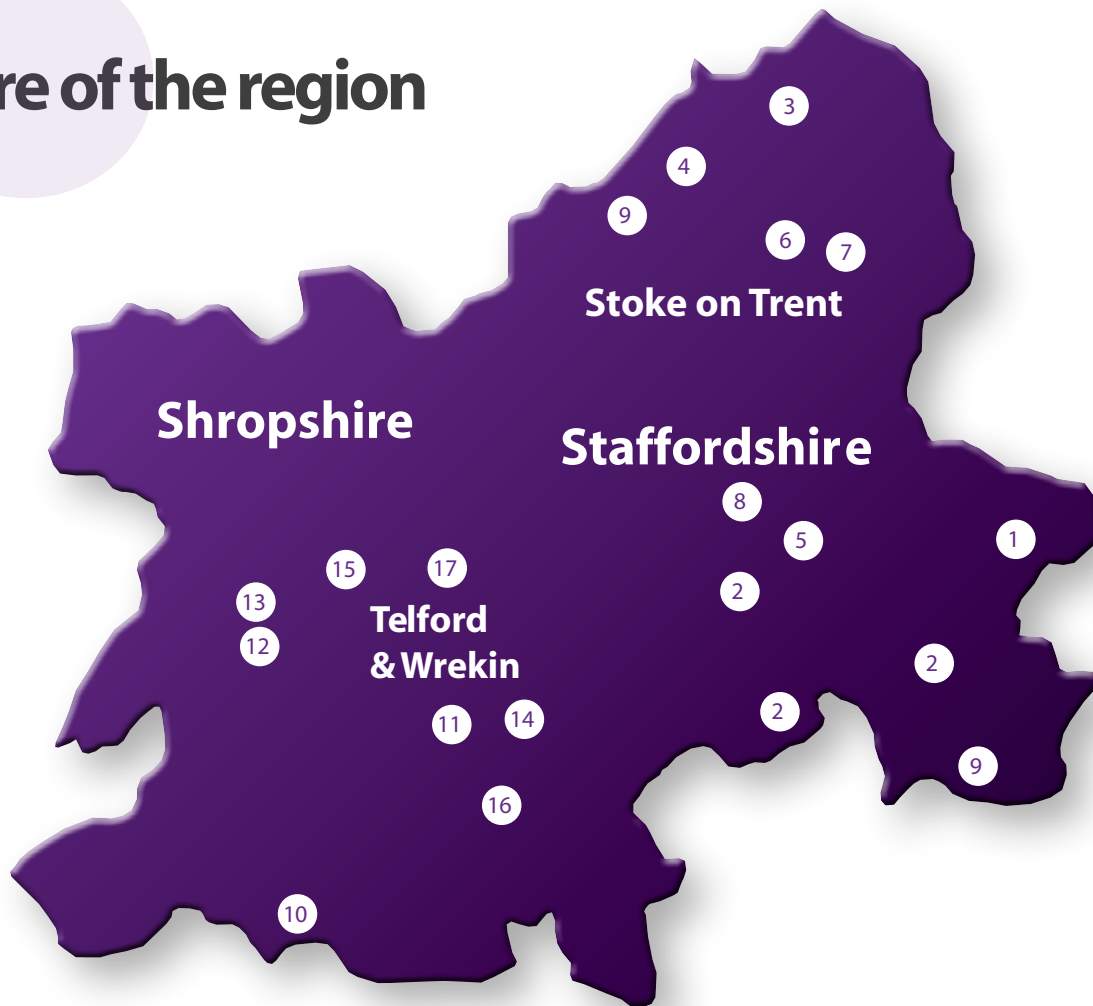
The Network has made an excellent start. I know they are keen for even better things to happen between organisations and HE in Staffordshire and Shropshire. It seeks your input to improve their service to you, to develop new training provision, to look for realistic yet exciting ways to help build your organisation’s strength and competitiveness through people development.

This guide is worth the read. I urge you to invest the time to do so.”

Hugh Tollyfield
Special Adviser Employer Engagement
Higher Education Funding Council for England



A picture of the region



Here are the dedicated employer focused teams at each of our Universities and Colleges that deliver HE across Staffordshire and Shropshire.

1 / Burton College

www.burton-college.ac.uk
01283 494400

2 / South Staffordshire College

www.southstaffs.ac.uk
0300 456 2424

3 / Leek College of Further Education and School of Art

www.leek.ac.uk
01538 398866

4 / Newcastle-under-Lyme College

www.nulc.ac.uk
01782 254212

5 / Stafford College

www.stafford.ac.uk
01785 223800

6 / Employer Services Stoke-on-Trent College

www.stokecoll.ac.uk
01782 603603

7 / City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College

www.stokesfc.ac.uk
01782 848736

8 / Business Evolution at Staffordshire University

www.businessevolution.staffs.ac.uk
www.staffs.ac.uk
01782 294178

9 / Research & Enterprise Services at Keele University

www.keele.ac.uk
01782 733441

10 / Ludlow College

www.ludlow-college.ac.uk
01584 872846

11 / New College Telford

www.newcollegetelford.ac.uk
01952 641892

12 / Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology

www.shrewsbury.ac.uk
01743 342342

13 / Shrewsbury Sixth Form College

www.ssfc.ac.uk
01743 235491

14 / Telford College of Arts and Technology

www.tcat.ac.uk
01952 642200

15 / Walford and North Shropshire College

www.wnsc.ac.uk
01939 262110

16 / i-CD Ltd at the University of Wolverhampton

www.wlv.ac.uk
01902 321147

17 / Rural Employer Engagement Development Network at Harper Adams University College

www.reednet.org
www.harper-adams.ac.uk
01952 820280

The Open University

www.open.ac.uk/cpd
0121 426 1661

What is a Lifelong Learning Network?

Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) were introduced by HEFCE in 2004, to create new opportunities for vocational learners to navigate their way through higher education and to reach their fullest potential.

What's the Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin LLN doing and why?

We are hosted by Staffordshire University, in partnership with Keele University, University of Wolverhampton, Harper Adams University College, the Open University and all FE colleges. We collaborate with employers, work based learning providers and other regional organisations across Staffordshire and Shropshire to help develop a workforce that is well qualified and confident to fulfil the needs of the local economy. We seek to encourage those learners who would not normally progress; including adults already in employment, young people who have chosen to take vocational qualifications or those undertaking advanced apprenticeships, as well as your current employees.

We do this by:

- removing barriers to student progression
- developing existing Information, Advice, Guidance (IAG) and co-ordinating IAG staff training
- creating relevant, flexible learning opportunities and awards
- engaging employers; funding the development of courses that meet organisations' needs
- understanding skills needs through extensive data collection and research

We do this across the following sectors:

Creative and Media
Health and Social Care
Public Sector and Public Services
Technology

We also concentrate on themes in each sector such as:

IT, Enterprise, Leadership and Management
Progression and Progression Agreements
IAG and Learner Support





What is Higher Education?

Higher Education (HE), means a course studied at or above level 4. Level 3 refers to pre-HE qualifications such as A levels and BTEC diplomas. The different levels and routes into and through HE can be seen on pages 10 & 11.

What sort of qualifications can HE offer employers?

HE providers are increasingly offering flexibility and the capacity to deliver through a variety of different routes to employers:

- Foundation degrees
- HNC/Ds
- Undergraduate (part-time)
- Taught postgraduate (part-time)
- Research postgraduate (part-time)
- Professional qualifications endorsed by professional bodies
- Off-the-shelf provision
- Bespoke and tailored Continuous Professional Development (CPD) provision
- Accreditation of in-house training

How is the learning delivered?

Flexible methods of delivery are becoming more common, within the workplace and by distance learning. Bespoke packages are available for groups of learners. Many programmes are offered on a full or part time basis. Some Bachelor Degree courses are being trialled over two years full time, while others may be broken down into bite size awards where learners dip in and out, accumulating credit over a longer period.

Distance learning courses are flexible and may be carried out at the learner's own pace. This reduces many course-related costs like travel, childcare and time lost at work. Other programmes developed around employers' own training programmes offer an opportunity to build a validated university award around people development programmes, including innovative negotiated learning frameworks (see page 17).

How are higher level programmes assessed?

Assessment methods may include reflective journals and self assessment, work-based assignments, portfolio, dissertation, examinations or presentations. Employer assessments must be rigorous and quality assured by the validating university.



How will your organisation benefit?

Your organisation may wish to help employees change career path or progress in their existing role, or you may require a new set of higher level skills to meet a specific skills gap. A higher education experience can help your employees gain confidence and independence in enquiry, thought and action at work. Vocational or work based HE courses like Foundation Degrees or HNDs will have a direct link to a person's current role, developing creative and reflective learning as well as specific skills and knowledge through work related projects.

A commitment to education through a highly skilled workforce will give you competitive advantage. The benefits of developing these skills to the organisation are many; improved or renewed motivation, improved employee retention. In order to gain their commitment to improving productivity and business performance, it is crucial that individuals know their value to your organisation. HE may also provide opportunities for innovations in technology and/or business process that increase profitability. Developing your managers of the future and creating a workforce that learns locally may help your organisation's community focus and social responsibility.

**Go to page 8 for
the benefits of each
qualification**

Where can you do it?

You can study an HE course at a university, a higher education college, at many further education (FE) colleges and also now in the workplace as a work based learning programme. These can include on/off-campus, as HE in FE, within the workplace (Work Based Learning), via distance learning (Technology Supported Learning) or a combination of some or all of them (Blended Learning) to suit the learner's preferences. These new flexibilities provide help for employees with vocational skills, to progress more easily onto higher level qualifications.

New Leadership and Management Qualifications

A new suite of qualifications in Leadership and Management has been developed through collaborating with Staffordshire University, Keele University and the University of Wolverhampton. Although lecturers from any of the universities could have developed new modules, it was decided to work collaboratively with local employers and a system of peer review, in order to strengthen the relationships between the institutions. A Postgraduate certificate, also available as stand alone CPD modules, and a full Foundation Degree (FD) in Leadership and Management have been developed and validated by these Universities with many of the colleges in the LLN delivering the FD. The first of the CPD modules to be developed was in Transformation and Change, jointly delivered at Keele University in October 2008. The first group of FD students started in September 2008 at South Staffordshire College in Tamworth with five of the college's own staff among the students.



"Following my promotion into a supervisory role, I decided to improve my management skills. This course provided an excellent opportunity and although it is a challenge getting back into learning, I'm thoroughly enjoying it."

Michael Edden – Site Supervisor

For course information go
to contacts on page 3

What are the options?

Qualification	Level	How long does it take?	Benefits of study
HNC - Higher National Certificate	University Certificate Level 4 120 HE credits*	Traditionally two years part time	Established, recognised, business-focused qualification that provides you with work-related skills and knowledge that match the current needs of business.
HND - Higher National Diploma	University Intermediate Level 4 & 5 240 HE credits	Traditionally two years full time	Established, recognised, business-focused qualification that provides you with work-related skills and knowledge. This course enables you to analyse and solve practical problems through the development of work-related solutions. Achieving HND allows direct entry to a one-year top-up to Honours Degree.
Fd - Foundation Degree	University Intermediate Level 4 & 5 240 HE Credits	Traditionally two years but fast track options are available in some subjects	Designed with employer involvement. Foundation degrees address constraints of time pressures involved in business. A more flexible programme of learning.
Top Up from Foundation Degree	University Intermediate Level 6 120 – 160 HE Credits	One year full time	Continuing the learning turns an Fd into a full Bachelor's degree. Attending full time study with other students from other organisations can help develop confidence and improve application.
CPD / Short courses	Can be multiples of 10, 15 or 20 credits at levels 4, 5 or 6	Each course differs, can be from 10 credits upwards	Continuous lifelong learning, through a suite of modules at each university which can help learners accumulate credit over time into an award or meet specific skills for the business. Can be at all levels and studied in a variety of ways.
Foundation Year	Pre level 4 (year 0) 120 credits	One year	A foundation to studying on a Bachelors degree. For those who want to develop appropriate level study skills.

Qualification	Level	How long does it take?	Benefits of study
Bachelors Degree (with or without Honours)	University Honours Level 4, 5 & 6 360 credits (300 credits without Honours)	Traditionally three years (can be four if a sandwich course which means a year in work placement) or part time	Graduates adapt quickly to new tasks and technologies, themselves a direct source of innovation. While studying, placements are beneficial to students to develop their experience, thus introducing new theory into the business.
Post Graduate Certificate	University Masters Level 7 60 credits	One year or more	Designed to develop learning into more specialist skills for direct application within a business. It is one third of a Masters programme.
Post Graduate Diploma	University Masters Level 7 120 credits	One year or more	Designed to develop learning into more subject focused specialist skills for direct application within a business.
Masters (e.g. MSc, MBA)	University Masters Level 7 180 credits	One year full time or part time for two or more years	Allows senior professionals to claim the competitive edge. Offers a global perspective on current issues - an advantage for career progression and promotion, while providing immediate benefits to current roles.
PHD / Doctorate	University Doctorate Level 8 Thesis on original research (not credits)	Typically three years, full time or extended	Become a recognised expert in your research field. Publishing can bring recognition to the individual as well as the educational institution.

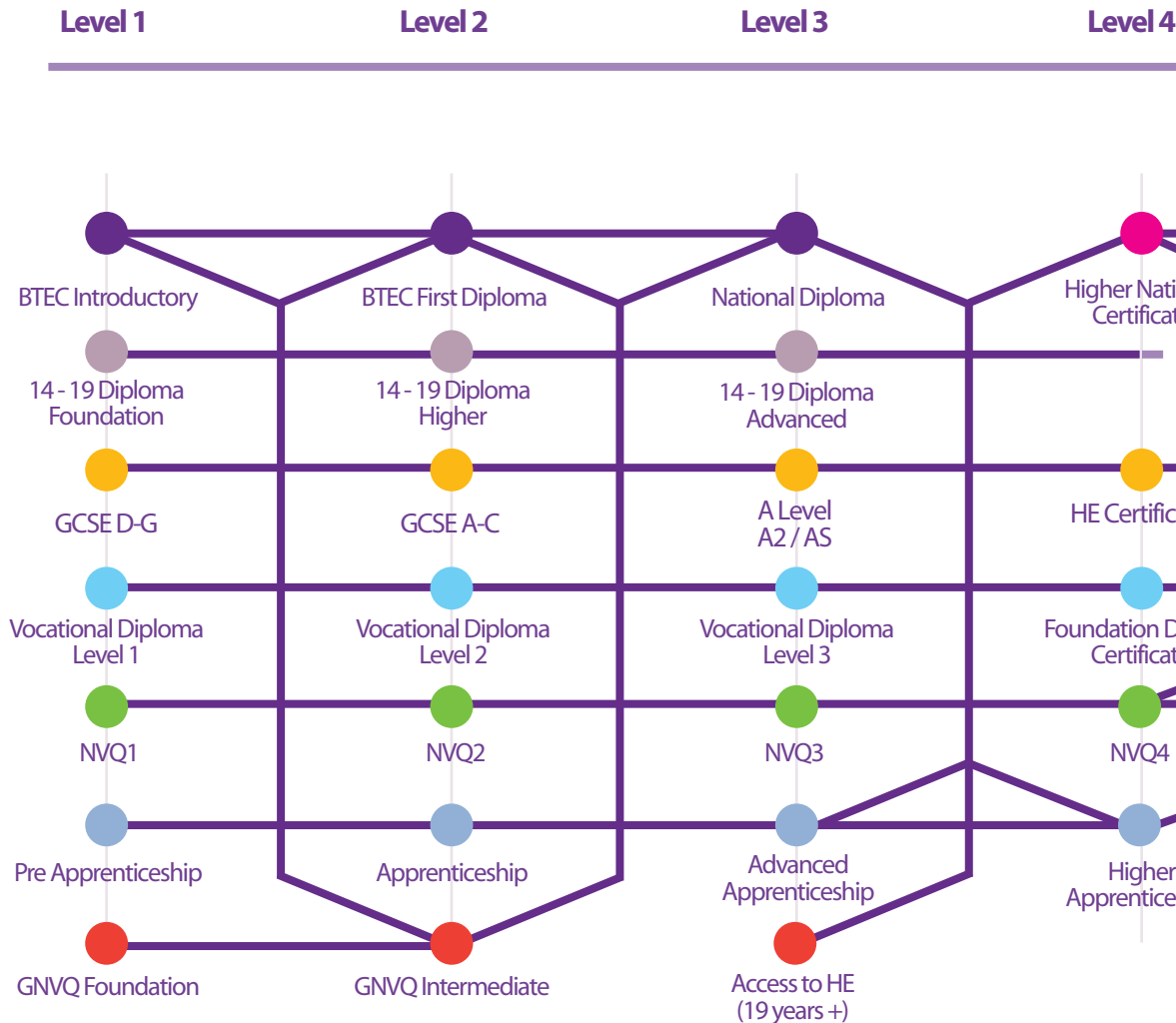
In addition to these qualifications above, HE and FE in England may offer short professional or continuing education courses across all levels.

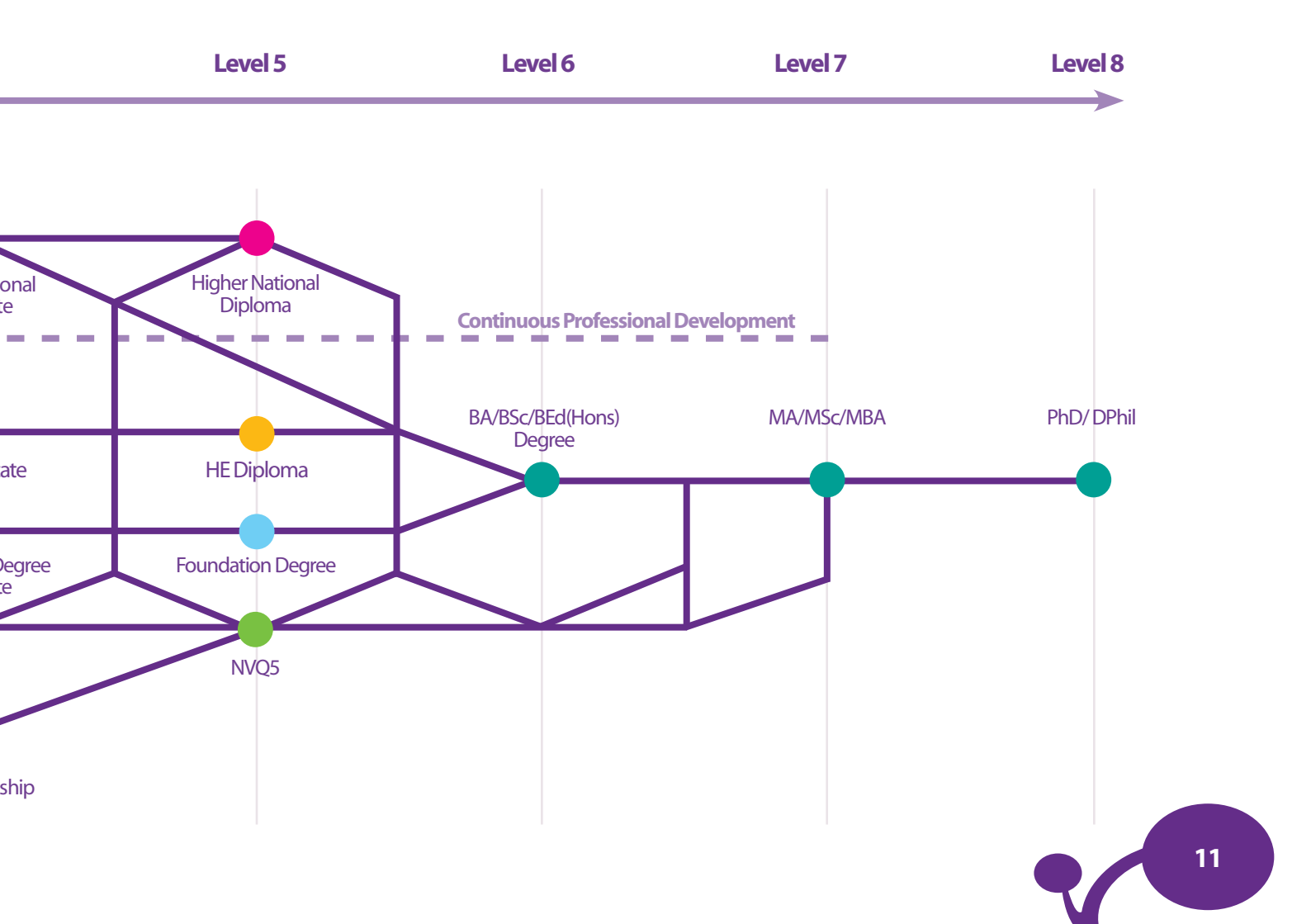
* Credit values vary according to qualification levels. A simple rule of thumb is that 10 credits = 100 hours of study, not all of which is necessarily in the classroom.

go to page 10 to see where you are and where you can progress

Your route into and through Higher Education

There is great flexibility within this framework. Your starting point will depend on your skills, experience and qualifications.





Level 5

Level 6

Level 7

Level 8

Continuous Professional Development

Higher National Diploma

HE Diploma

Foundation Degree

NVQ5

BA/BSc/BEd(Hons) Degree

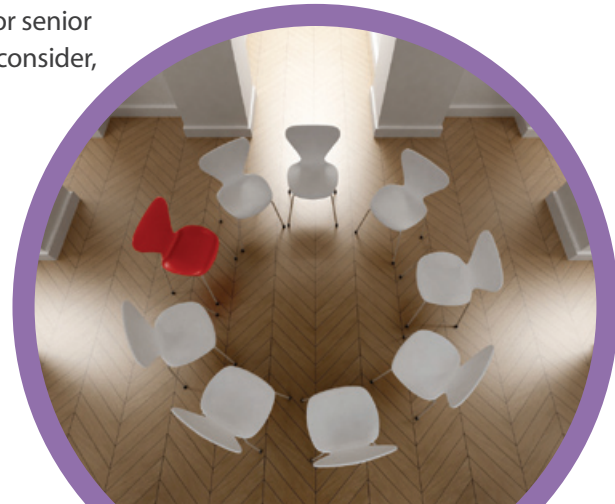
MA/MSc/MBA

PhD/DPhil

How much will it cost?

Several larger employers, like the NHS, rely heavily on the higher skills of graduates and pay for their employees to learn with a university. Such employers are integrated in the delivery of HE, and help create and develop new curriculum to meet their organisation's strategic needs. They see themselves as beneficiaries of HE, and value the knowledge and skills which higher education qualifications bring to their organisation. Such partnerships can link to research, placements, projects and other schemes.

Your organisation may wish to sponsor its employees. The cost of HE varies, depending on the length and level of a course, whether it is full or part-time, where it is delivered and to how many students. Time is an investment, both to complete the study required and apply new learning within the workplace. Courses vary in their length and structure, but a rule of thumb is that 10 credits is equivalent to 100 hours of study. It may be useful to have a workplace mentor; some institutions have a mentoring programme for students to take advantage of while they are studying. Support from a line manager or senior personnel is important, especially when there are work based projects to consider, such as a new marketing plan or technology implementation, and so the time required for these interventions needs also to be considered. Return on investment is difficult to measure in education, although the impact value of specific work based projects may be measured through setting objectives.



What if costs are an issue?

There may be local funding available. Various schemes like Train to Gain exist to help support businesses with training strategy development. If your organisation cannot directly fund or sponsor students as a group or cohort, there are sources of financial help for individual adult learners.

Student loans and related financial support

Adult students on HE courses may be eligible for loans and grants. Eligibility is linked to income. Support for HE learners with children or dependants is also available.

Bursaries

Non-repayable and often related to a specific sector, examples include dance and drama, teacher training and nursing awards.

Professional and Career Development Loans

These loans have to be repaid on course completion. The Government has increased number of loans available*, offering more generous terms, reduced headline interest rate and increased amounts available to a maximum of £10,000, helping more people progress into HE. Your employees may use this for study at college, university or via a private training provider. For more information call the CDL Information Line on 0800 585 505.

*New Opportunities - Fair Chances for the Future, January 2009.

Equivalent Level Qualifications

Under new changes, universities do not receive funding for UK/EU students studying at a level equivalent to or below that of a qualification they already hold. This does not apply to Foundation degrees, PGCEs or courses in medicine, nursing and social work.

A variety of websites exist to help you explore ways to finance HE:

www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance

www.studentfinanceengland.co.uk

www.studentsupportdirect.co.uk



For course costs, visit the university websites on page 3

Who can advise me about Higher Education?

What is IAG - Information, advice and guidance?

Information

Helping to explain what your learning and work options might be, information is provided in many ways, through printed materials (e.g. leaflets), audio-visual materials (e.g. DVDs or videos), computer software (on CD or via the internet) and/or verbal information to the user on a face-to-face basis or via the telephone or web-based service.

Advice

The provision of advice about learning and work, over and above information already accessed, is normally given on a one-to-one basis by a trained adviser, (face-to-face, over the phone or on-line). It may be that an explanation of some of the information provided is required, or how to access and use information, how to identify the need for, and location of, follow-on services, including career guidance.

Guidance

An in-depth interview or other activity conducted by a trained careers adviser which helps explore a range of options, to relate information to specific needs and circumstances, and to make decisions about career direction (progression in learning and work).

What help is available?

Specialists are available to help you and your employees access information and advice about:

- course choices and progression options
- the recognition of prior learning and experience
- professional skills updating
- the costs of study and the financial support that may be available

Is it free?

Information and advice is normally free to both employers and individuals. In-depth services such as psychometric and other career planning diagnostic assessments may be chargeable.



Who can advise my employees?

Keele University

01782 621111

undergraduate@acad.keele.ac.uk

Staffordshire University

Higher Education Shop

01782 292746

heshop@staffs.ac.uk

University of Wolverhampton

Higher Education Shop

01902 321032

heshop@wlv.ac.uk

Harper Adams University

Professional & Career

Development Services

01952 815324

shortcourses@harper-adams.ac.uk

Open University

0845 300 6090

general-enquiries@open.ac.uk

nextstep

A free careers advice service for anyone aged 20 or over.

08000 217 244

www.nextstepwestmidlands.org.uk

Staffordshire University Regional Federation (SURF)

01785 353517

surf@staffs.ac.uk

The SURF network comprises 9 colleges in Staffordshire & Shropshire which offer higher level courses including Foundation Degrees, year 0 and HNC/D

Other sources of free careers advice

www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk

On this website you can find lots of tools and guides to help you decide on your best route.

Call 0800 100 900 for personalised, one-to-one help through talking to a careers adviser.

learndirect - www.learndirect-advice.co.uk

This website provides careers information including over 700 job/career profiles, funding and childcare information together with an email advice facility. Includes a 10 minute skills and interests assessment.

Jobs 4 U (Occupations) - www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u

Jobs4u is a national occupational database which has introductory summaries and further, more detailed, information on over 800 jobs. The regularly updated database offers search facilities to give young people and adults ideas on careers that might suit them. It can be searched by subject, qualifications, salary information and interests.

What are Progression Agreements?

They are agreements that enable vocational learners to progress into and through a range of vocational higher education based on a set of agreed criteria and, in some cases activities. Most guarantee a place, others an interview.

What do they entail?

They involve the agreement of partners (e.g. a college and university, or work based learning provider and college) to undertake a number of activities to make progression for learners a possibility, including:

- Agreeing curriculum match, skills and prior knowledge requirements
- Agreeing any other conditions for guaranteed progression
- Communication between partners to enhance progression opportunities
- Communicating progression opportunities to learners e.g. via IAG

Where are Progression Agreements developed and what can they offer?

A good Progression Agreement is one that opens up opportunities for progression.

Some examples are:

- From existing qualifications into HE - especially where there is little history of certain types of learner progressing e.g. NVQ level 3, Advanced Apprentices
- Through HE - e.g. from shorter CPD into longer HE awards
- Between HE - e.g. from a Foundation Degree to a range of Honours top-ups
- Giving adult returning learners with certain skills and experience a Progression Agreement to assist them in entering HE
- Developing Progression Agreements from in-house company training
- Developing Progression Agreements from professional qualifications

Why do they exist?

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) considers them an integral part of the work of Lifelong Learning Networks.

Accrediting work based learning

Work-based learning (WBL) is not new. Adult learning has always occurred in the workplace with the support of professional and trade bodies. There have always been CPD programmes, delivered by training providers and universities, some accredited, some not, depending on the sector. Universities are now recognising the value of organisations' own people development programmes and accrediting them. They are also able to look at what already exists in the workplace and design awards around existing training. Assessment processes, university learning outcomes and quality assurance procedures are key to developing such awards, so a commitment from the organisation to invest in a group of learners is crucial.

"Stoke on Trent is a regeneration area in the West Midlands and we need staff, structures and teams in place to deliver regeneration projects. The Learning Laboratory programme focuses on partnership working and good practice. The LLN helped us to get accreditation at postgraduate level with Staffordshire University. The learners identified by North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership are focused on working together effectively and the course provides a broader understanding of regeneration so students will benefit from learning alongside colleagues who they will be working with in the future."

Conrad Parke

Head of Skills Development for Regeneration in the West Midlands, Regen WM

Negotiated learning frameworks

Universities have developed a variety of new negotiated frameworks to enhance the efficiency and expertise in current employment where research, project management or specialist technical skills might be required at level 4 or above. These contracts between a university and an organisation mean that a group of learners have agreed individual learning contracts, made up of core modules with additional options, selected by each individual from an approved list, as well as a negotiated work based project identified by the student and their line manager.



What are employers saying about HE?

The development of simpler, more flexible systems to recognise and accredit work-based learning is intended to improve the attraction of HE to your organisation. We hear from employers that more innovative, local HE courses will attract more employed adult learners. A recent research report, ***'Beyond Known Unknowns: a further exploration of the demand for higher level skills from businesses'*** published in January 2009 by independent think-tank CFE suggests that HE must do more.

James Kewin, Director of Skills and Innovation at CFE recently said:

"To penetrate the vocational and professional training markets many universities will have to make fundamental changes to the content and delivery of their provision. There is now an expectation that training can be tailored to the needs of an individual business and delivered at a time and place that is convenient to the employer. The challenge for universities is to develop a more flexible approach to delivery without compromising the quality of course content"

When asked about the Higher Education offer, and how important it is in relation to skills training, Colin Smith, Sales Director for Shropshire-based Müller Dairy (UK) Limited was clear:

"Absolutely skills first," he said, "but we don't know enough yet about how universities have changed and what HE has to offer. Accreditation or credits towards certificates or degrees may be of great value to some of our employees."

Colin continued: *"We should look at the HE offer, at how creative HE is becoming and at what the benefits of HE might be for our employees and business as a whole."*

Frequently Asked Questions by Employees

What is Work Based Learning (WBL) in HE?

Learning gained from previous work experiences and the application of new learning e.g. work based project(s) related to a current role.

Can I study at university without A levels?

Our universities and colleges always consider applicants with other qualifications, and most have a process to help mature students with few qualifications. If you want to study at postgraduate level, and don't have a first degree, evidence of experience may suffice.

What is APL or APEL?

Accreditation of Prior Learning is the process for assessing and then recognising prior learning. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning is credit given to students for work experience in previous and/ or current role(s). If achieved outside education or training systems, the learning is assessed and given credit where applicable.

How much credit will I get for my professional qualifications and / or experience?

Each university has their own process and will ask you to provide written evidence of qualifications and experience, to assess them for their equivalent academic credit value. If qualifications are more than five years old you may be asked to demonstrate current knowledge and application of this learning since acquiring them.

What is academic credit?

Universities need to recognise both the size and the difficulty of learning. The number of credits determines the size and the level of the credits determines the difficulty. See pages 8 & 9 for more information.

How long will an HE programme take?

It depends on the qualification. Credit gained for prior learning could reduce the length of your programme. New programmes and innovative delivery methods are being developed with employers for employees so it's best to ask about each particular course. See pages 8 & 9 for a guide.

What if I don't want to commit to a whole programme?

Many universities have short course provision or CPD programmes which you can study by taking one or more accredited modules in a particular subject to meet a specific personal development need. You can then use this credit to progress onto a full qualification at a later date.

What support will I get from the university once I start a programme?

Each student is allocated a support tutor. Other tutors work with you on specific modules. You also get learning materials, resource packs and a course handbook that explains what you need. Students and tutors communicate by phone, e-mail or via an online 'virtual learning environment' (VLE). You will get a university e-mail account which the university uses to communicate information and an IT centre and library on campus to access information.

What happens if my circumstances alter and I need to change my programme?

If your circumstances change you have the option of re-negotiating your programme or extending your course length.

Will I have to take any time away from work?

You can complete an entire degree without attending university, through distance learning. However, depending on course structure and how you work, you may have to attend campus occasionally. When working full or part time, study time may eat into your personal time. Discuss study leave with your employer should you need to. Consider setting aside time in a working day for the application of work based elements of your learning.



With thanks to our LLN partners for providing information and our other contributors:

HEFCE - www.hefce.ac.uk

CFE - www.cfe.org.uk

Higher York LLN - www.higheryork.org

Connexions - www.connexions-direct.com

RegenWM - www.regenwm.org

Müller Dairy (UK) Ltd - www.muller.co.uk

Designed by Smart Ideas - www.smartideas.co.uk