

Higher Level Skills Workshop Activity

- **What are the drivers for employer engagement?**
- **What are the barriers and issues that need to be considered?**
- **Future developments.**

Work in small groups (5-10 people).

Write outcomes of discussions onto paper provided.

Nominate one person to provide brief feedback from the group.

Feedback from the groups follows:

GROUP 1

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT DRIVERS

- Business need: eg “employee engagement” Future growth
- Academic credibility – there may be other reasons underneath this (eg selling course to employees)
- Relevance
- FE or HE
- Worried about staff moving on once “upskilled” – especially small businesses
- Specific competencies – need very carefully tailored programmes – “Bespoke”
- Negotiation – maybe they don’t know what they want and/or need
- Expediency – “want it now”
- Learning, thinking, problem solving, independence – where to FDs stand?
- COST + PRICING – cost benefit analysis
- Providers to “speak their language” – translation from “Education speak” to “business speak”

BARRIERS/ISSUES

- Co-ordination
- Do employers want to be involved in (general) curriculum development?
- What problems does this raise?
- Different motivators for graduate and non-graduate employees.
- Business improvement techniques – leading to things like staff retention, less sick leave, ... etc.
- Differences between LEs and SMEs – providers need to be aware.
- Employers have got to see what will improve by running the course.
- Employees have also got to see what is in it for them as they are the ones who have to engage.
- Get the Union involved too.

GROUP 2

BARRIERS/ISSUES

- Benefits of HE difficult to articulate (impact)
- Short term outlook.
- Senior managers do/don't have vision to build learning into organisations
- HE language
- Project overload – sustaining interest
- Perception of HE – expensive/inappropriate/inflexible
- Brokerage – lack of understanding of HE
- Practical issues – eg time, venue, pattern of delivery

DRIVERS

- HEI
 - Higher ambitions
 - Skills Strategy (BIS)
 - Diversity/WP
 - Reduced funded student numbers/capped.
 - Growth in co-funded numbers
- Employers
 - Quality/regulation
 - Focus on outcomes
 - Performance indicators
 - Efficiency/reduced funding/budgets (right first time)
 - Competition/commissioning
 - Staff retention – HR strategy

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- More shell frameworks?
- Right modes and delivery for each route
- Linking up frameworks, professional body qualification standard, etc
- Recognition for employers with good practices
- Assessment (various methods of assessing in workplace) including APEL.

GROUP 3

KEY DRIVERS

Institutions

- New courses to meet employer needs
- Disseminate quality provision of HLS
- Delivery in the workplace
- Relationship with employers
- Future research skill needs
- Partnership building
- Organic contact to build into future innovations, collaboration.
- Joined up thinking across departments/faculties
- Marketing/dissemination of work with employers
- Case studies – tell the story
- Go out and meet employers
- Centralisation of information across institutions – sharing of what is happening across HE in working with employers.

Employers

- Business support
- Professionalism
- Application of theory to practice
- Motivated workforce
- Engagement with clients
- Bite size chunks of learning/training
- HLS workforce
- Enriching employees, building loyalty
- Promotion internally due to training/knowledge/development.

BARRIERS

Institutions

- Academic level of employees
- S4L needs
- No current modules/courses to meet specific employer needs? At some levels of need.

Employers

- Cost of course
- Availability of staff
- Risk of up-skilling – go somewhere else!
- Cost of lost time to the business.

GROUP 3 (continued)

ISSUES

Institutions

- Academic content
- Basic building blocks of education
- Building contacts with employers
- Redundancies/company going bust
- SMEs – finding them to support
- Time to build relationships
- Employer networks – sharing of success

Employers

- May not know the skills level of own staff or qualification
- Know what they really need
- Do they know what training is available?
- SMEs – training needs.

FUTURE

Sharing of knowledge and resources across Education

GROUP 4

DRIVERS

- Funding and sourcing innovative programmes to connect with business – CPD
- Raising the profile of the profession
- Developing a new style of workforce – status, recognition, employee demand
- Employer voice – valued

BARRIERS

- Restricted job opportunities in certain sectors
- Expectations not met – response time
- Lack of industry understanding
- Work life balance – support from partners/family and employer
- Funding
- Location
- Delivery – silo working
- Language – employer friendly
- Non-flexible
- Restrictive HEI practices
- Raising organisational hopes/expectations.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- Bite sized programmes
- Partnership working – Sector Skills, Business Link, HEIs, Employers, Private Training Providers
- Culture Change – Employers to fund training.

GROUP 5 - DRIVERS

- Learner focussed
- Life Skills – Communication, Team Working, etc
- Right staff for the right role
- Matching needs requirements
- Retention
- Productivity
- Individual motivations and goals
- “The Only Game in Town”
- Improving credibility – eg call centres
- Self Esteem
- Recognition and Promotion
- Employee satisfaction and PPD
- For HEIs – Refreshing theory with current practice
- Third Stream Agenda
- Widening Participation

BARRIERS/ISSUES

- Common language
- Time = Money
- HEIs too slow at delivering/developing
- Investment from Employers
- Perceived benefit of HE opposed to private training
- Distinction between education and training
- Responsiveness
- Cycle of change
- Non-transferability
- Perceived Roles and Support Activity
- Delivery Models
- Interpretation of “work based” learning
- Assessment Strategies
- Focus is on “Skills” so HE needs to respond appropriately.
- Lack of collaboration

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- Collaborative working
- Employers need to be convinced of the value of investment – case studies, eg numeric value of benefit from British Gas
- Best support solutions for companies – individual response
- Lobbying for cloud computing/broadband, etc, to improve access and flexibility.
- Computer literate vs gadget literate.

GROUP 6

Are Higher Level Skills Interventions the only solutions?

Quality service builds loyalty – people to people vs business to business

Where are the enlightened employers? – what does this mean? Are providers enlightened employers?

Business performance improvement – the shared language

Service level agreements support engagement

The answer is yes – what is the question?

- West Yorkshire Co-operative
- Yorkshire and Humberside Co-operative
- Solutions providers in collaboration not competition
- Make the pie bigger! – between learners/institutions/practitioners

Networking leading to meaningful conversations

Cost models for delivery – are they fit for purpose?

Clarity of what is on offer or can be offered to support brokers/employers.