



**A report on approaches to the 'Recognition'
of employer based training within the
EBTA Community of Practice**

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Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Introduction and Background to the Review	4
3. Aims and Intentions of the Review	6
4. Methodology	8
5. The Findings	9
1. Experiences of having considered ‘recognition’ as an option	9
2. Reasons for deciding not to offer ‘recognition’	10
3. An example of a University with direct experience of ‘recognition’	11
6. Discussion of the Key Issues and Challenges	14
1. Concerns of reputational risk.....	14
2. Uncertainty about processes and procedures.....	16
3. Absence of a market?	166
4. An example of a programme from outside the sector	177
5. The way forward.....	18
7. Recommendations	19
8. Conclusions	200
9. Appendices	21
Appendix 1 – The EBTA Ladder of Accreditation: Descriptors.....	21
Appendix 2 – The EBTA Community of Practice Membership September 2010.....	233
Appendix 3 – Universities contacted for participation in this review	244
Appendix 4 – Semi-structured interview (format followed and questions).....	255
References	256

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a study into the approach and practice of UK universities of offering services to external partners in endorsement or kite marking, which is hereafter referred to mostly as 'recognition' (the reasons for naming the activity 'recognition' are given in section 2 below). The report is intended to assist in documenting the legacy of EBTA, and to enable some of the accumulated knowledge from the delivery of the EBTA service to be made available to a broader public. EBTA has pioneered many innovative offers in the field of employer engagement and this report captures one aspect of these.

The findings in the report are based on a combination of consultations with stakeholders and key individuals, the analysis of current literature, reviews of earlier research, and assessment of the opportunities for and the impact of universities offering 'recognition'.

It is clear from the consultations undertaken that although 'recognition' is a much underutilised approach (only a very small number of universities were found to have considered it and even less to have followed this through) it nevertheless represents a service which external partners may welcome, if it were to become more widely available. Indeed one of the recommendations of this report is that further information should be sought on the potential demand from external partners.

The report discusses the general accreditation services which currently represent the mainstream of activities that universities offer to external partners in this area and seeks to define and differentiate 'recognition'; and how it could be treated in a similar manner and become a precursor to full accreditation. Indeed the EBTA Ladder of Accreditation shows 'recognition' as appearing on the first rung of its activities.

The research has found that a small number of universities has experimented with 'recognition' and then rejected it and their reasons can be summarised as:

- The approaches made by external partners were not often ones that the universities found hugely attractive or employer engagement staff found that they could not convince senior management of the benefits of a possible partnership
- Existing processes for handling these requests were very similar to full accreditation services so the costs were high, and other alternative approaches were felt to be lacking.

Despite this there was some evidence of demand (albeit small) and there were views expressed that if the approach had been from an external partner with a high quality reputation, then the

results may have been different. Of those universities who rejected the idea of 'recognition' outright their major concerns were of reputational risk. Despite these findings one university has made a small success of offering 'recognition' and this report documents fully how this has been achieved with accompanying case studies (see section 5.3 below).

Following a discussion of some of the key issues and challenges the report concludes that it is nevertheless important not to reject 'recognition' outright particularly in the current climate facing universities and their employer engagement activities, as it may be necessary in the future to become considerably more flexible, adaptable and *employer focussed*. Activities such as 'recognition' may then offer more readily available means of broadening the reach of universities in ways in which external partners find attractive and accessible, and this could lead to increasingly successful and more extended engagements that are mutually beneficial.

2. Introduction and Background to the Review

This report describes a review carried out in March and April of 2011 to map the approaches, experiences, and involvement of universities in the EBTA Community of Practice in 'recognising' the delivery of training and development programmes of external organisations (programmes in which the University was *not* an active partner through co-delivery, nor were they engaged in validating or accrediting any outcomes). The review was undertaken as one strand of the *fdf* work plan from October 2010 to July 2011 and was one of a number of projects aimed at capturing the tacit knowledge and experience of EBTA and how it works. The term 'recognition' has a specific meaning in this context and would normally be called kite marking or endorsement, but as there was already an endorsement scheme running within *fdf* in association with some of the Sector Skills Councils, it was decided that 'recognition' would be a more suitable term to use for this review (these terms are however interchangeable).

'Recognition' was described to the universities who were contacted during the review as a way in which they might wish to / or have already established, a working relationship with an external partner that did not involve the more conventional approach of accreditation. 'Recognition' would however confer acceptance that a university had subjected an external programme to a level of scrutiny and made a decision that the applicant was delivering this programme at a higher education level, the programme could then be given some form of approval (what this might mean in practice was left open for discussion with the universities during the review). When EBTA was originally created it was envisaged that there were undoubtedly different forms of accreditation in existence and that these would very likely be the most problematic part of the process for EBTA consultants to describe to external partners such as employers. It was accepted that the internal

workings of universities and the educational terms they use to describe their processes would be unfamiliar to most employers, so EBTA endeavoured to create definitions of these terms and what they meant (see below). It was also recognised that the QA definitions and processes relating to ‘accreditation’ vary enormously across the HEI sector and are often complex and do not ideally relate to work with employers.

In order to make its work more transparent key individuals within EBTA, especially Ken Phillips the EBTA Manager and other colleagues, were instrumental in creating what became known as the EBTA ‘Ladder of Accreditation’ which described the potential forms that accreditation might take and was originally based on consultations and meetings with Quality Assurance managers across 10 HEIs in the North West region. This lists seven forms of potential accreditation:

The EBTA Ladder of Accreditation (summary)

1. Approval for training to be recognised for a university qualification. (e.g. University Certificate, Foundation Degree, Postgraduate Diploma)
2. Credit Recognition (Specific Credits)*
3. Credit Recognition (General Credits)*
4. Learning Through Work/CPD/Shell Awards*
5. Articulation Agreements
6. Accreditation of Prior (Experience and) Learning (APL or APEL)
7. Kite Marking or Endorsement

(*These are the recommended forms of accreditation for EBTA purposes. See Appendix 1 for a full version of the ladder.)

Level seven is called kite marking or endorsement and this is the level which has been focussed on for this review. In the early days of EBTA it was believed that this level was being used in practice although it was thought to be less attractive to external partners as it did not include arrangements for learner progression. The underlying assumption was that learners and employers would generally approach a university wanting qualifications (hence the emphasis on validation and accreditation) an option which would involve significantly more risk than activities lower down the ladder, such as kite marking. With hindsight the assumption that kite marking or

'recognition' / endorsement widely exists within the Community of Practice has not been found to be correct, and individual and institutional perceptions of the risks involved in different types of accreditation has been found to be much more complex, but this discussion will be returned to later in this report.

For the purposes of this review, 'recognition' can be summarised as the following (with acknowledgement to the University of Hertfordshire):

- The quality and standards of the provision are seen as being equivalent to HE generally
- It usually applies to specific provision only (i.e. a particular programme) and not the third party provider / delivering organisation
- There is no credit or award given and no particular HE level is implied
- It is not collaborative provision and no students are registered with the university
- The third party provider is assessed and rigorously checked by the university
- The provider is allowed to use the university's logo and a form of words which indicates that there is an association (and specifically what this means)
- A formal partnership will be created and will be reviewed (very likely annually)
- The costs involved may be similar to those charged for standard accreditation processes.

3. Aims and Intentions of the Review

Since the beginning of the EBTA process the validation and accreditation of external programmes has been the primary offer to employers (as shown in the table above in items one to four) and this has been very successful throughout a number of engagements for several years.¹ However a limited number of approaches to EBTA have not been taken further because the external partner withdrew on realising the extent of the commitment required and the likely costs being charged, and in the majority of cases it would appear that other possible options from lower down the Ladder of Accreditation were also not being offered, either because the universities involved were not aware of their existence, had too little experience of them or no interest in making them available. In most circumstances the options from the Ladder that have been explored the most and adopted are numbers one to four, plus the accreditation of prior experiential learning, APEL, with some evidence of a very limited use of number five - articulation agreements. Generally kite marking / 'recognition' is still relatively unknown and it is possible that no references were made by EBTA consultants to it in any of the EBTA engagements², nor was it proposed by the universities or requested by external partners. What is unknown now is whether if it had been on offer, it might have attracted more interest.

In December 2010 as EBTA prepared a final work plan for 2011, it was decided that on this basis perhaps kite marking or 'recognition' had been somewhat overlooked and that there should be an exploration at least of the current understanding of it, its usage and what the processes associated with it might be within the EBTA Community of Practice (COP). (See Appendix 2 for a list of Universities in the COP.) This interest had been prompted in part by an enquiry from Dr Frank Haddleton, the Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the University of Hertfordshire, who in October 2010 had asked EBTA what it knew of kite marking and its usage. This was partly due to enquiries the University of Hertfordshire had already received where non-credit rated provision was being requested by external partners and also due to Dr Haddleton's recent authorship of a chapter of a Higher Education Academy publication, '*Quality and Responding to Employer Needs: Summary Report of Nine Demonstrator Projects*' (Tallantyre 2010) in association with the QAA and *fdf*.³ Kite marking was specifically referred to in Chapter 2, '*Maintaining HE Standards in accredited in-company training*'⁴, where it was recognised that a company may prefer a kite mark as opposed to credit but that:

'to date very few awarding institutions have responded to this demand, possibly because it does not attract HEFCE co-funding'

and because

*'the processes associated with the confirmation of a 'kite mark' or 'endorsement' would be very different to those associated with the approval of credit or a named award. There may be fewer quality assurance implications with this route, but reputational implications mean that approval processes and legal agreements are still important.'*⁵

It was decided to investigate further these assumptions and the ensuing work plan included:

- Researching an evidence base of practice that demonstrates the effectiveness of the methodology
- Setting out the principles and methodology to enable HEIs to endorse employer training
- Developing an enhanced methodology and resources that will provide opportunities for streamlining accreditation processes and adding to cost-effectiveness
- Trialling processes of endorsement as a potential extension of the EBTA service to a wider community of employers and training providers.

A number of these areas above are documented in this report.

4. Methodology

The first phase of the review involved contacting the members of the COP who replied to Dr Haddleton's original enquiry in October 2010, this was a very small number of about four universities and although the majority expressed an interest in the process at the time they also said that they had not taken the idea of 'recognition' any further. The first activity was therefore to contact them individually explaining the purpose and aims of the review and to explore their initial responses to 'recognition'. This led to several developments, the first of which was that through an iterative process a set of semi-structured interview questions were developed which were then used in the second stage. This became a mapping exercise to capture interest from more members of the COP as during discussions other universities were mentioned and it was decided to include them as well in the research. In the end the original group of four or five universities was extended to ten and all of the following HEIs were approached (see Appendix 3 for further information):

- University of Bradford
- Bournemouth University
- University of Central Lancashire
- University of Chester
- University of Derby
- University of Hertfordshire
- University of Leicester
- Middlesex University
- The Open University
- The University of the West of England

Altogether nine of the above institutions were interviewed by telephone using the semi-structured interview format (see Appendix 4) and one University was visited for a longer discussion with the Principal Assistant Registrar. A case study was finally developed with the one institution which had direct experience of 'recognition'.

The review also included desk based research examining university prospectuses aimed at employers and other external partners and published reports intended to capture the current experiences of Universities delivering employer provision.

This review and the research carried out were in the main exploratory and qualitative and any results should be viewed with this in mind. The focus was also only on the EBTA community of practice and from a limited number of respondents who were selectively chosen to participate.

5. The Findings

Summaries of the discussions from all the universities that participated are described here.

1. Experiences of having considered 'recognition' as an option

Two of the HEIs interviewed (the University of Hertfordshire and the University of Central Lancashire) had seriously considered offering 'recognition' as an option to external partners largely because they had been approached by interested parties and this had prompted their own interest in 'recognition' as a way forward. A further university had been approached (the University of Bradford) but preferred to offer established options that were more sustainable. One of the universities was still considering offering 'recognition' and had not yet rejected the option outright (although in the short term management had decided not to take it forward) but the other two have now decided formally not to become engaged in this activity. The following points are a combination of the experiences of all three:

- The third party organisations making the approaches tended to be small and medium sized companies or training providers. Generally they were adamant that they wanted 'recognition' and not another service that the university could offer
- It was either known or assumed by the university that the organisation wished to enhance its reputation through an association with the HEI
- There was an appreciation in two of the HEIs that there was very likely untapped demand for the 'recognition' approach, as *'employers don't understand credits and they don't want the hassle of assessment'*
- Some of the provision under consideration would not really have been suitable for validation or accreditation either because it was modular and very 'bite sized', varied in the type of outcomes being achieved and the time involved was variable. Significant changes would also have been necessary for any accreditation to have been successful and both the HEI and the company came to see this as onerous. Nevertheless in general the providers were recognised as being professional organisations that were delivering programmes of high quality, and this was at higher levels
- The processes needed to achieve 'recognition' were often seen as being very similar to those required for conventional accreditation but when making these comparisons the universities became concerned about the absence of future progression options for learners
- It was believed that in one or two instances better progress would have been made if there had been suitable processes available to deal with 'recognition' and if this had been the case then fruitful and mutually beneficial partnerships could have been embarked upon. However,

it was often the case that negotiations were both frowned upon by the university management and rejected due to the perceived risks or they floundered early on after becoming 'lost' in finding a suitable way forward

- One alternative that HEIs mentioned was to have given a 'certificate of attendance' but no cases were forthcoming on this basis
- In one instance where the university already had a long standing partnership with a large and reputable company, something akin to 'recognition' might have been considered if it had been requested.

2. Reasons for deciding not to offer 'recognition'

In most instances the remaining universities had either never to their knowledge been approached for kite marking or 'recognition' and generally regarded it as a high risk activity. Many felt they had other suitable processes already in existence to offer to external partners that they had developed over time which they actively promoted and had no wish to embark on anything new at this particular time. These processes include SHELL frameworks or APEL which can be very well established. For example the University of the West of England (UWE) states on its website that: *'the framework will act as a shell within which specific pieces of accredited higher learning can be located and accumulated leading to defined higher education awards'*.⁶ Most faculties at UWE now use the Shell framework and the university sees itself very much as the *'partnership university'*. The Open University is slightly different as it operates its own credit rating system⁷ and deals mainly with professional bodies. A number of other schemes exist elsewhere in the EBTA community of practice or are in development, for example at the University of Leicester where they are currently discussing accepting experience in professional competence that is already badged by a professional institute in order to give entry to particular programmes.

The following points capture the main reasons why the HEIs interviewed do not or will not be offering 'recognition' and these are developed further in section five of this report where there is a discussion of the key issues:

- It is perceived as high risk as there is no real control over the university brand
- The lack of rigorous and sustainable processes was seen as an issue; if processes usually undertaken for accreditation were the only ones available then the preference of management was strongly in favour of offering these and nothing else
- As implied, the existing accreditation options which are tried and tested and which give robust and sustainable progression routes for learners are favoured (e.g. Shell frameworks/ CPD awards/APEL)

- In a number of instances the universities believed that no approaches had ever been made by external partners nor were they being actively sought by the university for this type of activity
- There was generally uncertainty over the costs that would be incurred and what to charge for these services
- QA considerations and concerns were paramount in a number of cases and included the need to maintain standards and ensure appropriate outcomes.

3. An example of a University with direct experience of ‘recognition’

Although some respondents were vaguely aware that ‘recognition’ might exist in other HEIs and were happy to make suggestions of which ones, this review was only able to establish that one university had a process for the activity and was actively engaged in carrying it out. The University of Chester was recommended by at least two interviewees and does indeed have an arrangement which it refers to as the ‘*accreditation of training delivered by external organisations*’. The procedure has been in existence since 2005 and was developed and is managed by Colin Taylerson, the Principal Assistant Registrar for Partnerships and Academic Strategic Support. The information here is based on a telephone interview and a visit made to the university and full acknowledgement and thanks are given for this information.

The University of Chester has an arrangement called ‘accreditation’ whereby it recognises a small number of organisations’ training and development programmes after a process of quality checks and improvements. The scheme is mainly being used for applied and vocational training programmes which are offered outside the normal academic infrastructure but which nevertheless are deemed to have generic HE level equivalence. On completing a prescribed process, the organisation delivering the training is allowed to use Chester’s name in their marketing activities. Several years ago the University was approached by providers who did not want curriculum validation but who wanted university *recognition* instead, so the process was created and providers who become recognised or ‘accredited’ are entitled to use: ‘this programme is accredited by the University of Chester’ on their headed note paper. Formal assessment is not normally a requirement on these programmes, by the provider or by the University. The provider will not be requested to deliver anything differently but they are offered advice, which rigorously probes and tests the delivery and the learning outcomes of a programme. As a result of this the University will usually ask that providers accept a number of recommended actions to improve their delivery and they may be asked to follow extra procedures. There have been about eight clients so far who have taken this route and there are potentially another two or three interested in the current academic year (2010-2011).

The following are the steps taken by the university in the process described above:

- An approach would normally come by word of mouth as the University does not promote the arrangement or actively seek clients. Often a query will come from academics or other professional connections or more often from the Business Development team. The first step is to explain what is involved and to explore with the client the various options available to them, this includes an explanation of full 'accreditation' in the conventional sense, validation and the option under discussion which is effectively 'recognition' or endorsement
- The case is then presented to senior management representatives who form the University's Curriculum Advisory Group who would then research the organisation thoroughly to establish its aims, reputation, and financial situation (similar to other investigations covering more formal accreditation arrangements)
- If the current proposed University costs are acceptable then discussions are continued. The arrangement once reached with an organisation, is planned to last for five years. The charge may be similar to full 'accreditation' but usually a 'recognition' approach is preferred by the client as it is less involved and is better at meeting their needs
- The early stages of the initial approach and discussions are often achieved within three to four weeks, although there may then be a wait for the Curriculum Advisory Group to meet; meetings are held monthly. Approval in principle, once given, is for making further investigations. In most cases, the programmes are specific skills training and not knowledge or subject based
- The training deliverer is asked for all relevant information to enable the University to consider its case; this includes programme information, training needs analyses, workbooks, learning support, the backgrounds of trainers/tutors, evidence of learning outcomes, methods of quality control etc. The University has several pages of guidance which it makes available to organisations to inform their submissions, so that the University can then take a view on the quality and depth of the delivery. There may be visits to the provider or they may visit the University
- Subsequently a bespoke panel is pulled together from academic and administrative staff to consider submissions from the client. Provisional acceptance may be given with recommendations for improvements with conditions, and eventually a revised programme will be recognised. The delivering organisation receives a letter of confirmation from the University and every year is expected to submit an annual report detailing its activities and giving updates and notification of any changes
- An agreement will then be signed after the Quality and Standards Committee has met and given it their approval. The whole process can take up to four months

- The training deliverers are generally looking for academic 'acceptance' and recognition, either because this is something which their markets value, their learners or both. Often the deliverers will have academic backgrounds themselves and may work closely with the University in other areas (e.g. animal behaviour). The words which can be used on any marketing activities are determined by the University's marketing department and any agreement document is signed by the Vice Chancellor and the most senior authority within the company. Annexes to this document specify that only the courses/programmes agreed and checked by the University may be referred to
- In theory learners may in the future come to the university and request APEL but this is not tracked or monitored as it is not offered in any formal sense. In fact clients either do not request this or with the odd exception, they are already training people who have university level qualifications. Effectively, learners could move through onto WBL at Chester but this has not happened in any large numbers.

Case study: The University of Chester

Examples of organisations and programmes...

- An organisation which trains the trainers of sniffer dogs for forensic and drugs work for the police and armed forces. The programme is for handlers working with highly trained dogs and being able to direct them and 'read' their behaviours. An in depth understanding of animal behaviours is covered
- A company made up of animal behaviourists/scientists who previously worked for a large pharmaceuticals company and then went independent. Again animal behavioural work; technicians working with laboratory animals
- Running family group conferences for family reconciliation; namely a process of mediation for working with the courts and families separating through divorce, specifically to determine appropriate outcomes for children. In this context the course offers 50% APEL for a post graduate certificate at Chester and is therefore the exception to other programmes so far
- Personal and business coaching skills. A London company using coaching for 1:1's and in-house training and development, the company also works internationally

A few new clients are being considered in 2011/12, among others a company specialising in the training of assessors of compliance with food safety requirements for restaurant and food preparation staff.

6. Discussion of the Key Issues and Challenges

Universities have been involved for many years in working with employers through research, knowledge transfer, placements and internships and more recently co-creating and delivering curricula often involving work-based learning (WBL) but the provision of bespoke programmes, the development of very small credit bearing learning opportunities and the accreditation of prior experiential learning is still being explored for its potential. It is also very clear that although the existence of employer responsive provision is well established it is nevertheless a relatively small part of a university's activities. In the discussions and reports which describe employer responsive provision the dominant mode of operation is very clearly conventional accreditation as accreditation is one of the primary functions of a university; all its systems and procedures are focussed on awarding qualifications and credit to individuals. Alternative approaches such as the ones being discussed here are generally only mentioned in passing, and although both the recent QAA publication *'Employer-responsive provision survey: a reflective report'*⁸ and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) report⁹ mention the *'recognition of in-house training'* or kite marking they do not expand on it, and do not offer any examples of it being used in practice.

Dr Frank Haddleton identified kite marking as an area meriting further research and described it as:

*'where the awarding institution acknowledges that the training is at HE level but does not attach a level or credit-rating or award to that training...'*¹⁰

It is also referred to be as being *'very different'*.¹¹ He also states that there might be fewer quality assurance implications with this route but that reputational risks may mean that the approval processes and legalities are virtually the same. Not all of these points were confirmed by this review and what follows is a summary of the key issues, in order of importance, which were raised by respondents and explored with them during the interviews.

1. Concerns of reputational risk

Of the few universities that had considered offering 'recognition' the overwhelming majority had decided not to go ahead on the grounds of a risk to their reputations. Universities generally are the standard bearers of high quality, robust, higher level provision which is widely respected for following procedures which demonstrate rigour and depth of assessment; all a university's activities are subject to these requirements and their systems reflect this. Clearly fulfilling very high standards is absolutely necessary and must be upheld and the existence of the QAA is helpful in this respect. What is of interest here is that during this review discoveries were made about the

context in which reputational risk became a consideration and how the perception of the *possible risks* also differed depending on who was being approached in the university hierarchy.

Generally the external organisations that had approached the universities in question (the universities that had decided *against* offering 'recognition') were not well known to them (with the odd exception), and they tended to be relatively small or medium sized organisations which the universities genuinely felt did not have a similar reputation to themselves. It was clear that endorsing or 'recognising' provision in this situation would mainly be of benefit to the external organisation and that they wanted it primarily for marketing purposes; an association with a university would be used to enhance their reputation but in doing so this carried the risk of diminishing that of the university. A number of approaches were therefore being turned down because the partnership was not welcomed. In a small number of cases this had proved frustrating to the workforce development and business engagement staff of the university as they felt they did know the external organisation and believed that the fears of management were unfounded. Nevertheless they could see this from both sides and were prepared to accept current decisions although sometimes they also hoped that these might be different in the future.

It was also clear that the universities were receiving approaches from interested parties but they themselves were not seeking out partnerships with key organisations / companies who were attractive to them and then considering what they could offer as a university if the potential partner did not want full accreditation. This is a generalisation only being made in this context, as clearly all universities will have working partnerships with a large number of external organisations for a variety of reasons.

When individuals were asked what they thought the outcome might have been if an approach had been made from another type of organisation completely, one which was of a suitable reputation, possibly a large employer well known and respected for its training and development and one which may have already been delivering very high quality provision, the answers were somewhat different. It was thought that in this situation if the employer wanted 'recognition' the request would have been taken more seriously. Indeed one or two respondents could think of existing partnerships of this kind where the possibility could even be just around the corner.

In the light of this, it would appear that concerns of reputational risk are understandably higher in situations in which senior management are approached about external partners of whom they are unsure and that if 'recognition' was seen as enhancing a university's reputation rather than potentially diminishing it, then the final decision may be very different.

2. Uncertainty about processes and procedures

Although the EBTA Ladder includes kite marking or endorsement and places it firmly within the spectrum of accreditation, most people interviewed regarded it differently and therefore outside the normal range of their activity. The experience of the majority was in dealing with the validation and accreditation of assessed programmes, which included making decisions about learning outcomes and methods of assessment and then taking external programmes through the usual quality assurance processes. This would normally involve academic scrutiny, formal planning meetings, the production of the relevant documentation, the convening of an approvals panel, written reports, conditions to be met and then validation with the subsequent credit being agreed (in addition to any quality enhancement advice which may have preceded this). Costs for this vary from one university to another but they are often fairly considerable and may include an upfront fee followed by a student related element.

It was largely believed that employers and other partners are only willing to pay these costs when they see accredited qualifications at the end of the process and there was widespread concern that 'recognition' might cost almost the same but deliver a less robust outcome. Indeed at one university where a written proposal had been produced for the approval and monitoring by senior management of 'recognition' (called endorsement) it was stated that: *'endorsement mirrors the process for external accreditation partnerships'* (thereby demanding the same time and effort), and this assumption was not uncommon. The idea of using a 'light touch' in this situation was seen as inappropriate by the majority of respondents as they were very concerned about the use of the university's branding and the work which might be needed to safeguard this. Starting from this premise of not reducing any processes or costs, respondents were very quick to query who might pay for such a service and why.

If 'recognition' continues to be seen as very different and if it therefore requires a completely separate approach, then again this represents a problem as:

'we're not geared up for anything like that; we don't have the mechanisms'.

3. Absence of a market?

The majority of respondents strongly felt that there was no market for 'recognition'. If a respondent believed that the costs were likely to be the same as for conventional accreditation processes and the risks were going to be greater, then there were very few reasons to consider pursuing it as an option or in making it available as a service to external partners. Some of these respondents had never been approached for such a service but others who had, nevertheless found it impossible to find a way to make it work in their HEIs.

Despite this there was a small minority of respondents (three) who were more optimistic and who were prepared to speculate that firstly costs could be reduced or minimised, that partners of sufficient standing would come forward and be attractive to the university and also that strategic change in the HE sector might also demand a more forward thinking and creative approach. They were also willing to entertain the idea that 'recognition' might prove to be the opening for a number of ventures which would encourage new partners to come onto the 'first rung' of the accreditation ladder, and that this could then develop into mutually beneficial relationships leading to credit bearing programmes. Sometimes this came up in exploratory discussions about strategic changes to the sector as a whole such as student fee increases, the potential for new ways of work based learning to be offered by major employers and so on. For these respondents it was more acceptable that radical change might be just around the corner.

4. An example of a programme from outside the sector

The final question which needs to be asked and which cannot be answered by this review is, 'is there a market for 'recognition' and what would it look like'? The missing part of the picture here is what external partners might be prepared to purchase if 'recognition' were on offer. There is some market knowledge in this respect but it lies outside the HE sector and with professional institutes, for example the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) which runs an endorsement scheme for training providers who deliver leadership and management programmes. Providers can either be 'recognised' as offering a 'Development Programme' (where learners are not assessed) or an 'Endorsed Programme' (which has assessment). Both types of programme are separate to Approved Centres which offer ILM qualifications, but they are allowed to use an ILM logo which shows that they are either 'recognised' or 'endorsed'. ILM states that:

'this rigorous process enables providers to gain ILM recognition for programmes which are of the highest quality, but which do not fit into the prescribed format or requirements (content or assessment) for national qualifications'.¹²

Fees charged by ILM for this recognition are very modest, interest is strong from providers and considerable numbers of ILM members come via this route. Many providers actually become approved centres at a later stage, so it can be viewed as an option which encourages them to become involved in the first place.

5. The way forward

It appears that for most of the HEIs in this study there are issues and challenges to be faced at the moment in offering 'recognition', but these have been overcome by one institution and there is interest from others in doing the same. Although the majority of HEIs listed here have made the assumption that there is not much demand for 'recognition', this report also shows that there has been very little attempt to *create demand* or generate a special market (and so opportunities may have been missed). It would appear that many HEIs have been mainly reactive rather than proactive and consequently have been approached by private training providers and SMEs who have been unable to persuade the HEIs to risk their reputations or make the time and investment to share their brand. On a number of occasions HEIs said that perhaps they would think otherwise if they themselves were seeking high status partners with whom they wished to forge an on-going partnership.

Against this backdrop there is also the finding that some employer engagement individuals in HEIs experience the current situation as very frustrating; they believe they could be more entrepreneurial and more strategic in working with the market but their senior management are risk averse and inward rather than outward looking. This creates a major disconnect between the work of employer engagement staff and any access they might have to the HEI developing an HEI brand in this area and marketing it.

It is worth noting here that the EBTA initiative was originally created to stimulate demand from employers and to give them an accessible route into HEIs, and it has very successfully created a market for institutions to respond to. At the moment there is much uncertainty in the HE sector regarding future funding scenarios but it is likely that both the widening participation and the employability agendas will become increasingly important in this arena and may prompt HEIs to seriously seek out other routes to market beyond the existing conventional ones.

This report therefore raises the following questions:

1. Are there opportunities which are not being fully exploited by HEIs?
2. What connections can be made between employers and HEIs to mutual advantages which do not demand full accreditation?
3. Which are the partnerships that could enhance HEIs' reputations?
4. What types of proposals would be welcomed rather than rejected? (This may well be specific to an individual HEI)
5. How can HEIs make more use of their employer engagement resources to really exploit their brands and develop new, sustainable markets?

7. Recommendations

Any further work in this area will necessarily depend upon the continuity of the EBTA service and how it is to be supported in the future, The following recommendations are offered as indicators of where there may be potential for additional investigation.

- Explore further the existing experiences of 'recognition', including other university stakeholders external to the EBTA Community of Practice, and capture more of this experience and its evidence base
- Publish these findings so that the experiences of how to offer 'recognition' can be disseminated to a wider audience demonstrating how it can be managed on a recurring basis and can become a sustainable and professional service. (The caveats to this include ensuring that an external partner is of suitable quality and reputation to be matched with an HEI, and the HEI can amend its accreditation processes to make them more streamlined and less costly)
- Senior managers in HEIs are clearly concerned about reputational risk and what can be done to minimise this. Guidance could be sought from the QAA regarding appropriate forms of any 'recognition' activity with an emphasis on quality enhancement, so that university staff can offer suitable services to partners with the understanding and support of senior management
- Undertake a market analysis that will indicate the true scale of any interest in 'recognition' by external partners, revealing their motivation and willingness to pay
- Consider how EBTA can offer an extended service to those stakeholders who are new to 'recognition' enabling them to engage effectively with a wider community of employers and training providers, designing 'recognition' as potentially linked to widening participation strategies and partnership-building.
- Integrate this service with other EBTA developments, and explore linkages with related activity such as Endorsement, to sustain and enhance the work of the Community of Practice.

8. Conclusions

It is clear that whatever terms are used be they 'recognition', kite marking or endorsement they represent a form of accreditation activity which was originally identified by the EBTA Ladder but has been found to have limited usage so far in employer/training provider engagement with HEIs. This research and review has been restricted to the EBTA Community of Practice but it has nevertheless discovered from the small number of universities involved that there is interest and some minimal but successful engagement in 'recognition' services at the present time.

Most accreditation activity is currently dominated by approaches and processes which the universities understand and regard as their core purpose that is awarding credit to approved programmes, offering Shell frameworks and APEL. However they are equally charged with increasing their employer engagement activity and this may require new and creative ways of attracting partners in the future. They are moving into a new era of student funding which will very likely bring with it an increasingly high volume of change and challenging decision-making as the market around them also reacts to these new developments and employers seek to offer new training to both graduates and non-graduates. In this new era, activities such as 'recognition' may become one way of forging new strategic partnerships with partners and even if this does not become the case, streamlined processes for 'recognition' may still be suitable for extending and developing accreditation activities generally.

There is scope for the EBTA service to work with the Community of Practice to take this work forward and continue to offer an innovative approach to employer engagement.

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1 – The EBTA Ladder of Accreditation: Descriptors

LADDER OF ACCREDITATION: DESCRIPTORS	
FORMS	DESCRIPTORS
<p>1. Approval for training to be recognised for a university qualification. (e.g. University Certificate, Foundation Degree, Postgraduate Diploma)</p>	<p>The HEI approves employer based training for named qualification from the HEI concerned. Awards might range be from a one module certificate to a full Foundation degree or honours degree or postgraduate qualification. The level of engagement required will probably limit this to larger employers with a sufficient volume of employees and 'repeatable business' to justify costs. It is assumed (unlike form 4 below) that this will need to undergo a full validation procedure.</p>
<p>2. Credit Recognition (Specific Credits)*</p>	<p>Specific credit is applied where there is a direct match between the content and learning outcomes of the external course and existing provision offered by a university so that the individual given the credit is agreed to have gained a similar study experience. These credits are then available to the employee for progression to HE awards: either clearly specified in the credit recognition process; or used more generally through APL. In the latter case training is not recognised as a direct match with the learning but the experience is none the less seen as a recognised benefit to the course and so the learning credits are used to enter or progress on the course.</p>

<p>3. Credit Recognition (General Credits)*</p>	<p>The HEI recognises training provided by the employer as equivalent to a specified number of HE credits at an agreed level. General credit refers to the academic level at which the external course is assessed and are not directly matched against any existing provision by a University (in contrast to specific credits above). These credits are then available to the employee for progression to HE awards: either clearly specified in the credit recognition process; or through APL.</p>
<p>4. Learning Through Work/CPD/Shell Awards*</p>	<p>The HEI matches the employer based training to an existing award set up as a 'shell' for the 'student' to negotiate the relevant content and/or learning outcomes. These have been set up by a number of HEIs and often referred to as learning through Work Awards, or CPD Frameworks. Employees are enrolled either individually or in groups, funded either by the employee or the employer. In some cases, HEIs have approved 'shell modules' that relate more to credit recognition.</p>
<p>5. Articulation Agreements</p>	<p>The HEI enters into an agreement with an employer whereby employees who have undertaken an agreed programme of employer-based training will be eligible for admission to a specific programme of study at the HEI, either at the start of the programme or part way through.</p>
<p>6. Accreditation of Prior (Experience and) Learning (APL or APEL)</p>	<p>Employers are asked to make their employees aware that on the basis of the training undertaken, they may be able to gain APL from a named HEI which will provide exemption from part of an existing award of the HEI. – see below</p>
<p>7. Kite Marking or Endorsement</p>	<p>The employer or training provider pays an HEI to endorse a programme of training i.e. the HEI acknowledges that the training is at a HE level but no credits, specific level, or awards specified. The fdf Endorsement Service can be seen as an example of this. The latter is clearly about quality <i>enhancement</i> rather than quality <i>assurance</i>.</p>

***Recommended forms of accreditation for EBTA purposes.**

From 'Guidelines to HE Providers September 2010' issued by EBTA.

Appendix 2 – The EBTA Community of Practice Membership September 2010

Institution

Anglia Ruskin University
Aston University
Bournemouth University
Acua Ltd (Coventry University)
Harper Adams University
Liverpool Hope University
Liverpool John Moores University
Manchester Metropolitan University
Middlesex University
Queens University, Belfast
Southampton Solent University
Staffordshire University
Thames Valley University
The Open University
University of Bedfordshire
University of Bolton
University of Bradford
University of Central Lancashire
University of Chester
University of Cumbria
University of Derby
University of Greenwich
University of Hertfordshire
University of Huddersfield
University of Kent
University of Leicester
University of Lincoln
University of Salford
University of the West of England
University of Ulster
University of Westminster
University of Winchester
University of Wolverhampton
University of Worcester
York St John University

Appendix 3 – Universities contacted for participation in this review

University	Name	Role
Bournemouth University	Jo Stark	Employer Engagement Manager
Middlesex University	Tracey White	Senior Lecturer Accreditation & Work Based Learning
The Open University	Vicky Smith	Head of Credit, Qualifications and Ceremonies
University of Bradford	Celia Moran	Director of the Escalate Programme
University of Central Lancashire	Peter Betts	Commercial Director of UCLan Business School
University of Chester	Colin Taylerson Dave Perrin Jan Morris	Principal Academic Registrar for Quality and Enhancement Head of Professional Development Unit Innovation & Development Directorate
University of Derby	Ann Minton	Workforce Development Fellow
University of Hertfordshire	Dr Frank Haddleton Lynne Stevens	Director of Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Corporate Development Manager
University of Leicester	Sandra Hopkins	Work Based Learning Manager
University of the West of England	Helen Millican Lesley Moore	Shell Framework Programme Manager Director of Work Based Learning

Appendix 4 – Semi-structured interview (format followed and questions)

1. Explanation given of the review – its aim and purpose
2. Description given of endorsement / kite marking / 'recognition', followed by discussion
3. Had the HEI any knowledge and / or experience of 'recognition'?
4. If so, what was this?
5. If not, why not? Had they ever been approached for 'recognition' and if so, by whom and what was their response?
6. Further exploration of the type of accreditation that was usually on offer from the HEI including the range of external partners and their needs
7. Discussion of the appropriateness of this and its usage
8. Did the HEI believe that anything would change in the future?

Where an HEI had seriously considered offering 'recognition' the following questions were also asked:

1. Why consider 'recognition'? Who had the approach been from and what was being requested?
2. What were the factors that went into the consideration of offering 'recognition', both for and against?
3. What were the respondent's views of this?
4. What had been the outcome and what was the reasoning behind it?
5. Did the type of external organisation affect the decision and how? Would this have been a different decision if the organisation was better known?

References

- ¹ See Dhillon, B. et al. (2011) *Growth of EBTA*, Forward, March, Issue 23, available at <http://www.fdf.ac.uk/downloads/378/20110304155547journal%2023.pdf>, accessed 5.5.11.
- ² This was also confirmed in discussions with several EBTA consultants during this review.
- ³ Tallantyre, F. (2010) *Quality and Responding to Employer Needs: Nine Demonstrator Projects*, York: Higher Education Academy.
- ⁴ Haddleton, F. (2010) *Maintaining HE Standards in in-company accredited training*, York: Higher Education Academy
- ⁵ As cited above
- ⁶ <http://www.universitiessouthwest.ac.uk/partners/CurrentProjects/HigherSkills/ShellFramework.aspx>
accessed May 2011
- ⁷ www.open.ac.uk/credit/rating accessed May 2011
- ⁸ (2010) *Employer Responsive Provision Survey: A Reflective Report*, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
- ⁹ Tallantyre, F. (2010) *Quality and Responding to Employer Needs: Nine Demonstrator Projects*, York: Higher Education Academy.
- ¹⁰ Ditto
- ¹¹ Ditto
- ¹² 'Guidelines for Endorsed and Development Programmes 2008', The Institute of Leadership and Management ILM