Western Vocational Lifelong Learning Network
WVLLN
March 2008
Issue 13

Newsletter

Editor's comment

In this edition you will find a report on Hefce's strategy on rewarding partnership with industry initiatives, a learner focused interview, a report on the benefits of studying locally and an update from the Assistant Director Progression.

The WVLLN are delighted to be working with the SWLLN to organise a workshop on AP(E)L to be held on Thursday 22nd May 2008, 10.30-16.00 at the Taunton Conference Centre, Somerset College of Art & Technology.

For further information and booking please see update from Assistant Director Progression on page 2.

The WVLLN welcomes Grace Dobie who has joined as Steve Dear's PA.

The next issue will include an update on curriculum as well as reports on events & conferences that the team have attended.

Funding council strategy to reward partnership-with-industry initiatives

Working students and employers will steer sector's agenda, says Hefce head as reported by Times Higher Education (THE). David Eastwood, Chief Executive (CE) of Hefce suggested last week that students of tomorrow will juggle full-time work, family responsibilities and higher education and in doing so will demand more personalised ways of learning.

Speaking at the triennial Conference of Northern Universities, he said that the sector was witnessing the birth of "a new political economy", with student fees and employers contributing a greater proportion of the sector's funding.

David Eastwood continued by stating that the 18 to 21-year-old school-leaver is no longer "in the driving seat" of the higher education sector. He went on to confirm the recipients of nearly £50 million which has been allocated to develop degree courses in partnership with businesses.

The Government is pushing universities to work with employers to design new degree courses for their workforce, and wants 10,000 students in 2009-10 to be on courses co-funded by employers, with a further 20,000 in 2010-11.

The CE of Hefce stressed that the Government's challenge of persuading employers of the "mutual benefits" that come from co-funding courses would not be easy.

He went on to say that although he knew that there are some who feel that it is not the business of higher education to engage with business, "when one sees what can be done in practice, it is clear that such engagement is not only compatible with our mission as a sector, it is a logical extension of so much of what we do".

He went on to highlight the growing number of universities and colleges that are developing innovative approaches to management and leadership training drawing on experiences in the workplace. Furthermore there is a demand for courses that give credit towards a degree for "prior or experiential learning", and a growing recognition that "what employees learn in the workplace, formally and informally, can be a part of what is accredited towards their degrees".

Professor Eastwood announced the creation of a new central port of call for all businesses in the country looking for a university to help them meet their training needs. The University of York has won £400,000 in Hefce funding to develop the UK Universities Continuing Professional Development Network.

Hefce will provide at least £105 million in funding to universities and colleges over the next three years to support the development of courses funded jointly by students, the state and employers.

Hefce board papers released recently confirm strategic development grants totalling almost £50 million, designed to help universities develop co-funded courses.

For details of the awards for 'Employer Engagement' and this article by Rebecca Attwood in full see Times Higher Education report 28 February 2008.

Learner Focus - interview by Caroline Adelmann RAC

In order to paint a picture of the kind of adult learner who has experienced life changing decisions Caroline was asked to find and interview such a learner in her own institution. The following is an abridged version of the interview and the learner's name has been changed for confidential reasons.

Anne has been working in Accountancy for 10 years and although AAT qualified found no opportunity to progress within her workplace. These opportunities were always offered to young graduates often with unrelated degrees. She had been told by her employers that they were not a 'training organisation'. In effect she was being sidelined and passed over.

By way of background, Anne had, after school, gained a place at Wolverhampton to study Accountancy, however, during her first year, like many others she found herself with financial problems compounded by her parents' divorce. She dropped out and found a job which she felt would lead somewhere but she became in her own words 'stuck'.

It is hardly surprising that she felt undervalued and unfulfilled. Her partner, a surveyor by training, was happy in his work and she felt she needed to address this discrepancy between their lives outside the home.

So how did she come to choose the Royal Agricultural College? Quite by chance through a mailshot delivered through the door. She was unaware of the College and the courses that they offered. With a vague idea of a career change into property, specifically a RICS accredited course, she plucked up courage to attend an Open Day, which she initially felt intimidating as she felt out of place amongst the other younger students.

One of the senior lecturers in Property Agency, took her and a few others aside and explained the foci of the course. Anne found the tutor friendly and approachable and was encouraged to apply.

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Place address label here

University of Bath in Swindon
Oakfield Campus
Marlowe Avenue
SN3 3JR

Phone: +44 (0) 1793 328820
Fax: +44 (0) 1793 328825
E-mail: E.Fisher@bath.ac.uk

www.wvlln.ac.uk

Our aims for the next month

Elaine Fisher

The WVLLN was delighted that our approach to progression through the transferability of skills was showcased by HEFCE at the National LLN Symposium. A formal report has been produced and it will soon be featured on the National LLN website.

This year the Progression Team are focusing on adult agreements which will include those for Apprenticeships in IT, Engineering, Health & Social Care together with Early Years. The team are busy mapping the appropriate Apprenticeship Frameworks and it is anticipated that draft versions of these agreements will be ready to present to the Management Board for their consideration in May.

The WVLLN is maintaining its involvement with the 14-19 advisors and we are currently planning an event for the new Diplomas to be held on November 6th. We are currently planning the content but are absolutely delighted that Professor Hopkin has agreed to be our key note speaker on the day. Professor Hopkin has been quoted as being very supportive of the Diplomas and we hope his presence will provide a positive message to the participants.

In collaboration with Aimhigher and SWLLN we are seeking to produce an Information, advice and guidance 'signposting' guide for use across the whole SW region. The aim is to design and produce a simple 'guide' (hard copy and/or PDF) which will raise awareness of staff across a range of agencies and educational providers in the SW of the range of existing resources and the means by which these can be accessed.

Work on AP(E)L is still progressing and it is anticipated that a draft version will be ready to present to the Management Board in May.

The WVLLN in conjunction with the SWLLN are planning a workshop on the Accreditation of Prior Learning. This will be a free Workshop Day for learning and training providers across the whole of the South West from Cheltenham to Penzance to Bournemouth. The theme is the Accreditation of Prior Learning, both certificated and through experience.

The aims of the day include: Sharing and comparing institutional practice in credit and AP(E)L; looking at how AP(E)L can be used to improve HE progression opportunities for vocational learners & considering the usefulness of AP(E)L units as progression tools.

Although this event is primarily aimed at HE and FE admissions staff, the workshop may also be of interest to other HE/FE staff who deal with AP(E)L or anyone in education, learning and training across the SW who has an interest in AP(E)L.

Date and Venue: Thursday 22nd May 2008, 10.30-16.00 at the Taunton Conference Centre, Somerset College of Art & Technology. For further details & booking please e-mail Chris Pateman at cpateman@bournemouth.ac.uk

Upcoming Events

- 3rd March—Planning Group meeting for 14-19 event, Oakfield
- 4th March—Planning Group meeting for joint WVLLN/SWLLN workshop, Open University, Bristol
- 6th March—Management Board meeting, Oakfield
- 13th March—Progression Co-ordinator team meeting, Oakfield
- 25th-28th March—Transitions Project, National Star College

Progression Focus

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She was accepted on the proviso she gained some relevant work experience—so she did—working weekends at a local estate agents.

Anne said that the tutor's friendly, approachable style and encouragement were major factors in her decision as well as liking the 'atmosphere, the parking and the easy drive from home'. When asked if she found the process easy she explained that after the first hesitant step she found the process relatively simple and straightforward. Anne is now in her second year, working hard at her studies, whilst holding down a job to help her finance her future. This future includes gaining some more experience, but ultimately she would like to be running her own business.

It would not be true to say Anne has found it an easy road, but degrees and career changes require motivation, dedication and when it gets tough, determination. Anne is showing all of these qualities. Although the first step was the most difficult, Anne has now made a second chance for herself and is making the most of it.

There's no place like home

In his recent article in the Times Higher Education (THE) David Baker discusses the concept of studying locally as one way of avoiding spiralling debts. He refers to research findings published this month by the Sutton Trust which confirm that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to enter higher education if they can find the right course for them at a local institution. The report entitled 'Knowing Where to Study? Fees, Bursaries and Fair Access' details that an aversion to debt is pushing a growing proportion of prospective students to think about studying locally, with three quarters of them planning to live at home. This is consistent with a general trend over the past decade which has seen students in each new cohort studying closer to home with an average of five miles a year. Those students who feel that their only option, for whatever reason, is to study locally are disadvantaged from those who have a wider choice due to better financial circumstances and higher grades. The report, in its conclusions, states that predominately middle-class young people who have attended an independent school are much more likely to apply to a university outside their local area. This together with the fact that almost all of these students benefit from having parents who have experienced a university education and few financial concerns should surprise no-one. The most important recommendation of the report is that schools make pupils aware much earlier of the financial implications and long-term benefits of studying in higher education. Universities that work with schools are more likely to persuade the wary and inexperienced that higher education is for them than those who simply wait for the UCAS forms to arrive. "Stay local, go far" was the slogan for one HEI's recent drive to widen participation among first-to-go and black & minority ethnic families and there is evidence this is a realistic goal for many students. **Taken from THE website 22nd February 2008**