

Building Higher-Level Skills Provision

A guide for independent training providers

Second Edition

A partnership between:



The
Education
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Foundation

Foreword

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has produced a second edition of this guide to help independent training providers maximise the opportunities arising from the Government’s reforms to further education and higher education. It provides a current overview of the higher-level skills landscape and is designed to assist independent training providers in the development of their higher-level skills provision.

We are grateful to The Education and Training Foundation for commissioning and sponsoring the updating of this guide, and would like to thank all the providers who contributed to the publication.

We hope that this guide will prove useful and that it will help you to consider whether higher-level skills provision is appropriate for you and, if so, to begin to develop a strategy for its development.

Paul Warner

Director of Employment and Skills, AELP

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1. Introduction

This guide is designed to support directors, chief executives and senior managers of independent training providers (ITPs) as they consider how they may participate in the opportunities arising from the Government's latest reform plans for further education (FE) and higher education (HE) and as they work to establish their own provision for developing the higher-level skills of current and future learners.

“Higher-level skills are those which go beyond acquiring basic knowledge and understanding and being able to apply that understanding to straightforward situations. They include analysis and synthesis of a range of knowledge, which may be acquired by using research skills; critical reflection on different and potentially conflicting sources of knowledge; problem-solving by identifying a range of possible solutions, evaluating these and choosing the solution most appropriate to the situation; developing complex arguments, reaching sound judgements and communicating these effectively. The framework for HE qualifications (FHEQ) describes the higher-level skills that students should be able to achieve and demonstrate at each qualification level.”

QAA (2008), *Learning from Academic review of higher education in further education colleges in England 2002-07*

Moving into the delivery of higher-level skills is a strategic decision; the implications need to be carefully considered especially at a time when the higher-level skills landscape is complex, at times apparently contradictory, and in a state of flux.

The opportunities available to ITPs to develop a portfolio of higher-level skills provision are many and various, and providers will need to consider why they are getting involved in the delivery of higher-level skills as well as which qualifications they wish to offer.

Beyond the development of new income streams, ITPs may decide to offer higher-level skills provision for a number of reasons, including:

- supporting progression for their learners from existing Level 3 provision;
- building upon existing partnerships with employers to develop higher skills;
- providing specialist support to a wider local or sub-regional partnership of providers, employers and/or other stakeholders; and
- enhancing the experience of current staff.

However, ITPs should consider some key questions before developing their strategy for higher-level skills. If the answer is 'No' to any of the following questions, a longer-term strategy for the introduction of higher-level skills provision is probably necessary.

Key questions

Is there evidence of demand for additional higher-level skills from employers and learners?

Is high-quality and well-regarded Level 3 provision already in place?

Are well-qualified and experienced staff available who are able to deliver and assess a higher-level skills provision?

Are the necessary specialist and general resources available for delivery of the higher-level skills provision in the chosen subject or sector?

Is there the capacity to provide time for teaching staff to develop their knowledge and understanding in their subject or sector at a level appropriate to the higher-level skills qualifications to be taught?

Can whole-group learning opportunities be provided to enhance and develop learners' knowledge as well as skills?

Is there the capacity to establish effective partnership working and appropriate quality assurance (QA)?

Higher-skills qualifications that ITPs might offer at Level 4 and above have previously been referred to as either prescribed HE, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), or non-prescribed HE, funded by the Skills Funding Agency (hereinafter referred to as 'the Agency'). The Agency currently provides a simple distinction in its Funding Rules, based on the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) declaration in *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan* (2011) that, "We will develop and promote the concept, identity and value of our 'Higher Vocational Education' portfolio with clear, flexible and articulated progression routes into Levels 4, 5 and 6." The Agency notes:

"The Agency does not fund 'prescribed higher education' which is the responsibility of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), including Foundation Degrees and Higher National Qualifications. Where The Agency has confirmed higher-level qualifications (Level 4 and above) for funding, these will be listed in LARA (Learning Aim Reference Application)."

Skills Funding Agency (July 2012), Funding Rules 2012/13, Version 3

Some qualifications may form part of Higher Apprenticeship frameworks or may be delivered as standalone qualifications. Provision may draw on government funding or may be full-cost recovery. Higher Apprenticeships may also cross over the divide of provision funded by HEFCE or the Agency, demonstrating the potential for the complexity of the provision.

In all instances, it is likely that the provision will be employment related, featuring substantial work-based learning, and will require the development or enhancement of new or existing partnerships.

This publication is intended to support ITPs when planning their approach to higher-level skills provision through the consideration of:

- the higher-level skills 'landscape';
- the range of HE and professional qualifications;
- the potential in Higher Apprenticeships;
- partnerships; and
- the development of a strategy for higher-level skills provision.

Invest in market research

“The days of ‘if we build it, they will come’ should be consigned to history. To be effective, any higher-level skills provision must be based on solid market understanding (ideally tailored to your specific organisation), an iterative process of product development and responsive delivery.”

CFE Research (2012)

2. The higher-level skills ‘landscape’

The White Paper, *Higher Education – Students at the Heart of the System*, published in June 2011, consulted on the Government’s policies for the reform of HE including, ‘...a new focus on the student experience and the quality of teaching and in which FE colleges and other alternative providers are encouraged to offer a diverse range of higher education provision’.

“We will remove the regulatory barriers that are preventing a level playing field for higher education providers of all types, including further education colleges and other alternative providers. This will further improve student choice by supporting a more diverse sector, with more opportunities for part-time or accelerated courses, sandwich courses, distance learning and higher-level vocational study.”

BIS (2011), *Higher Education - Students at the Heart of the System*

The Government’s response to the consultation on the White Paper was published in June 2012.

Key developments since the White Paper

- Around 85,000 student places were made contestable between institutions.
- Unconstrained recruitment of the roughly 70,000 high-achieving students, scoring the equivalent of ABB or above at A level or equivalent – e.g. a BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma at grades DDM; a CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Child Care and Education at grade A; a BTEC Level 3 (NQF) Certificate at grades DD or DM with an additional A level at grade B or grade A respectively.
- Reduction in the numbers of students required for an organisation to use the title ‘university’ from 4,000 HE students to 1,000 HE students.
- The Government consulted on a new fit-for-purpose regulatory framework for HE; it concluded that a risk-based approach to regulating HE is the most desirable although no primary legislation will be introduced.
- Introduction of a new National Scholarship Programme in 2012-13 through to 2014-15 to help individual students from low-income backgrounds as they enter HE.
- Introduction of a new system to designate specific courses at alternative providers. This designation of a course allows eligible students from England on that course to access loans and grants from the Student Loans Company. Applications to HEFCE for designation for courses starting in 2014-15 can be submitted from 3 February 2014 until 14 March 2014.
- 24+ Advanced Learning Loans made available for eligible learners aged 24 and over studying at Level 4.

BIS (2012), *Government Response, Consultations on: 1. Students at the Heart of the System. 2. A new fit for purpose regulatory framework for the higher education sector*

In addition, measures outlined in the Government’s response to the *New Challenges, New Chances* consultation of 2011 confirmed the intention to establish a ‘...level playing field for higher education providers of all types, including FE colleges and alternative providers’.

In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement of 2013 it was also announced that the Government will remove the cap on student numbers at publicly funded higher education institutions (HEIs) in England by 2015-16. This will enable them to expand to meet any demand from an estimated 60,000 young people a year who have the grades to enter HE but who cannot currently secure a place. The statement also pledged to deliver 20,000 additional Higher Apprenticeships in England over the next two years, with a funding boost of £40 million.

For 2014-15, the Government will significantly increase the cap for HEFCE-funded institutions by 30,000, allowing those institutions that want to begin expanding to do so straight away. To ensure that institutions provide places in the subjects most needed in the economy, the Government will provide extra funding for students wishing to study science, technology, engineering and/or mathematics (STEM) of £50 million per academic year from 2015-16.

The belief is that freeing HEIs from number controls will help improve quality in the sector by increasing competition and allowing institutions who face strong demand to expand. To maintain quality in the sector and ensure value for money, the Government will retain number controls at alternative providers in 2014-15 on the basis of their 2012-13 levels. From 2015-16, it will allow student numbers at alternative providers to be freed in a similar manner as for HEFCE-funded provision. The Government will continue to closely monitor quality of provision across the sector and will reserve the right to re-impose number controls on institutions that expand their student numbers at the expense of quality.

Thus the Government's current vision for HE incorporates new types of higher-level skills provision that will widen opportunities for flexible study for both young people and adults. The vision includes part-time and work-based programmes, and the expansion of Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications leading to progression to honours degrees and beyond, perhaps completed in two years and designed jointly by awarding organisations (AOs), employers, providers and other stakeholders.

ITPs are well placed to respond to the new HE and higher-level skills agenda with this emphasis on growth in non-traditional forms of HE and a much closer relationship with the world of employment. They can offer flexible models of delivery and, by offering qualifications at Levels 4 and 5, can provide significant opportunities for learner progression to Level 6 and beyond.

“Independent training providers have the potential to be much more flexible and responsive than universities and colleges, which should form an important part of differentiation and an opportunity for partnership delivery between the sectors to use to best effect.”

“... Employers frequently turn to ITPs as well as to universities and colleges. Employers are often more satisfied with their flexibility and see them as more responsive to employer needs. However, ITPs are perceived to be weaker in terms of brand recognition, quality and the ability to award qualifications.”

CFE Research (2012)

Higher skills and higher education funding

HE delivered by providers other than HEIs is primarily funded by HEFCE, either directly to the provider or, if the provision is franchised, indirectly via the HEI. In addition, there is provision at Level 4 funded by the Agency. This includes a wide range of vocational and professional qualifications, and these are listed on the LARA/Learning Aim Reference Service (LARS). For the 2013-14 academic year onwards, funding above Level 4 will only be available at Level 5 and 6 if the qualification is part of a Higher Apprenticeship.

Part of the new HEFCE allocation of student places, introduced in 2012, is designed to encourage alternative, lower-cost, degree-level provision. HEFCE has now offered a direct allocation of prescribed HE places to 187 colleges; this includes 65 colleges new to HEFCE funding in 2012-13 but, as yet, no ITPs.

In addition to the changes in the HEFCE allocation, the Agency's *Guidance Note 4* (June 2010) introduced providers to the implementation of the Government's new 'freedoms and flexibilities'. One major change was for Agency-funded providers (apart from poor performers) to be allowed to move money between budgets, thus allowing them to respond quickly to local demand. In the case of ITPs with a contract for services, this flexibility applies to their post-19 employer-responsive provision. To secure funding for HE qualifications using these new freedoms and flexibilities, providers must ensure that the qualifications are identified on the LARA/LARS.

Funding for HE qualifications should be considered on an individual basis, particularly in the context of any partnerships that the ITP has in place.

"Establishing the demand, developing the product, and designing appropriate delivery models as well as exploring the funding and charging structures take a significant amount of time. The set-up costs of establishing higher-level skills programmes can be considerable, so it is vital to invest in proper research and product development processes in order to ascertain whether or not the provision is likely to be financially viable in the long term."

Louise Timperley, formerly Head of Apprenticeships, Kaplan

Recent government policy is increasingly looking at the role of employers and learners in funding their own HE rather than direct government funding through the HEFCE or the Agency.

This can be done in a variety of ways.

Investment by the employer:

- the employer pays for 100% of the training; or
- the employer makes a contribution to the training.

Investment by the individual:

- the individual co-funds the training with the employer making a contribution; or
- this could be funded via:
 - a 24+ Advanced Learning Loan;
 - a Professional and Career Development Loan (PCDL);
 - self-funding;
 - a combination of any of the above.

24+ Advanced Learning Loans

Since August 2013, government grant funding has been withdrawn for learners aged 24 and above who are studying for qualifications at Levels 3 and 4, and those taking Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships. To support affected learners, 24+ Advanced Learning Loans have been introduced to help them pay the tuition fees up front. Once a Loan is secured, the learner doesn't need to pay anything back until their income is over £21,000 a year.

Learners can apply for a Loan ranging from a minimum of £300 up to the value of either the course fee or the funded rate set by the Agency (whichever is the lowest). For Apprenticeship frameworks, the funding rate (and the maximum Loan amount) assumes a minimum employer contribution of 50% of the fully funded rate.

Advanced Learning Loans Guide – a guide to 24+ Advanced Learning Loans for independent training providers, available on the AELP website, gives further information: <http://www.aelp.org.uk/news/general/details/advanced-learning-loans/>

N.B. The take up of 24+ Advanced Learning Loans for Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships has been very low. As a consequence, the policy of funding Apprenticeships through Loans is currently under review.

Professional and Career Development Loans

A PCDL is a commercial bank loan that the learner pays back once their programme is completed. No interest is paid during the period of training. Loans are generally available for between £300 and £10,000.

See: National Apprenticeship Service – NAS (2013), *Funding Guide for Employers: Advanced Level or Higher Apprenticeships for employees aged 24 and over*

“Higher Apprenticeships introduced by this government are now at the highest level they have ever been ... To continue the work already being done to focus on the rigour and responsiveness of the apprenticeship system the government will shortly be announcing further reforms to the system. The aim is to produce an apprenticeships model that matches and surpasses the best in the world.”

Skills Minister, Matthew Hancock (17 October 2013)

3. Higher education and professional qualifications

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) expects HE programmes to address:

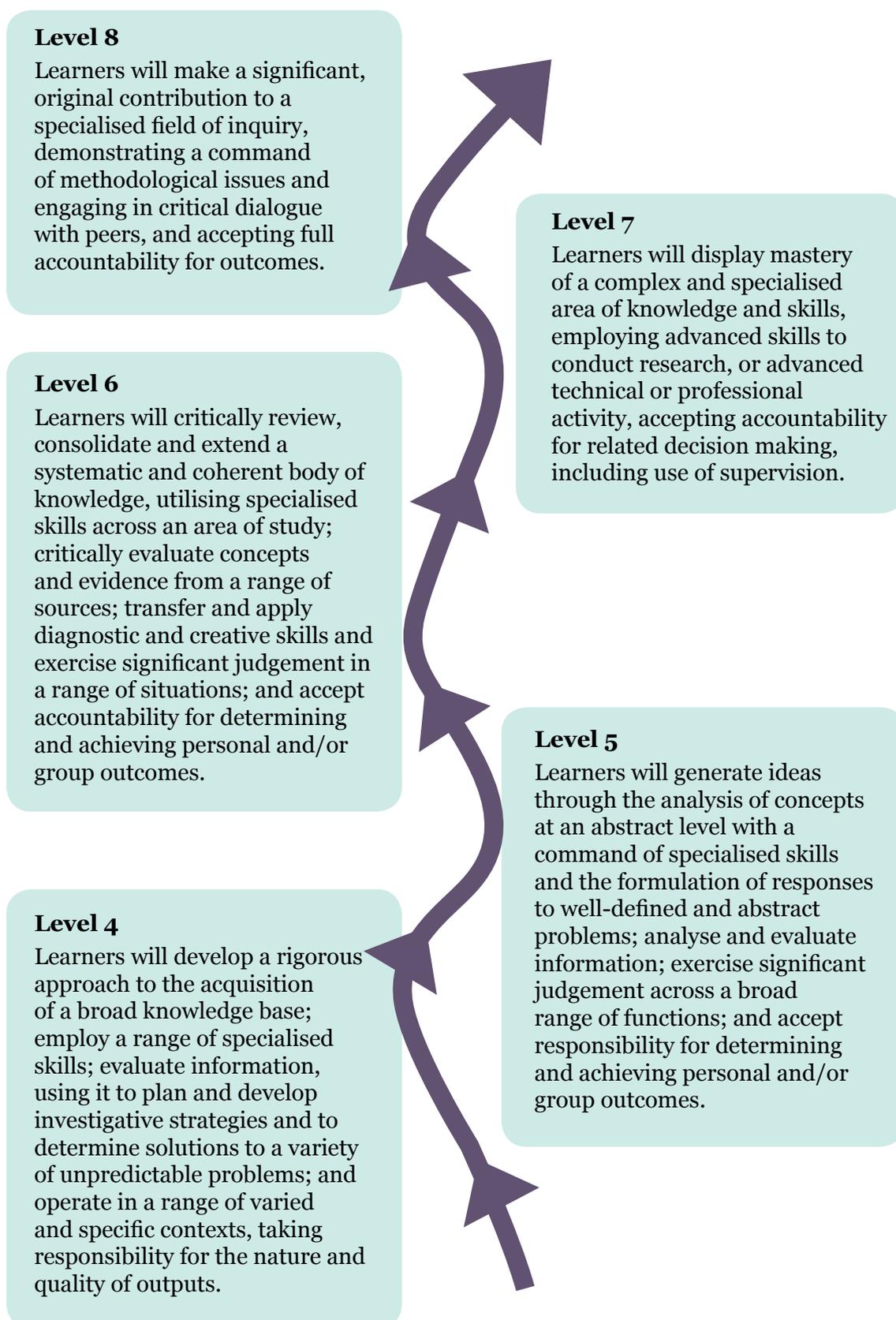
1. **Intellectual skills** – the skills required to understand and engage with the theoretical framework that structures a field of knowledge: research, critical analysis and evaluation. They are the skills most closely identified with academic achievement in HE.
2. **Practical skills** – those skills often associated with employability and problem-solving. They include the ability to apply theory in practice and evaluate theory in the light of practical experience. These skills enable learners to apply theory to action in a critical way and reflect on performance.
3. **Transferable skills** – including communication, information technology (IT) and numeracy, and the ability to work with other colleagues, clients and customers. ITPs and FE colleges normally have well-established systems for developing these skills, reflecting their importance in Level 3 provision. However, at higher levels, ITPs need to ensure that these skills reflect Level 4, 5 and 6 descriptors.

Based on: HEFCE (March 2009), *Supporting higher education in further education colleges: Policy, practice and prospects*

A further central characteristic of higher-level skills is the confidence and ability a learner has to operate as an independent learner. It is crucial that this characteristic is developed and reinforced in higher-level skills provision.

Understanding HE qualifications

There are clearly defined level descriptors for HE qualifications:



Based on: QAA (August 2008), *Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England (Appendix B)*

Also see: QAA (August 2008), *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*

HE qualifications are ascribed levels in the FHEQ.

Qualifications	Level
Doctoral degree (e.g. PhD/DPhil, EdD, DBA, DClinPsy)	8
Master degree (e.g. MPhil, MLitt, MRes, MA, MSc)	7
Integrated master degree qualification (e.g. MEng, MChem)	
Postgraduate diploma	
Postgraduate certificate	
Bachelor degree with honours (e.g. BA/BSc Hons)	6
Bachelor degree	
Foundation degree (e.g. FdA, FdSc)	5
Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)	
Higher National Diploma (HND)	
Higher National Certificate (HNC)	4

QAA (August 2008), *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*

HE qualifications carry credit in many instances, which supports progression.

Typical examples are shown below. Firstly, building on HNC and HND achievement and, secondly, building on the success of a foundation degree.

Qualifications	Credit
Bachelor degree	120 credits at Level 6
HND	120 credits at Level 5
HNC	120 credits at Level 4

Qualifications	Credit
Bachelor degree	120 credits at Level 6
Foundation degree	240 credits, of which 120 must be at Level 5

Professional qualifications on the Qualifications and Credit Framework

Professional qualifications can be found at Levels 4 to 8 on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) where the standard QCF architecture applies.

Architecture of the QCF:

All qualifications in the QCF are made up of one or more units. Every unit (and every qualification) in the QCF has a credit value. **Credit values** are ascribed to units on the basis of one credit for ten hours' (notional) learning time, in accordance with requirements set out in the regulatory arrangements for the QCF published by Ofqual and the regulatory authorities for Wales and Northern Ireland in 2009.

Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) is the process of building up a combination of credits to meet the achievement requirements of a qualification and, as appropriate, using credit(s) awarded in the context of one qualification towards the achievement requirements of another qualification.

Each qualification may also stipulate one or more **rules of combination (RoC)**, which specify which units are mandatory or optional, how many credits are needed for the qualification and at which level, and whether or not there are any forbidden combinations. The rules for some qualifications may allow credit achieved at lower levels to count towards a qualification at a higher level (although more than 50% of credits must be achieved at the level of the qualification or above). For example, allowing some Level 3 credits to count towards achievement of a Level 4 qualification. This supports learner progression, as they can achieve credits that they can later transfer to a higher-level qualification.

One example of a professional qualification is the Chartered Insurance Institute Level 6 Advanced Diploma in Financial Planning that requires 60 credits, all taken at Level 6.

Individual units may form part of several qualifications and this is where RoCs are particularly important. For example, the unit 'Managing organisational culture' offered by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) may contribute to the Level 6 Award, Certificate or Diploma in Management and Leadership and may also contribute to the Level 6 Diploma in Public Service Leadership and the Level 7 Diploma in Leadership Coaching and Mentoring.

The QCF and higher education credit

Credits within the QCF and within HE share a number of common features but they are separate and different currencies and there has been little progress in articulating the two systems into one. There is limited evidence of the extent to which either system is used for credit transfer within vocational education or HE. To date, credits are most commonly used as volume measures for qualifications and programmes.

Unlike the QCF, credits in HE are not regulated but are based upon voluntary agreements and guidance. The approach used by most HEIs is based on the *Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England* published by the QAA in 2008. This guidance states that a credit is equivalent to ten hours' learning time, as in the QCF. However, in HE, credits can be ascribed to learning outcomes, modules, units, full qualifications and programmes and do not need to be based on units of learning outcomes as they do in the QCF, although they often are.

Future vocational qualifications

In November 2013, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) published its *Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications in England*. This sets out a new vision for vocational qualifications and makes a number of recommendations to make them more relevant and flexible for individuals and employers. The implications of this review will become clearer over the coming months.

Foundation degrees

Combining work-based learning with academic study, foundation degrees allow learners to enhance their performance through customising a work-related degree to meet business objectives and aims. Foundation degrees are both academically rigorous and work-focused and they are a crucial progression route from Level 3 accreditation to Level 6 and above.

From an employer's perspective, a foundation degree offers various advantages. The qualification content can be adapted so that learning can be aimed at an organisation's particular needs and context, putting that organisation in a stronger and more competitive position for the future. Foundation degrees are often much more flexible than traditional HE qualifications as they involve work-based learning to develop higher-level knowledge, as well as technical and practical skills.

Foundation degrees are utilised by employers for a number of different purposes, such as:

- enhancing the knowledge and skills of existing employees (with the aim, for example, of increasing productivity and competitiveness);
- developing the skill set of existing employees (for example, when adaptation to new technology is required);
- moving employees on within the business (for example, promoting employees to managerial levels); and
- training new recruits.

"[One] thing that we hadn't anticipated about recruitment on to the foundation degree was just how important learners on the course were going to be when it came to promoting the programme. Some of our learners became real advocates for the foundation degree, happy to go back to their employer and persuade them to support other employees through the programme. They were able to demonstrate to their employer how the projects they had been doing as part of the foundation degree, which are based on real situations within their workplace, had clear benefits to the business."

Sally Lucas, Executive Director, CWT

Only universities or institutions with Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) can validate foundation degrees, and the awarding institution is accountable for the standards and quality of the learning provided.

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)

HNCs and HNDs are work-related or vocational HE qualifications. Similar to foundation degrees, HNCs and HNDs are designed to give learners the skills to put knowledge to effective use in a particular job. These qualifications are available in a wide range of subjects and are highly valued by many employers, both in the UK and overseas, and can also count towards membership of professional bodies and other employer organisations.

On the QCF, HNCs are at Level 4 and HNDs are at Level 5.

HNCs and HNDs are provided by over 400 universities and FE colleges. HNCs can take one year to complete full time and two years part time or when taken as distance learning or sandwich programmes. HNDs take two years full time and can also be taken part time.

Because HNCs and HNDs are designed to equip the learner with the skills for a particular field of work, they can lead straight to a career or can facilitate progression within a current career, for example, as a stepping stone to gaining professional status.

An HNC or HND can also provide a progression route to a bachelor degree; an HNC may be used as entry into the second year of a degree, while an HND may be used as entry into the second or third year.

Bachelor Degrees

Bachelor degrees are at Level 6 on the FHEQ. A bachelor degree (sometimes known as an 'ordinary' or 'first' degree) is a course of academic study leading to a qualification such as a bachelor of arts (BA) or a bachelor of science (BSc). It usually takes three or four years to complete full time (normally four years if the course includes a year in industry or abroad). Bachelor degrees can also be studied part time or through flexible learning.

Degree programmes emphasise the need for independent and autonomous learning and strong study and research skills. Learners who have developed such skills during their earlier study will be better prepared for these qualifications. A summary of the qualities possessed by a bachelor degree graduate is contained in the nationally agreed 'qualification descriptors' within the FHEQ.

Foundation degrees, HNCs and HNDs are normally accepted by HEIs as direct entry ('top-up') into the second or third year of a bachelor degree, but this varies across HEIs, subjects and courses.

“As well as thinking about progression routes in terms of what learners can go on to do when they have completed the foundation degree, or any other higher-level course, consideration needs to be given to feeder routes. When our ILM team leading course didn't run, we lacked sufficient learners to make the foundation degree in leadership and management viable the following year.”

Sally Lucas, Executive Director, CWT

4. Higher Apprenticeships

“We want employers to use the Higher Apprenticeship as a means of developing their rising stars; young people who are going to be the talent pool for the future. By offering clear career paths with greater opportunities for progression, the industry expects to enhance performance and motivation amongst its workforce leading to greater productivity. Learners will be able to progress on to the Higher Apprenticeship from the Diploma and Advanced Level Apprenticeship in Employment Related Services.”

Carole Carson, Managing Director, Babington Business College

Higher Apprenticeships were introduced in 2009, initially in the engineering and IT sectors. They are designed to meet employers’ needs for higher-level skills, as well as being a way for employers to motivate their workforces and maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of their organisations.

You can search for Higher Apprenticeship frameworks and find details on each through Apprenticeship Frameworks Online at: <http://www.afo.sscalliance.org/frameworkslibrary/>

The following 45 Higher Apprenticeships were identified as available in December 2013:

Framework title	Issuing Authority	Level
Accounting	Financial Skills Partnership	4
Advanced Manufacturing Engineering	SEMTA	4
Advertising and Marketing Communications	Creative Skillset	4
Agriculture	Lantra	4
Automotive Management and Leadership	Institute of the Motor Industry	5
Banking	Financial Skills Partnership	4
Broadcast Production	Creative Skillset	4
Broadcast Technology	Creative Skillset	6
Business and Administration	Skills CFA	4
Business Innovation and Growth	Skills CFA	5
Care Leadership and Management	Skills for Care & Development	5
Construction Management	CITB	4, 5, 6
Contact Centre Operations	Skills CFA	4
Creative and Digital Media	Creative Skillset	4
Criminal Investigations	Skills for Justice	5

Framework title	Issuing Authority	Level
Employment Related Services	Skills for Justice (certification but not issuing authority)	4
Engineering Environmental Technologies	SEMTA	4
Express Logistics	Skills for Logistics	5
Facilities Management	Asset Skills	4, 5
Fashion and Textiles: Technical	Creative Skillset	4
Food and Drink	Improve	4
Health (Assistant Practitioner)	Skills for Health	5
Hospitality Management	Skills CFA	4
Human Resource Management	Skills CFA	5
Information Security	e-Skills UK	4
Insurance	Financial Skills Partnership	4
IT, Software, Web and Telecoms Professionals	e-Skills UK	4
Legal Services	Skills for Justice	4
Life Sciences and Chemical Science Professionals	Cogent	4, 5
Management	Skills CFA	4, 5
Mineral Products Technology	Proskills	4
Power Engineering	Energy and Utility Skills	4
Professional Aviation Pilot Practice	People 1st for GoSkills	6
Professional Development for Work Based Learning Practitioners	Skills for Justice (certification but not issuing authority)	4, 5
Professional Services (accountancy, audit, tax)	Financial Skills Partnership	7
Professional Services (audit, tax, management consulting, management accounting)	Financial Skills Partnership	4
Project Management	Skills CFA	4
Providing Financial Advice	Financial Skills Partnership	4

Framework title	Issuing Authority	Level
Public Relations	Skills CFA	4
Recruitment	Skills CFA	4
Retail Management	Skillsmart Retail UK Ltd	4
Supply Chain Management	Skills for Logistics	5
Sustainable Resource Management	Energy and Utility Skills	4
Vehicle Maintenance and Repair	Institute of the Motor Industry	4
Water Industry	Energy and Utility Skills	4

Higher Apprenticeships must comply with the *Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE)* and in so doing, unlike Advanced and Intermediate Apprenticeships, are qualification focused and do not require the achievement of additional features. They combine a range of on- and off-the-job training, and the length of time that they take to complete can vary.

A Higher Apprenticeship framework must specify the qualification or qualifications that an apprentice must obtain. Any such qualifications specified in a Higher Apprenticeship framework must be underpinned by National Occupational Standards. The qualifications must also be approved by the relevant Sector Skills Council (SSC) or Sector Body, or underpinned by professional standards as recognised by the sector. The qualifications identified must provide the evidence that the individual has achieved:

- the competencies required for performance in the particular occupation or job role; **and**
- the technical skills and knowledge/understanding of the theoretical concepts specifically relating to the occupation or job role, together with knowledge and understanding of the industry and its market.

A Higher Apprenticeship framework must satisfy these requirements by specifying either:

- a competencies qualification at the appropriate level (Level 4, 5, 6 or 7) and a separate technical knowledge qualification; or
- an integrated qualification at the appropriate level that combines competence and technical knowledge elements, which are separately assessed; or
- an integrated qualification at the appropriate level that combines the assessment of competence and technical knowledge elements.

“We already had a long-standing relationship with Total People; they deliver a wide range of Apprenticeships for us, so they were the natural choice of provider to invite to work with us on the Higher Apprenticeship in Engineering. Bentley Motors sees the Higher Apprenticeship as a valuable alternative to graduate recruitment. In our experience young people who have been brought into the business as apprentices demonstrate a high degree of commitment and loyalty. We are able to train them in the Bentley way of doing things from day one, which means that towards the end of their Apprenticeships they have gained sufficient confidence, skills and experience to enable them to run projects independently and by doing so contribute to the productivity of the company.”

Ian Grant, Development Officer for Apprentices, Bentley Motors

The following two examples of a current Higher Apprenticeship framework illustrate firstly, a framework consisting of a competence qualification with separate knowledge qualifications and, secondly, a framework based on a combined qualification.

Higher Apprenticeship in Automotive Management and Leadership at Level 5

Pathway 1: Automotive Management and Leadership

Competence qualifications available to this pathway:

- C1 Level 5 Diploma in Automotive Management Competence for Middle Managers
- C2 Level 5 Diploma in Automotive Management and Leadership

Knowledge qualifications available to this pathway:

- K1 Level 5 Diploma in Automotive Management
- K2 BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Automotive Management and Leadership

In the instance above there is also only one pathway available, whilst in the example below there are two pathways available.

Higher Apprenticeship in Care Leadership and Management at Level 5

Pathway 1: General Adult Social Care

Combined qualifications available to this pathway:

- B1 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services (England) (QCF)

The framework also indicates that the Diploma is available from eight AOs – City & Guilds, CACHE, Pearson Edexcel, Pearson EDI, Skillsfirst, OCR, LAO, iCQ

Pathway 2: Specialist Adult Social Care

Combined qualifications available to this pathway:

- B1 Higher Diploma: Professional Practice in Leading and Managing Care Services (Dementia Care)
- B2 Higher Diploma: Professional Practice in Leading and Managing Care Services (End of Life Care)
- B3 Higher Diploma: Professional Practice in Leading and Managing Care Services (Business, Quality and Service Improvement)
- B4 Professional Diploma in Care Leadership and Management (Business Development and Enterprise)
- B5 Professional Diploma in Care Leadership and Management (Learning Disabilities)
- B6 Diploma in Professional Practice in Social Care (Business & Enterprise)
- B7 Diploma in Professional Practice in Social Care (Dementia)

The framework offers no choice of AO in this case; qualifications B1-3 are offered by Middlesex University, B4 and B5 by University College Birmingham, and B6 and B7 by the University of Chichester.

“Clear progression routes are vital and everyone involved needs to know where the learner needs to come from and what the learner could progress on to when they complete the Apprenticeship, whether that be further study and/or advancement in terms of their career.”

Simon Deane, Founder, Accountancy Plus

The future of Apprenticeships

In October 2013 the Government published *The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Implementation Plan*. This sets out, following Doug Richard’s independent review, the reform of Apprenticeships. The Government’s intention is that their reforms will ensure that Apprenticeships become more rigorous and more responsive to the needs of employers by:

- improving the quality of Apprenticeships;
- introducing higher expectations for English and mathematics;
- introducing grading in order to incentivise apprentices to strive to be the best;
- increasing the focus on assessment at the end of an Apprenticeship to ensure full competence.

Employers will also be given more responsibility for developing the standards and a high-level approach to assessment to replace the current Apprenticeship frameworks.

At the same time, the Government announced the launch of guidance for eight Trailblazers for these new Apprenticeships. These will be led by employers and professional bodies and will be the first organisations to develop new Apprenticeship standards and assessment approaches. It is the intention to have all new apprentices working to these new standards from 2017-18. The Trailblazers will give employers the opportunity to lead the development of new Apprenticeship standards and the high-level assessment approaches that sit alongside them. Once approved, the standards developed by Trailblazers will become the Apprenticeship standard for that occupation.

The first Trailblazer projects are in the following sectors:

- **Aerospace** – will develop the standard for Aerospace Manufacturing Fitter and is led by organisations including Airbus, BAE Systems, GKN Aerospace, the Institution of Engineering and Technology, Magellan Aerospace UK Ltd, Marshall Aerospace and Defence Group, MSM Aerospace Fabricators, Rolls-Royce and the Royal Aeronautical Society.
- **Automotive** – will develop the standard for Automotive Mechatronics Maintenance Technician and is led by organisations including Bentley Motors, BMW Group UK, EEF, Ford, the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Jaguar Land Rover, Siemens, Toyota Manufacturing UK and Vauxhall Motors.
- **Digital Industries** – will develop the standards for Software Development and Networking and is led by organisations including Accenture, BT, BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT, CapGemini, Cisco, IBM, Microsoft and the Test Factory.
- **Electrotechnical** – will develop the standards for Installation Electrician and Maintenance Electrician and is led by organisations including Balfour Beatty, Barlows Electrical, Daly Limited, Darke & Taylor Ltd, the Institution of Engineering and Technology, the Joint Industry Board for the Electrical Contracting Industry, National Grid and UPM Shotton Paper.

- **Energy and Utilities** – will develop the standard for Maintenance Engineers and is led by organisations including British Gas, the Clancy Group, E.ON, the Institution of Engineering and Technology, the Institution of Gas Engineers and Managers, Leven Energy Services, National Grid, Northumbrian Water, Thames Water and Viridor.
- **Financial Services** – will develop the standards for Corporate Banking, Digital Marketing, Compliance and IFA Network Administration and is led by organisations including Barclays, Capita, HSBC, Lloyds, Santander, Sesame and Openwork.
- **Food and Drink Manufacturing** – will develop the standard for Food and Drink Maintenance Engineer and is led by organisations including Arla Foods (UK), Dairy Crest, First Milk, Fosters Bakery, Haribo, the Institution of Engineering and Technology, the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, McCain Foods (GB) Ltd, Mondelēz International, Müller Dairy, Nestlé UK, Premier Foods, Thorntons PLC and Unilever UK.
- **Life Sciences & Industrial Sciences** – will develop the standards for Laboratory Technician, Science Manufacturing Technician and Medical Technology Technician and is led by organisations including Fujifilm Diosynth, GSK, IChemE, Johnson & Johnson, Lotte Chemical UK Ltd, Lucite International, MedImmune, P3 Medical Ltd, Seralab, the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Society of Biology, Synergy Outsourcing and Victrex Plc.

BIS (October 2013), *The Future of Apprenticeships in England: Guidance for Trailblazers, Version 1*

5. Partnerships

Whether delivering higher-level skills qualifications in the context of a Higher Apprenticeship or as standalone qualifications, ITPs will have to work in partnership with other organisations to build their higher-level skills provision.

Key partners will be the AOs for the proposed qualifications, typically:

- HEIs;
- professional bodies, e.g. the CMI, Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM); and
- AOs such as OCR, City & Guilds.

Partnerships with higher education institutions

Providers, other than HEIs, may have both directly and indirectly funded provision.

- Directly funded provision: the provider is wholly responsible for all aspects of finance, administration and quality and for setting the fees. HEFCE allocated £5.3 billion to 129 HEIs and 186 FE and sixth form colleges for the academic year 2012-13.
- Indirectly funded provision: the franchising institution holds responsibility for the provision and the fee setting and passes on a proportion of the funding from HEFCE to the provider.

Currently, no ITPs receive direct student numbers from HEFCE, instead they work with one or more validating HEIs, generating indirect HEFCE student numbers through franchise agreements.

A successful partnership must provide cost-effective benefits to both partners, especially in relation to the learners and staff, and allow both to better respond to market and policy drivers.

“The inclusion of a private training provider within the partnership allows extensive employer links to be established. Direct access to over 5,000 employers, 2,000 apprenticeships and 50 apprenticeship frameworks has significantly enriched the partnership. This has led to improved placement opportunities for trainees to teach vocational learners in situ, while improving the quality of training to these groups.”

Ofsted (November 2011), *Report on University of Bolton, Initial Teacher Education inspection*

“Geographically, Staffordshire University is near enough to enable meetings etc. to take place regularly but not so near that we are competing with each other over learners and work with local businesses. Staffordshire University was happy for us to take the lead on designing the models of delivery and writing the course content. We were also able to use our own staff to deliver the programme.”

Sally Lucas, Executive Director, CWT

Any collaborative arrangement should be formalised through an agreement, or a memorandum of co-operation, which specifies clear funding arrangements and details of the working relationship, including aspects relating to exclusivity, transparency, clarity and stability. The supply chain management Common Accord from the AELP will help with this process: <http://www.aelp.org.uk/supply/details/common-accord/>

The following list summarises some key features identified by HEFCE as contributing to effective partnerships:

Prerequisites:

- clarity of purpose – a clear, shared understanding of why the partnership should exist and what it is seeking to achieve;
- a commitment to collaborative working at all levels, including senior management and the board or corporation;
- real benefits for all partners;
- informed awareness of the costs of working in partnership, especially in terms of time;
- clear roles and responsibilities;
- clear communication structures;
- clear financial and service agreements.

Ethos:

- collaborative arrangements that recognise the equality of all partners;
- openness and transparency;
- shared resources and responsibilities;
- willingness to compromise;
- partners who are alert to potential areas of conflict of interest and competition.

Structure:

- advantages of building on existing or prior networks;
- some central co-ordination for partnerships in both the college and the HEI;
- appropriate administrative support;
- the involvement, in some capacity, of all categories of staff;
- creation of sub-groups and working parties, bringing together FE and HE staff around topics of mutual interest to build effective relationships.

Process:

- it is helpful for partnerships to focus on a limited number of key issues;
- initial concentration on practical issues should not result in the loss of a more strategic perspective;
- flexibility to respond creatively to changing external circumstances is an important characteristic of successful partnerships;
- an agreed mechanism for dealing with conflicts or disagreements is very helpful.

HEFCE (March 2009), *Supporting higher education in further education colleges: Policy, practice and prospects*

Support from professional bodies

Professional bodies can be crucial partners in the delivery of both standalone professional qualifications and Higher Apprenticeships. Research into stimulating the supply and support of Higher Apprenticeships through engagement with professional bodies identified that 70% of the professional bodies interviewed believed that ‘... *Higher Apprenticeships were a suitable way for professionals in their sector to become fully qualified*’ and that ‘... *73% were interested in contributing to the development of Higher Apprenticeships*’.

Professional Associations Research Network (2011), *Higher Apprenticeships and Professional Bodies: A report for the National Apprenticeship Service*

Many professional bodies offer work-based or experience-based routes to professional qualification. However, it is important to note that Level 6 is the most common minimum requirement for entry to professions.

“Over the years, I have worked hard to develop relationships with both employers and their professional bodies. I support as many local groups as possible. I was President of the South Western Society of Chartered Accountants for a year and continue to attend their meetings regularly. I appreciate that, in accountancy, there are established professional bodies, but, for sectors where they don’t exist, my advice would be to create your own local network or representative body.”

Simon Deane, Founder, Accountancy Plus

Working with awarding organisations

AOs develop qualifications based on national occupational and academic standards and ensure the assessments are carried out in line with national assessment strategies. They approve assessment centres and provide external verifiers to ensure that all candidates are assessed fairly and consistently to the appropriate standard.

A good partnership with the right AO can provide the ITP with:

- financial savings and improved efficiency;
- enhanced staff CPD; and
- help with marketing.

Whenever possible, it is important for an ITP to explore the flexibility of arrangements, and the support and guidance, offered by each AO for the accreditation of the ITP’s proposed higher-level skills provision and to negotiate optimal agreements in areas such as:

- administration and costs;
- assessment and verification; and
- qualification development and design.

6. Strategic planning

“It is crucial that you do your homework; use a variety of strategies to gain as much information as you can about your employers and their needs. At Babington, we collect a lot of market intelligence by getting out and talking to employers as well as through employer surveys. It is vital to have delivery staff who really understand the sector they are working in, and are in tune with changes and developments that are likely to impact on the employers’ development and training needs.”

Carole Carson, Managing Director, Babington Business College

Through research undertaken by CFE, six key lessons were identified for ITPs in developing their higher-level skills offer to employers:

1. **Invest in market research:** What is the demand? Where is the demand?
2. **Play to your strengths:** Employer engagement; flexibility; learner focus.
3. **Ensure delivery is responsive to the needs of employers:** In both the form and the content of the provision.
4. **Build on your market share:** Focus on the professional, work-based and work-related vocational markets.
5. **Accept that not all businesses will invest in higher-level skills:** HE will be a niche local market.
6. **Understand the role of cost:** The research suggested that there is *already* a culture of co-funding amongst employers that invest in higher-level skills. Most businesses are prepared to meet some of the costs of higher-level skills training but believe that this responsibility should be shared with government. Only 5% of businesses that had not undertaken higher-level skills training reported that reducing costs would make them more likely to train.

Play to your strengths – what ITPs can offer

- Programmes are vocational and directly linked to employment.
- The provision allows learners to stay local and fit their learning in with any family or work commitments.
- The setting is familiar, e.g. if progressing from an Advanced Apprenticeship.
- Learners have confidence in strong and sympathetic support for adult learners given by the provider.
- More one-to-one support may be available.
- Specialist vocational subjects may not be available at a university, e.g. marine engineering or land-based/environmental programmes.
- More flexible entry requirements, e.g. recognition of experience and work-based achievement.
- Good value for money – in comparison to university fee levels.
- Flexibility of delivery modes including work-based learning, part-time study and blended learning.

- Good progression routes – building success from Level 4 to 5 to 6.
- Can be less intimidating than a university setting.

Based on: Mixed Economy Group (MEG) for LSIS (2011), *Strategic Options, Operational Challenges: A study of Higher Education delivered in a Further Education setting*

It is important that an ITP’s move into the delivery of higher-level skills fits with their overall mission and values and does not contradict existing development priorities.

There are a number of factors that ITPs will need to consider as they develop their strategy for higher-level skills, including:



ITPs could focus their thinking for strategic planning for higher-level skills provision on these factors, considering each in terms of the ITP’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats. To help with this process, checklists of some key questions are provided in Annex 1.

“Getting the right people to deliver the higher-level skills courses is absolutely crucial to their success. Staff not only have to have the right industry experience and be suitably qualified, they also need to be able to deal with what is often a very diverse and, on some occasions, demanding group of learners. The skill set required to deliver training to 16- to 18-year-olds on Level 2 or 3 programmes is very different from that required to be effective with groups of experienced people, many of whom are making a financial contribution to their training.”

Sally Lucas, Executive Director, CWT

Developing a strategy

There are many ways of putting together a strategy for higher-level skills development. The final document could be a standalone strategy or it could be incorporated within other planning documents. Equally, it could be produced collaboratively with partners.

The degree of formality will depend on the needs of the provider. The following structure would be suitable for a variety of external as well as internal audiences.

A higher education strategy: indicative content

- A brief description of the provider.
- A statement about why the provider offers HE, including how it relates to the organisation's mission.
- The context for the provider's HE provision.
- A description of planned changes to provision.
- A statement about how the strategy meets needs and adds value.
- Assessment and management of high-level risks.

More specific information about planned changes or existing unchanged provision, regarding:

- management and governance of HE;
- curriculum development;
- resourcing: staff, facilities, equipment and learning materials;
- CPD and scholarly activity;
- recruitment, retention and progression into and through HE;
- relationship with employers;
- relationship with HEI partners; and
- involvement with other agencies and HE networks.

Based on HEFCE (2009), *Supporting higher education in further education colleges: Writing higher education strategies*

7. Conclusion

Entering the market of higher-level skills provision can be daunting, and the journey of putting everything in place can take time and may not always be smooth. Nevertheless, ITPs have much to offer that is distinctive and can add value to an already world-class system of higher vocational education and skills.

Annex 1: Strategic planning checklists

Checklist 1: Context and capacity

Question	Yes/No	Notes
Market placement		
Do we have a clear, valid and reliable view of the likely demand for our higher-level skills provision locally, regionally and/or nationally?		
Is our proposal for a distinctive niche or specialist market free from significant competition?		
Local priorities		
Is there evidence of demand for additional higher-level skills from employers?		
Do we have a clear rationale for our intended provision in order to make clear proposals to employers and HEIs?		
Do we have effective strategic links with employers and will we be able to engage them in curriculum development, delivery and assessment?		
Learners		
Is there evidence of demand for higher-level skills from learners?		
Have we got clear progression routes into our higher-level skills provision?		
Have we got clear progression routes for learners on successful completion of our higher-level skills programme(s)?		
Is high-quality Level 3 provision already in place that is well regarded by learners?		

Checklist 1: Context and capacity (continued)

Question	Yes/No	Notes
Partnerships		
Have we reviewed our arrangements with our AO partners?		
Do we have appropriate links with professional bodies in place?		
Have we have considered whether our HEI partner should be a local or a more geographically distant partner?		
Will we be required to establish new and different systems by our partners?		
Do we understand the reasons for each of our partner's involvement with us – and our involvement with them?		
Do we have a plan B if learners are not recruited or the HEI withdraws franchised 'student numbers'?		
Curriculum development		
Do we know what are we going to offer, at what level and in what sectors – and why?		
Do we have a robust curriculum model for our higher-level skills delivery?		
Will our qualifications offer be standalone, part of a Higher Apprenticeship, or both?		
Is the model flexible and likely to attract employers and learners alike?		
Do we have an opportunity to offer a new mode of study?		
Can whole-group learning opportunities be provided to enhance and develop learners' knowledge as well as skills?		

Checklist 1: Context and capacity (continued)

Question	Yes/No	Notes
Internal capacity		
Have we got the accommodation and resources (both physical and human) to offer these qualifications?		
Do our teaching staff have the skills and knowledge to develop and deliver a meaningful higher-level skills curriculum?		
Is there the capacity to provide time for staff to develop their knowledge and understanding of current scholarly ¹ developments in their subject or sector, at a level appropriate to the higher-level skills qualifications to be taught?		
Do we have an effective model for managing our staff delivering higher-level skills programmes? <i>In the same way as our Level 3 staff or perhaps under a different management structure?</i>		
Have we got the capacity, not just for delivery and assessment, but also for QA, for management, for partnership development and for partner liaison?		
Have we got the capacity in terms of administration, data collection needs and finance?		
Is there the capacity to establish effective partnership working and appropriate QA?		

¹Scholarly – concerned with or relating to formal academic study or research

Checklist 2: HEI partnerships

Based on: MEG with LSIS (January 2012), *FE College/HEI Partnership Checklist*

Question	Yes/No	Notes
Are the duties of both parties fully and clearly articulated?		
Are the financial arrangements clear, including any payment schedules and timings of any reviews?		
Have all potential costs been identified?		
Do both staff and learners have access to university facilities such as library, virtual learning environment etc?		
Is virement of 'student numbers' possible and is it clear at whose discretion – the ITP or the HEI?		
Have minimum 'student numbers' been determined? By course, or as a total?		
Does the HEI provide support for staff development opportunities or offer preferential rates for staff taking higher-level CPD courses?		
Is the frequency of validation events determined and articulated?		
Are arrangements in place to secure learner progression?		
Is the role that the HEI will play in QA clearly articulated?		
Does the role of the HEI in QA work well with the ITP's existing QA procedures? <i>Note: Departments within an HEI may adopt very different procedures from each other.</i>		

Checklist 2: HEI partnerships (continued)

Question	Yes/No	Notes
Will the HEI actively market the ITP's partnership provision?		
Is a process agreed for the production, checking and 'sign off' of marketing material and programme information?		
Is a policy and procedure for dealing with learner complaints agreed?		
Is a procedure for dealing with disputes agreed, and fit for purpose?		
Are notice details for the termination of contracts agreed, including how to meet the continuing needs of learners already on programme?		

Annex 2: Sources of information

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Organisation web links

Alliance of SSCs, Apprenticeship Frameworks Online
www.afo.sscalliance.org/

LSIS on The National Archives
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130802100617/http://lsis.org.uk>

MEG
www.mixedeconomygroup.co.uk/

NAS, Higher Apprenticeships
www.apprenticeships.org.uk/employers/the-basics/higher-apprenticeships.aspx

Ofqual, The Register of Regulated Qualifications
<http://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

QAA pages on HE in FE
www.qaa.ac.uk/Partners/education/HE-in-FE/Pages/default.aspx

Skills Funding Agency
<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>

Quotations

The quotations contained in this guide have been taken from higher-level skills case studies, based on conversations with the following:

Simon Deane – Founder, Accountancy Plus

Carole Carson – Managing Director, Babington Business College

Ian Grant – Development Officer for Apprentices, Bentley Motors Ltd

Sally Lucas – Executive Director, CWT

Louise Timperley – formerly Head of Apprenticeships, Kaplan

The full case studies are available on the AELP website:

<http://www.aelp.org.uk/news/general/details/building-higher-level-skills-provision-a-guide-for/>

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