

*The AdvAnce↑ Project is funded through the Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) Local Flexible Fund. It is a partnership between the Aimhigher Peninsula Programme, the Devon Training Provider Network and the local LSC. Funding is for the period Mar 2007- Sept 2009.*

### Project Aims

The project seeks to enhance the relatively low numbers of work based learners progressing onto higher qualifications and higher education. Arising from earlier work on Apprenticeship progression, AdvAnce↑ is a response to the lack of data in this field, needed to better understand barriers to progression.

Specifically the project seeks to:

- Identify how many Apprentices and Advanced Apprentices are progressing onto higher education
- Identify the short and medium term progression aspirations of completing Apprentices and Advanced Apprentices
- Review the experience of work based learners who have progressed on to higher education to identify barriers and successes
- To develop and embed practical systems to better monitor progression
- In response to the findings, to work with partners to overcome barriers to progression onto higher qualifications and higher education

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Devon & Cornwall	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6
Advanced Apprentices to HE	4	19	19
Apprentices to HE	12	0	18
NVQ to HE	0	4	0
Total WBLs progressing to HE (% of WBLs leavers)	16 (0.21%)	23 (0.36%)	37 (0.55%)

Figure 1: HE progression amongst work based learner -LSC

### Progression from Apprenticeship onto higher education: learner awareness and aspiration

Higher Education (HE) progression amongst work based learners (WBLs) remains very low according to Learning and Skills Council (LSC) exit data, (see figure 1).

Even allowing for shortcomings in this data these groups are underrepresented in HE, to their own detriment and to that of the wider economy.

The Advance project has been working closely with the Devon & Cornwall Training Provider Network to gather more accurate progression information and enhance progression. The project is establishing simple systems that allow data to be gathered from completing Advanced Apprentices about their short term (6 months) and medium term (3 years) progression aspirations. This highlights the levels of HE awareness, the best timing for future promotional activity and gathers learners views on their preferred mode of delivery – part-time / full time. The process is also providing useful evidence for training providers facing Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspections.

### Initial Findings

The first phase of the project, involving 3 training providers and feedback from 82 work based learners highlighted the following:

- many learners (60%) were not clear about higher education progression options, suggesting a need for further Information Advice & Guidance (IAG).
- there are clear has implications for the higher education modes of delivery as many learners would want part time work based higher learning
- having completed their Advanced Apprenticeships almost three quarters of the learners (77%), expected

to continue with their current employer and most (60%) also expected to be with them after 3 years. However, after 3 years a significant number, (43%) expected to have been promoted by their current employer, or to have found a new job.

Some important messages for training providers, higher education and employers are emerging.

### **Extending the data collection**

Members of the AdvAnce team, along with Craig Marshall from Devon and Cornwall Training provider Network (DCTPN), have met up with the following WBL providers: Cornwall College, Exeter College, City College Plymouth, Acacia Training, Accountancy Plus, ETS, ULTRA, Somerset County training, Somerset College and Truro college. All have agreed, along with the established pilot institutions, to ask their Advanced Apprentices at the pre exit interview, about their short (6 months) and mid term (3 years) work and training aspirations.

### **Date collection**

All the data will be sent quarterly to DCTPN. The first tranche of data is due May 2008 and then every four months until July 31<sup>st</sup> 2009. Analysis and reports will be available in October 2008 and September 2009 and will be disseminated to all participating partners and interested parties.

### **Update on progress**

Early indications show that the inclusion of these questions is being well received:

- two training providers have commented that the progression questions have assisted with a positive Ofsted inspection,
- another has used this as an opportunity to raise awareness of HE progression routes amongst their Liaison officers,
- another provider has said that the emphasis on progression is empowering the Apprentice and facilitating a useful discussion with the reviewing officer.
- Training Providers have requested that local colleges offering Foundation Degrees provide them with their promotional materials for the subject areas they work with so that they can pass it on to learners as they near completion.

#### **Useful Websites:**

[www.learnandwork.org](http://www.learnandwork.org)

[www.peninsulaonline.org.uk/](http://www.peninsulaonline.org.uk/)

[www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/SouthWest/](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/SouthWest/)

[www.swlln.ac.uk/](http://www.swlln.ac.uk/)

[www.trainingprovider.com/](http://www.trainingprovider.com/)

### **Looking back: the progression experience of work based learners in higher education**

Working with the Higher Education Learning Partnerships (HELP) CETL at the University of Plymouth, an on-line student survey was conducted of Foundation Degree, HND and HNC students enrolled with University of Plymouth Colleges. This is being followed up with a number of focus groups. Findings from the survey and initial focus groups are reported here; a fuller report, incorporating all of the focus group findings should be available by Sept 2008.

The survey was completed by nearly 300 students (5.2%). Of the respondents 33 (11%) were formerly on Apprenticeship schemes; 21 are now on Foundation Degrees, 11 on HNCs, and 1 on an HND. The first 6 focus groups involved 57 stage 1 participants, of which one group was made up of part-time learners in employment and on business related programmes supporting their professional development. These work based learners were aged 30 and above, generally older than the ex Apprentices completing the survey.

Whilst similar to the main cohort in a number of characteristics, the ex Apprenticeship respondents were more likely to be male (73% compared to 46%), 23 or over (76% compared to 53%), working in a full time job directly related to their course (52% compared to 22%) and studying part-time (55% compared to 22%). More than a third of the ex Apprenticeship survey respondents had been on schemes related to Engineering or Manufacturing Technologies.

### **Prior to the course**

Ex Apprentices appeared slightly more likely to have sought careers advice prior to the course, although this was still only 30% of the respondents; the usual source of advice was either the local college or family and friends and occasionally the employer. Participants in the part time focus group agreed that they and their employer had discussed their course, although there was no 'formal' careers advice.

Being able to study locally appeared to be an important factor allowing learners to continue in their existing jobs and maintain relatively low living costs. Indeed, the part-time focus group participants had only looked at locally

based courses related to their existing employment.

In terms of the ex Apprentices' decision to enrol on their higher education course, these are their views prior to starting their course:

- most felt confident that they would pass the course (73 %) and nearly all were self motivated to enrol (91%)
- most received support from their family and friends to enrol (58%)
- many were concerned about coping with home responsibilities (42%) and/ or work responsibilities (33%) whilst studying almost half (45%) said that they had their employer's support but many (18%) did not; and some felt unable to answer the question, presumably because it had not been discussed with their employer.
- there were financial worries about fees (33%) and living costs (30%), although these were not as greater priority as might have been expected.

Most focus group participants had not explored the local labour market before choosing a course and none of the part time participants had done so, other than considering possibilities within their own companies, or demands of their existing roles. However, many of the part time students in employment did have a strong 'sense of career' and had made career plans, unlike many full time students.

### **On the course**

More than half (52%) of ex Apprentices that responded to this question thought that their employers were supportive whilst on their course but a significant proportion (21%) did not. The focus groups suggested that on occasion employers could be hostile to students embarking on such courses and one participant had changed jobs to find a more flexible employer. Employer support included payment of fees, paid time out of work and encouragement.

For most part-time focus group participants problems encountered since starting the course related mainly to uncertainty about the standard of academic work required. Many were writing formally for the first time in many years but were reassured after their first assignment was returned marked. There was evidence across all of the focus groups of an increased self confidence in their own ability, supported by the realisation that their fellow students were, as one participant put it, '*not Einsteins*'.

### **After the course**

On completion of the course, more than two thirds of respondents (70%) expected to be working full time, and over half (52%) expected to complete the top up year. This means that at least 22% expect to work full time and do the top up year at the same time, which current provision does not seem to allow. The level of support from employers for a 'top up year' after the Foundation Degree was unclear at this stage.

### **Conclusion**

These initial findings will be reviewed in light of the second round of focus groups, which will incorporate the views of Stage 2 students. There are however, a few points that are already worth noting:

- Careers advice appears to have played only a very small part in learners' decisions about their choice of programme and its location; the selection process has tended to rely on non-formal advice from existing informal support networks – friends and family, as well as employers - and gathering information from the media, internet and open days. This is against a backdrop of limited formal careers advice provision for those over 21 who are not already enrolled at a college. There are implications for the nature of information, advice and guidance provision, as well as the target audience.
- The location of the course was an important factor for most learners: work based learners seeking programmes nearest to their home and work place. As most ex Apprentices were working full time their programmes tended to be part time. There is clear demand for the delivery of flexible higher education through local providers; the mode of delivery for the honours 'top up year' – generally delivered full time at Plymouth - may consequently prove unpopular.
- Ex Apprentices that went on to higher education programmes appeared highly motivated and confident that they could succeed on their programme prior to enrolment. The confidence of work based learners appeared to be enhanced after receiving early feedback on their performance at stage 1. Does this mean that those that are slightly less motivated or less confident tend not to apply, even though they may have the ability to succeed? How can the lessons of those that have succeeded be shared?
- Employers were generally supportive, and in a variety of ways: offering payment of fees, paid and unpaid time out and encour-

agement. There were instances where employers were clearly not supportive, and rare examples of learners changing employer because of this. Whilst there are very practical and motivational benefits of a supportive employer, it also seems likely that some less confident learners will be put off higher level programmes if their employer is not supportive. Information, advice and support for employers in relation to higher level skills development appear key.

- Prior to the course there were concerns about tuition fees and living expenses. Similarly, a few learners had initial concerns about accommodating the demands of work and domestic demands alongside their study. The focus groups suggested that these were not a significant issue for most learners now that they were on the course, although they may have remained so for some individuals.

It will be interesting to see if any of the findings differ for the second round of focus groups involving stage 2 students coming to the end of their initial course. Most importantly, having analysed all of the findings, it will allow us to compare the actual experience of those Apprentices and work based learners who have progressed on to higher education with the aspirations of completing Apprentices. Are there perceived barriers that have been overcome? What are the factors which helped learners move from a higher education aspiration to actually applying for a course? What are the lessons that can be shared? Ultimately it is those Apprentices that choose *not* to progress onto higher education that the Advance project is trying to understand and to reach; hopefully these findings will help us to do so.

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### **Aimhigher Workhigher—raising awareness and aspiration towards HE progression.**

The 3 project officers Sally Wild, Helen Evans and Liz Kingdom have been working closely with training providers, Colleges and the LSC and have been successful in producing some excellent resources and providing some exciting learning opportunities for Apprentices.

### **Engineering Masterclasses**

Falmouth Marine School are running a series of 3 masterclasses with 10 Advanced Apprentices from Pendennis Shipyard. After 2 of the 3 masterclasses 50% of the participants are definitely

### **Young Apprentices**

A series of Maths Masterclasses for Young Apprentices in Construction are being run with 32 Young Apprentices. The first masterclass involved attending University of Plymouth School of Maths and Statistics. The second activity day involved surveying, setting out, decorating and stairs and angles. More details in next newsletter.

Truro College, South Devon College and City College Plymouth are also running masterclasses and developing an HE Bridging module for apprentices. More details in next newsletter.

### **Progression Toolkit**

The excellent Progression Toolkit was launched in 2007 and so far there has been a great demand for the resource : Venus Training and Consultancy 30 Toolkits, SWH Training 12, City College WBL Dept 100, and Exeter College 300.

### **[www.learnandwork.org](http://www.learnandwork.org)**

The website details HE progression information for training providers, learners and employers, has a large case studies section and has links to other key websites.

### **The DCTPN Virtual Learning pilot**

Will showcase the work undertaken on a Foundation degree in the hotel and catering sector along with case studies of apprentices who have progressed on to HE.

**[www.trainingprovider.com/](http://www.trainingprovider.com/)**

### **The future for Aimhigher Workhigher**

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have agreed funding for Aimhigher for 2008– 2011. The emphasis will be on intensive work with learners who have the capacity to succeed at HE level but currently do not have the aspiration to do so. Advanced Apprentices clearly fit into this group and if you would like any more information please contact the team.

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