INTRODUCTION

The case studies included within this document are examples of employer engagement with higher education and also serve to illustrate how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) work with industry to develop tailored training and development.

The purpose of the case studies is to provide Brokers with some background knowledge as to how and where higher level skills are brokered to business.

The case studies cover the following areas in relation to higher level skills:

- Types of training, development and programmes available
- Assessment methods
- Modes of delivery
- Benefits to organisations and employees
SAINSBURY’S AT BELL’S STORES

Bells convenience stores began trading in the North East in 1968 with two stores. Expansion continued over the years and in 2003 there were a total of 54 stores throughout the region. In 2004, J Sainsbury plc acquired Bells Stores and it is now part of the group, but has retained its own identity.

Staff development had always been high on the agenda for Bells Stores, especially in terms of higher level skills but the solution to their needs was never found. The store was looking for flexible, higher level, vocationally relevant, skills training for their managers that was challenging enough to meet the needs of the company but also to fit around a 45 hour working week.

The Work-Based Learning Team at the University of Teesside approached the organisation in September 2005 with the offer of working with them to develop a training solution for their staff. Through a series of meetings and discussions between the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Teesside and the company managers a successful collaboration between the company and Teesside Business School was brokered.

The training solution was funded through the APEX Project (Accrediting Pathways to Excellence), a successful collaboration between the University of Teesside and Aimhigher. The project can help to assist local companies by accrediting their in-house training, helping them to create provision where there isn't any or offering existing university modules.

A University of Teesside accredited Management Development Programme was created by the Work-Based Learning Team, Teesside Business School and the company training department working closely together. The programme was devised with academic input and guidance from the university and focuses on managerial skills, specifically people management. The programme consists of three 20 credit modules creating a 60 credit University Certificate in Advanced Professional Development (UCAPD).

Eight store managers were put forward to take part in the first year of the course (2005/06) with more following in 2006/07.

Flexibility of the programme is maintained through a mixture of in-house training workshops followed by written assessments and presentations, all of which are work-based and relevant to the managers’ day to day role. Where possible, training is delivered on company premises by their own training and development staff.

The employer and employees have felt real benefits of the training including:

• Employees better able to organise their own work and that of teams
• A more structured approach to tasks
• Establishing best practice
• Improve in-store performance

David Filmer, Sainsbury’s at Bells Training and Development Manager, who has been involved in the development of the programme from the beginning said in April 2006: “We’ve always had a strong commitment to training and development and this course will be a major part of our management programme. We’ll have 8 - 10 managers taking part every year and as well as helping them do their current jobs better, it will also be useful for their own career development.

Established in 1982, today Tom Walker & Sons Ltd is one of the UK’s leading wholesale cheese distributors and packers. Based on the outskirts of Stockton-on-Tees at Thorpe Leazes Farm it is a family business now run by Tom’s sons and daughter.

The business sources and supplies cheese from all over the world and counts national multiples including Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda and Waitrose as part of its strong client base. The family management team, who took over from their father nine years ago have been looking to develop the vision and capability to take the business forward in today’s competitive climate. The family team were unclear as to how they could channel their ideas for growing the company in order to achieve significant levels of growth without compromising it.

Through contact with Business Link and the Regional Development Agency (One NorthEast), the Durham Business School contacted Tom Walker & Sons Ltd in connection with their Strategic Development Programme (SDP). The Strategic Development Programme is a 12 month course which comprises flexible workshops and one-to-one mentoring with experienced business leaders from all backgrounds and sectors. The programme equips owner-managers with the skills, knowledge and tools necessary to determine and implement growth and change strategies, adding value to existing products and operations, with a strong emphasis on teamwork and employee development.

A specific learning solution was developed following an initial diagnosis of the company and understanding of the particular learning styles of the directors. Following the diagnosis, all three directors took part in the Strategic Development Programme between 2003 and 2006. Based on this initial diagnosis a learning framework was developed and delivered based on a mix of academic, theoretical and practical stimulation using a variety of learning materials including case studies. An online pioneering knowledge transfer and learning platform were used to ensure that the directors had access to learning materials 24/7. At all times directors were challenged to apply their new found learning to their own business activities.

Following the programme, the directors now have a shared clarity of vision and sense of purpose. This focused vision has been cascaded throughout the business, in turn resulting in the entire business working as a single entity towards achieving their strategic goals.

Peter Walker, Managing Director of Tom Walker & Sons Ltd explains “the Strategic Development Programme (SDP) at Durham Business School provided the opportunity to take a step back from day-to-day operations to consider our ideas for developing the business, expanding into new markets and look at ways to enhance existing operations.”
“The programme helped my family and I to develop a more pragmatic approach to business planning, setting workable targets and implementing change. For instance, due to seasonality, we had extra capacity for nine months of the year. Where once we might have accepted that as a trait of the market we operate in, we’re now continually developing the business to utilise these opportunities to build the business and improve efficiencies.”

Tom Walker & Sons Ltd has seen real benefits following the development programme in terms of increased turnover and business recognition. In 2006, the company had its most profitable festive period since business began 25 years ago, achieving 26% of its annual sales in November and December and boosting turnover to £10 million. In the same year the company was also awarded 17th place in The Journal’s “Fastest 50” league table of the regions fastest growing private companies.

The company continues to succeed and aims to increase turnover by 50% by 2010.

The Borough of Lambeth Education, Children and Young Peoples Service (CYPS) is a joint venture between Lambeth’s Children’s Education and Social Care services. The aim is to promote achievement through learning for all people who live, work, study and teach in the borough.

The Children and Young Peoples Service plan has been developed using contributions from children, young people, their families and their carers as well as many stakeholders who are involved with and supporting children and young people. The service encapsulates adult and community education, schools and colleges, extra curricular activities, parental support, school development and pre-schools.

Within its remit is the appointment and development of Teaching Assistants. Lambeth has been looking for a training programme specifically for Teaching Assistants but have rejected programmes in the past for being inflexible, education specific and with little opportunity to include study of specific subject content.

A number of schools in the borough of Lambeth received a direct mail shot from the University of Greenwich outlining its programmes and the Borough of Lambeth Education department contacted the university to find out more. Upon contacting the University, discussions between Lambeth’s Teaching and Learning Consultant and the University’s Foundation Degree Development Coordinator began in January 2006. It was discovered that the Teaching Assistants needed a flexible programme which would:

- Enable them to gain a BA or BSc by the most efficient means and thereby embark upon a further graduate programme leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)
- Allow maximum credit for prior learning, especially the Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) Award
- Be able to be delivered in the workplace (if required)
- Include study of a preferred topic area if required as part of the overall programme
- Allow access to taught modules from a range of subject areas

The needs diagnosis led to the solution of a Foundation degree/BA/BSc in Applied Professional Studies, an existing, flexible framework that allows negotiation into possible pathways and modules. This makes it a needs led, student focused qualification. The mode and location of delivery can also be adjusted to suit the learner’s needs.
Delivery of the Applied Professional Studies Foundation degree/BA/BSc for Borough of Lambeth Education began in July 2006. A subsequent intake in January 2007 has included students from other areas and other professions.

The Borough of Lambeth council have seen numerous benefits including:

- A commitment to training beyond HLTA to aid staff achieve QTS status
- Learners gained higher education credit
- Increased self confidence
- Ability to ‘fast-track’ to other awards
- Flexibility in learning style and location to suit learner/employer

Source: University of Greenwich Employer Engagement and Higher Level Skills Case Study.
Kent based employer Cummins Power Generation is a world leader in the design and manufacture of power generation. They employ more than 400 people at their Manston Park centre, Ramsgate, assembling generators and power production equipment for worldwide distribution.

Cummins Power Generation has found it increasingly difficult to recruit graduates in the Kent area due to the problems caused by the national shortage of qualified electrical engineers. Up-skilling their in-house staff provided a solution to the shortage.

The University of Greenwich offered to tailor make a course specifically for the organisation. Dr Stuart Ashenden, Director of Academic Planning, led detailed discussions with management and staff. He says: “we talked not only to company managers but also to individual employees about their career aspirations. We gained a deep understanding of both the business and staff needs and we have been able to structure a programme which is now attracting interest from other companies in the sector”.

The part-time degree was designed for their existing Higher National Certificate/Diploma technical staff to up-skill them to degree level in Electrical Engineering. The BEng (Hons) programme consists of a day release course and includes a mentoring element whereby a University tutor visits the company to work with students in their workplace (outside of the day release).

By September 2006, five employees had started the degree while four further members of staff were taking other undergraduate and graduate courses including Mechanical Technology Engineering and an MSc in Engineering Management.

Richard Meadows, Cummins Power Generation technical director said: “we are delighted to have been able to work so closely with the University of Greenwich to develop a programme which meets the needs of our staff – contributing to their skills in the workplace as well as their personal career development.”

DENHOLM REES & DONNELL LTD

Denholm Rees & Donnell Ltd offer quality precision engineering services and CNC machining. It is a privately owned engineering company with seventy years experience and employs over fifty people on two sites.

The organisation received a call from the Business Development Manager at the Centre for Leadership Development, a partnership of four Merseyside Universities. The call was to inform the organisation about funding that was available for their Senior Management Team. The Centre for Leadership Development’s primary objective is to provide funding for leadership development to leaders of small to medium sized enterprises in and around the Merseyside area.

After recently taking part in a three year World Class Manufacturing project with Cranfield University and successfully addressing a decline in their core customer base, Denholm Rees & Donnell needed to explore the internal challenges both operationally and strategically.

The Centre for Leadership Development could provide funding for 6 employees through the European Social Fund (ESF). A meeting with the Managing and Financial Directors took place to discus various training options. It was felt that the training should build on previous training with Cranfield University and should address the need for the company to clarify its sense of purpose and direction and to translate this into daily operational activity. Longer term strategic thinking and processes needed clarification and the current management team had been promoted from operational areas of the business and had no formal management training.

Three alternative training providers were suggested by the Centre for Leadership Development with two universities submitting proposals and one contacting the company direct. The company selected Liverpool Hope University to deliver a coaching-mentoring programme.

The most suitable mentoring approach for the training was identified through discussions with the mentor, the business and those taking part in the training. The company elected to divide the programme into a number of phases. The programme was designed to explore communication, teamwork, delegation and performance improvement.

The delegates have benefited from the learning with a substantial increase in confidence within the team and senior managers now have a sharper view of the direction to move. This in turn has allowed greater delegation and more autonomy for other managers. The training solution was evaluated and individuals we asked to outline the benefits to themselves and the company.
They included:

“Better communication between management and an understanding of each others roles in the team and identification of one’s own weaknesses”

“Exposure of underlying issues which were addressed and brought about a better team ethic”

“Improved communication and organisation within the factory and management team”

“A greater understanding of my role and responsibility as part of the management team”

“It has changed my management style”

The organisation has significantly benefited from the mentoring programme which has had a direct result on company productivity. The organisation has also subsequently embarked on an Organisational Change Programme with John Moores University which is supported through Merseyside Automotive Group showing a commitment to continuing professional development. This programme includes mentoring and builds on previous training undertaken, allowing management processes to be cascaded down to the shop floor.

Due to the investment in mentoring the company is looking to increase turnover by more than 30%, profit by 40% and employment by 5%.

Source: North West Higher Level Skills Pathfinder Case Study.

Further Information
More case studies around higher level skills and employer engagement can be found at:

http://www.londonhigher.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/skillscity.pdf