FOUNDATION DEGREES
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Version 2 (June 2008)
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This document aims to answer some of the most frequently asked questions employers have about Foundation degrees.

General

Why have Foundation degrees been developed?
Foundation degrees are developed with employers to respond to their demand for the right skills for the workplace. This provides an opportunity for higher education to be shaped to meet employers’ needs.

Inspired and designed to meet the needs of employers, Foundation degrees are delivered in a way that means existing employees can study whilst working, giving a highly educated, skilled workforce with minimum disruption.

How do Foundation degrees differ from NVQ Level 4 qualifications?
Foundation degrees integrate academic and vocational learning, whereas NVQs are competency-based. NVQs do not include opportunities for reflection or to develop critical analysis skills. Some Foundation degrees incorporate NVQ level 3 as a precursor to, or as part of, a Foundation degree but it is not easy to make this work well.

What kinds of subjects are there?
There are more than 1,600 Foundation degrees available, and the list is growing all the time.

Foundation degrees are frequently transdisciplinary as they draw upon skills and knowledge defined in relation to occupational roles in different employment sectors.

If an employer would like to help develop a Foundation degree that is not currently available then Foundation Degree Forward exists to support this.

How long will a Foundation degree take?
Full-time courses are normally studied over a two year period. A part-time Foundation degree may take less or more time depending on the workplace and the time available to the student and the study modes (e.g. distance learning, e-learning) offered by the providing institutions.

For instance, it is possible for a Foundation degree to be completed in two years by someone in full-time employment if the programme is designed to operate across the calendar year rather then being bounded by the traditional academic year (October-June).
Who can do a Foundation degree?
A Foundation degree is for everyone with the ability and motivation to succeed and includes:

- People who are unemployed and looking for a way into work.
- Employees who want to get on in their job.
- Those wanting to return to work or change their career.
- People who want to gain a work related qualification.

If a potential student does not have any traditional qualifications, work experience may be taken into account and assessed through the process known as the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

Many Foundation degree students are over 25 and have never thought about gaining a higher education qualification while they earn.

How is a Foundation degree delivered?
Foundation degrees can be delivered by day release, block release at agreed points or they can be delivered entirely by distance learning with support from tutors and workplace mentors agreed between the employers and educational institutions.

Employer Involvement
What is the benefit for the employer?
Foundation degrees are designed to help tackle employers’ higher level skills shortages and make sure that they stay ahead of the competition. Employers will experience improved productivity and efficiency, by motivating and retaining existing staff in addition to:

- Reduced recruitment and training costs.
- Less shortfall caused by skills gaps.
- Better knowledge to make good quality decisions.
- More highly motivated staff, from the opportunity to progress in the workplace.
- New approaches and ideas.
- A thinking and reflective employee capable of both working in a team and knowing when creative thinking can make a positive contribution to efficiency and customer responsiveness.
What types of businesses use Foundation degrees?
Both SMEs (employers with under 150 employees) and large employers are involved in the development of new Foundation degrees.

Some larger employers that are already taking advantage of Foundation degrees include: National Health Service, Rolls Royce, BMW Group, Specsavers, Tesco, Sony, Christian Salveson and Norwich Union.

What commitment is needed from the employer?
There will be commitment needed from the employer if they are involved in developing a new Foundation degree. They will work in partnership with a higher education institution and probably one or more further education colleges. This partnership may also include other employers, the relevant Sector Skills Council and other agencies such as professional bodies interested in the Foundation degree.

The level of involvement, to an extent, can be chosen by the employer. Staff from fdf may also be available to help and support the development of the degree.

Training may be required around mentoring good practice or in the assessment of work-based learning outcomes. Bureaucracy and red tape will be kept to a minimum.

If an employer is simply using an existing Foundation degree that is already set up, the employer will still need to make a commitment in terms of support and flexibility.

What impact will a Foundation degree have to the working week?
This will depend on the sector, the nature of the job and the level of work-based learning. Some learning will involve reflecting on everyday work whereas some programmes require a certain amount of attendance at a university or college. Typically this is a few hours a week and, occasionally, on a Saturday.

Flexibility
Are start dates flexible?
Foundation degrees are designed to be flexible and starting times may vary. Some have many starting points but most have at least two – autumn and January. However, this will depend on your chosen institution.

If the employer is involved in the design of the Foundation degree they will be able to negotiate how they would like it to be delivered from the outset. Foundation degrees are not usually fully “roll-on, roll-off” unless they are wholly distance learning based.
Are delivery methods flexible?
A number of delivery methods have been developed giving the employer a flexible learning solution with minimum disruption. Modes of delivery include:

- Distance learning
- E-learning
- Local delivery
- Workplace learning
- Modular provision

Progression
What are the entry requirements?
Enter requirements for Foundation degrees are agreed by the institution offering the course.

If a potential student does not have any traditional qualifications, work experience may be taken into account and assessed through the process known as the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

Foundation degrees can offer progression from qualifications such as Apprenticeships and NVQs but require a higher level of challenge and attainment.

How do Foundation degrees fit with professional qualifications?
With some Foundation degrees, discussions take place with professional bodies to embed a professional qualification within the Foundation degree or offer exemption from part of that qualification. Many developers are trying to improve the links and progression routes between Foundation degrees and professional qualifications.

What is available after completing a Foundation degree?
A Foundation degree will provide a learner with a number of skills and it may be that they want to continue studying.

When a Foundation degree is designed and validated at least one progression route to a higher-level award or Honours degree must be made clear. The Foundation degree will attract a minimum of 240 credits and can lead to progression onto an Honours degree. Therefore after obtaining a Foundation degree the equivalent of a further year’s full-time study can achieve an Honours degree.
In some cases, after completing a Foundation degree an employee may even be equipped to move directly onto other professional qualifications or postgraduate level qualifications.

**Funding**

*Who pays for what and when?*
Employers could choose to support their employees by offering them financial assistance. Loans are available for full-time students. Part-time students may be eligible for grants towards fees and course costs.

For more information regarding funding please see the *Funding, Fees and Costs* handout. For more general information on the financial support available for students please see: [http://www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance](http://www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance)

This information is correct at July 2008, flexibilities are under discussion and any changes will be published via the Skills Broker Website.

**Partnership**

*Who would be involved in the partnership?*
Employers work closely with higher education institutions and further education colleges. Sector Skills Councils and other professional bodies are also actively involved in the design and implementation of Foundation degrees.

*Will the partnership listen to the employer’s individual needs?*
Foundation degrees must involve employers in the design and development to ensure that the work-based qualification is a real asset to organisations. Getting involved in designing a Foundation degree at the earliest stages means it is tailored to meet the organisation's specific skills and delivery needs.

*How much influence as a partner will an employer have?*
As a partner, the employer’s influence will be very strong. The employer could work directly with further and higher education partners on a specific Foundation degree to make sure that its design meets the needs of their sector, their business and their employees, or they can develop new modules for existing Fds that better meet their workforce needs. Educational institution staff will need the employer to identify what it is they would like to see in the Foundation degree.