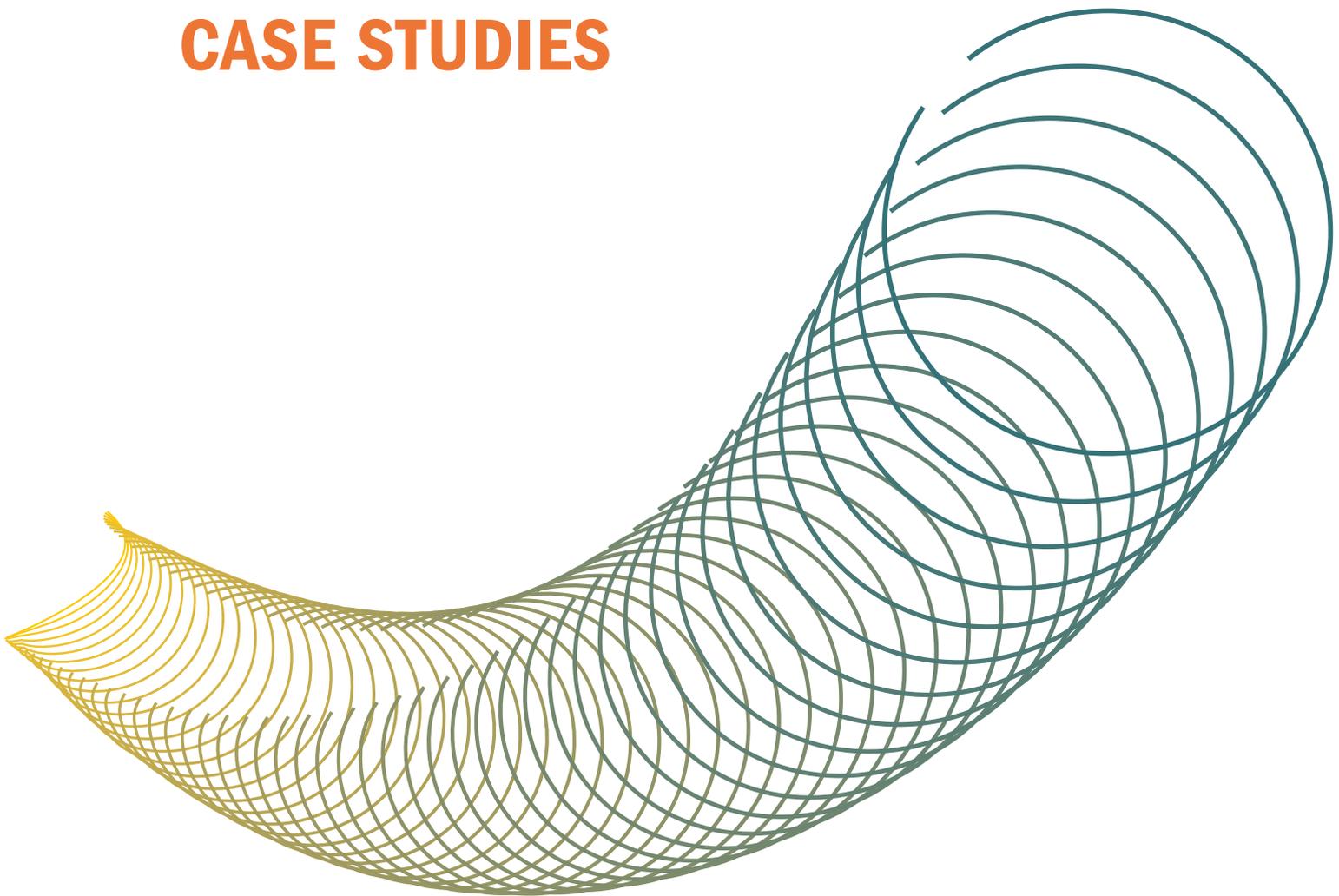


ROUTES TO HIGH-LEVEL SKILLS

CASE STUDIES



Universities UK

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INTRODUCTION



Partnerships between higher education, other educational providers and employers have a vital role to play in addressing the UK's skills challenges by providing integrated pathways to higher level skills for learners. By collaborating with employers, providers can develop flexible provision that equips learners with the skills and ability to adapt to the rapidly changing world of work.

This report by CFE Research on behalf of Universities UK (UUK), summarises eight case study examples of effective current and emerging collaboration between higher education, further education and employers. It accompanies a more detailed report on our research findings and is a follow-up to *Forging Futures*,¹ which examined the ways in which universities and employers were working together to improve higher level skills.

The eight case studies are:

1. Bangor University and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
2. Birmingham Higher Level Skills in Engineering Programme
3. Lincolnshire Institute of Technology
4. Middlesex University Centre for Apprenticeships and Skills
5. MIRA Technology Institute
6. Staffordshire University Creative Arts Partnerships
7. University of Strathclyde Engineering Academy
8. University Campus St Albans

The case studies illustrate how this type of collaboration can grow and work in practice. There is growing and diverse collaboration between HE, FE and employers. Partners are taking innovative approaches to ensure their collaborations are effective and that pathways and courses developed are industry-relevant, meet defined skills needs, and provide coherent progression and flexible opportunities to engage in learning. This is vital for developing new talent to ensure a future skills pipeline but also for upskilling and reskilling the current workforce in response to changing skills needs.

This type of collaboration is unlikely to develop spontaneously between partners with no history of working together, but tend to emerge from pre-existing relationships. Key drivers for collaboration are economic (addressing skills needs and improving graduate employability), social (enhancing the accessibility of provision to attract a broader range of potential learners and support social mobility) and in response to policy developments (such as the apprenticeship levy). Additional benefits of collaboration include shared learning and staff development, enhanced financial sustainability, stronger relationships and opportunities to develop new partnership projects.

Developing collaborations is not without challenges. Different institutions and employer partners can bring competing interests, demands and expectations, as well as different language and understanding, which need to be managed. Educational institutions are increasingly competing for students, and ways to overcome or set this aside are needed for effective collaboration. Developing partnerships can require a significant time and resource input, particularly if creating a new programme, model of working or flexible learning opportunities. For collaborations undertaking innovative projects and breaking new ground, there is unlikely to be established practice or learning to work from.

The higher education providers represented in the case studies overcame these challenges to create strong collaborations. Key ingredients for success include: finding spaces (subject, level or target student) for collaboration where institutions do not see themselves in competition; early identification of a shared goal or vision; recognising and respecting the strengths of partners; identifying and mapping progression routes; and focusing on the specific skills needs of the locality, identified through substantial employer engagement and working with other stakeholders such as LEPs and other sector bodies.

¹ *Forging Futures: Building higher level skills through university and employer collaboration* was produced by CFE Research and jointly published by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and Universities UK.

BANGOR UNIVERSITY AND GRŴP LLANDRILLO MENAI



A partnership between the University and the largest FE institution in Wales that is enabling closer working with employers on regional economic development programmes and widening participation in higher education.

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATION ABOUT?

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (GLIM), was formed as a result of a merger between three large further education colleges (FEC) in North Wales, making it the largest FE institution in the country. **Bangor University** and GLIM have worked together for many years, particularly to widen access to higher education. GLIM has a dedicated University Centre with many HE programmes validated or franchised by Bangor University. In 2016 the two organisations agreed a joint Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen their existing relationship and identify new channels for collaborative working. In particular, the partnership is enabling stronger dialogue on employer engagement and regional economic development programmes such as the joint development of degree apprenticeships.

Both organisations work with employers such as **Horizon Nuclear Power**, who recently entered into a more formal partnership with Bangor University to explore opportunities including work placements and other graduate employment activities, research development, and joint STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subject engagement activities.

The University and GLIM are currently developing progression routes, for direct entry (or from a foundation degree), to degree apprenticeships in ICT and engineering. This process has involved mapping current provision across the institutions and examining how this could be modified to create an industry-relevant, employment-led qualification that brings learners in through existing provision. GLIM have strong employer links which support current skills-based activities as well as extensive experience of work-based learning and assessment; Bangor University offer the academic expertise at the higher level and with a strong research influence. So, both partners are crucial to this joint development.

The partnership is enabling stronger dialogue on employer engagement and regional economic development programmes.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

The University and GLIM wanted to explore how they could build on their existing partnership to clarify and enhance progression routes, strengthen their engagement with employers, increase Welsh medium provision, and co-operate further on widening access programmes. The merger that created the GLIM encouraged the colleges to consolidate their HE arrangements and these may be further strengthened by working more closely with the university in the future.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DRIVERS?

A major driver for strengthening the partnership between the University and GLIM was the need to address local skills issues more effectively. Each partner already had links with employers in the region and they play a full role in regional skills partnerships and programmes. Through the partnership, they sought to develop a more coherent offer for industry partners, with a broad range of options designed to address their current and future skills needs.

One of Horizon Nuclear Power's senior team is chair of the Regional Learning and Skills Partnership (RLSP). Supporting skills development and training across North Wales is a key strategic priority for the company. Horizon regard their partnership with GLIM and Bangor University as key to achieving their goal of increased skills development across the region and the link with the RLSP ensures that provision addresses wider skills needs.

The University is committed to delivering into the skills priorities for the region, both through its core offer as a university but importantly through a collaborative and coordinated approach with GLIM and the major employers in the region. This collaborative approach allows the partners to engage effectively and coherently to try and address current and future skills needs in the region.

Interviewee, Bangor University

Importantly, collaborating with local colleges helps the university to achieve its aspiration to engage potentially disenfranchised groups living in areas that traditionally have low rates of progression to HE. The different learning modes and approaches available through GLIM provide a different route to engage with HE. Articulation into the University in the later years of study programmes can provide an attractive route for many.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER BENEFITS?

Supporting progression: The collaboration enhances access and progression across the educational process from joint engagement with schools through to degree programmes. The University Centre within GLIM gives students an opportunity to experience HE in an environment they are already familiar with and can then encourage them to progress.

Responsive provision: Each partner brings different experience, strengths and regional contacts. By collaborating they are more agile in identifying and responding to new opportunities such as degree apprenticeships. Together they can also offer greater breadth of provision in education, CPD and innovation.

Flexible delivery: Colleges are considered better placed to provide part-time provision in some subjects, which allows the partnership to meet the needs of a wider range of students.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

A flexible and responsive approach by the partners, led at a senior level but based on detailed regional understanding, is key to a successful collaboration, all underpinned by a positive and constructive working relationship.

Interviewee, Bangor University

BIRMINGHAM HIGHER LEVEL SKILLS IN ENGINEERING PROGRAMME



A unique collaboration between the FE sector, a Russell Group university and industry, creating a single system to develop higher level skills in engineering.

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATION ABOUT?

Following a successful bid for HEFCE Catalyst funding, the **University of Birmingham** are collaborating with **University College Birmingham (UCB)** and **South & City College Birmingham** to create a single system to encourage progression to higher level skills in engineering. The three-year pilot programme has been jointly developed by all three institutions and their employer partners as an alternative route to acquiring an engineering bachelor's degree. Students will spend their first two years studying for a foundation degree in electrical and electronic engineering at South & City College (validated by UCB). A wraparound programme of extra study skills support and advanced maths will be delivered by UCB and South & City College to prepare students for transition to the university, where they will progress into year 3 of a bachelor's degree in engineering.

Arup, Alstom UK & Ireland, Telent and **National Grid** are the employer partners, and have contributed to the bid and the development of the course alongside Metrasens, Ricardo Rail and Network Rail. Students on the programme will be offered paid summer work experience placements, and will be able to step on and off the pathway. The programme is targeted at non-traditional students – those who would not come through the usual STEM A-Level pathway on to an engineering degree. In particular, the aim is to progress students who might normally leave education at Level 3 through to degree level at a Russell Group university. The first cohort are due to start in September 2019.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

The collaboration grew from pre-existing partnerships, all linked by UCB. As a university that has retained FE provision, UCB were ideally placed as they have experience of HE and FE and have existing validation partnerships with both the University of Birmingham and South & City College. The University of Birmingham and UCB also have a wider partnership agreement to encourage a broader range of students to access HE. Developing these partnerships into a tripartite collaboration provided an opportunity to develop an engineering progression pathway from FE to HE that would further the widening participation work and help fill an identified higher level skills need.

The University of Birmingham and South & City College contacted a number of companies that they already had a relationship with to look at where they might have skills gaps. Representatives were invited to an employer event where they could feed into the curriculum content, delivery model and explore the potential for work placements; this work is ongoing.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DRIVERS?

The education partners involved in the collaboration were looking at ways to strengthen their relationship. The programme is in response to the higher level engineering skills gap that has been identified in the Midlands. Information on regional and national skills needs was also incorporated through working with the LEPs and taking into account the Industrial Strategy.

All three institutions felt that this was a significant opportunity to offer an innovative programme and progress non-traditional students to higher level skills at a Russell Group university. This is aligned with the civic responsibilities of the university and the colleges' desire for their students to have such a progression opportunity.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER BENEFITS?

Curriculum innovation: Staff have become more open to thinking about alternative delivery models to meet student needs. Engaging employers has allowed the creation of a bespoke course to meet their needs.

Widening participation: Partners felt that this would be of great benefit to the local community, particularly in raising the aspirations of students and encouraging more vocationally minded students to consider university, and in particular a Russell Group university.

Staff development: Staff at all partner institutions will benefit from working more closely with each other and learning from how each other works, particularly in understanding the different demands of the HE and FE sectors.

Strengthening partnerships: Working together will strengthen relationships between the institutions and encourage conversations about taking things further.

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TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Having the buy-in and top-level support from each of the institutions and being very clear from the start about what the intended outcomes are. So, for example, for us it is about identifying that cohort of students and being very clear not to drift away from them.

Interviewee, UCB

Everybody recognising what their own institution's strengths and perhaps areas of improvement [are] ... understanding what they can bring to the partnership and not everybody thinking they can do everything. Being honest about that.

Interviewee, UCB

It's really about building on the partnerships, and the relationships that you already have and seeing what you can offer as a result of those. ... It's about building on the strengths that you already have and trying to make the most of those and make sure there is a real institutional commitment to it. Sponsor it at a high-level and make sure you've got the right level of project resource.

Interviewee, University of Birmingham

LINCOLNSHIRE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (LIT)



A joint bid to establish a Lincolnshire Institute of Technology that involves the university, all seven FECs in the county and two major employers.

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATION ABOUT?

The **University of Lincoln** is collaborating with two major employers and **all seven further education colleges** in Greater Lincolnshire to develop a bid to establish an Institute of Technology (IoT), with the theme of Industry 4.0 (digitalisation). **Siemens** (global technology company specialising in electrification, automation and digitisation) and **Bakkavor** (international food manufacturing company) are the two lead employers. These represent the two major industries in Lincolnshire: advanced manufacturing (concentrated in the centre and north of the county) and agri-food (concentrated in the south). Other employers are also involved, and links to employer organisations have been developed to ensure that the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses in the county are represented. Lincoln University Technical College are also involved in delivering provision and pathways from Level 2. The LIT is one of 16 proposals to progress to Stage 2 of the competition.

The concept of the LIT is based on the successful FE-HE-industry collaboration that is already established at the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) on the University of Lincoln's Holbeach campus. The LIT will build on this model to deliver high-level technical skills across the whole of the county through an integrated network of centres. Lincolnshire is a large county with limited public transport infrastructure, making it impractical or impossible for those outside Lincoln to travel to the city to undertake study. The LIT's network of centres will ensure students can access quality provision and progress to high-level skills in their local area. Students will also have access to a virtual learning environment which will provide flexible access, depending on learners' needs. The focus of the LIT will be at Levels 4 and 5, with the University of Lincoln ensuring there is provision at Level 6 and upwards to allow for seamless progression. In response to employers' needs, the curriculum offer has been designed for current employees as well as new learners.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

Employer engagement has always been a key feature of the University of Lincoln, with employers involved in establishing and developing a range of subject areas and schools. The University and Siemens have been collaborating to develop new curricula under the theme of industrial digitalisation and the focus of the LIT bid builds on this work.

The NCFM is an example of an employer-focused education centre with HE and FE provision and progression pathways from Level 2 to Level 8. The potential to expand this model into other sectors is strong, so has been used as the basis for the LIT bid. The University of Lincoln has established links with a number of FECs in the county, and all were interested in working together to create a county-wide LIT.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DRIVERS?

It is recognised that the Lincolnshire economy needs to adapt and respond to technological change. Digitalisation is a key feature of the development of the advanced manufacturing and agri-food industries. The LIT partners are committed to helping improve the competitiveness and resilience of the regional economy, particularly given the potential implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector. The LIT will deliver high-level technical skills to future-proof the workforce, as well as strengthening relationships between employers and FE and HE.

The establishment of an IoT will bring a level of national prestige, and the reputational benefits to Lincolnshire were an incentive to partners to engage with the collaboration. There was real excitement involved in doing something ground-breaking.

It is recognised that the Lincolnshire economy needs to adapt and respond to technological change. Digitalisation is a key feature of the development of the advanced manufacturing and agri-food industries.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER BENEFITS?

Profile: Being part of something with the potential to have a transformational effect on the regional economy will help to raise the profile of all the educational institutions involved. The profile of the LIT will also attract broader employer engagement, reaching into the supply chains of the anchor employer partners.

FE collaboration: Having all of the FECs in the county involved in the bid has encouraged greater collaboration and a readiness to share knowledge and best practice.

Future-proofing the workforce: The LIT will help Greater Lincolnshire develop and retain high-level skills. Businesses will also be able to grow their own talent through upskilling and re-skilling of their current workforces.

Progression pathways: The focus of the LIT will be at Levels 4 and 5, with some Level 3. The LIT will help to streamline progression pathways and make them more accessible to students.

Strengthened employer engagement: The employer-led nature of the LIT is a key feature, and provides a mechanism for strengthening relationships with industry.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

The University of Lincoln has a deep and long-standing commitment to employer engagement. The Institute of Technology concept, being employer-led, presents a great opportunity to build on this track record and strengthen relationships with industry across Greater Lincolnshire, to the benefit of local people and the regional economy.

Interviewee, The University of Lincoln

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR APPRENTICESHIPS AND SKILLS



A new, employer-focused university centre to establish progression routes to higher level skills and widen access to professional careers.

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATION ABOUT?

Middlesex University established the Centre for Apprenticeships and Skills in 2017 to respond to the growing focus on higher and degree apprenticeships at the institution. The Centre provides a single point of contact at the university for employers, and has dedicated staff to drive the university strategy around apprenticeships. To best meet the needs of employers, the university is increasingly working with the FE sector and has developed a strategic relationship with **Capital City College Group (CCCG)**. CCCG is made up of three large FE colleges (City and Islington College, Westminster Kingsway College, and the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London), and a specific CCCG training arm that functions as a private provider.

This strategic relationship is encouraging all institutions to look at the alignment between the HE and FE apprenticeship offers. The aim is to create progression agreements to allow learners to progress seamlessly through the levels. The full range of provision has been mapped and both the university and CCCG are now looking at how they can streamline pathways and ensure progression routes through to higher level skills across different subject areas, particularly in public services. For example, CCCG offer a level 4 police community support officer apprenticeship that can lead on to a level 6 police constable apprenticeship at Middlesex. There is also scope to develop progression pathways overseas, as both Middlesex and CCCG have transnational education provision.

One key area that Middlesex are working on is professional sales. They have recently launched a new B2B sales professional degree apprenticeship and have a first cohort of around 20 students from **Royal Mail** and **BT**. The University was part of the Trailblazer group that developed the Standard for the apprenticeship. Employers contributed to the development of the course, such as by providing materials to support workplace mentoring and coaching.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

Middlesex University has a 25-year track record of delivering skills for employers and has been looking at how to develop this in response to the increasing importance of the apprenticeship agenda. Growing this area of work has involved strengthening existing relationships with employers to best meet their needs.

The University was already working closely with **Consalia**, a private training organisation who specialise in sales, and they had worked together to develop a master's programme in sales transformation. This progressed to looking at how provision could be designed to meet increased interest from employers in apprenticeships in response to the apprenticeship levy. The result was the professional degree apprenticeship in B2B sales. Both Middlesex University and Consalia had strong links with employers and so brought those together.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DRIVERS?

Apprenticeships are high on the political agenda and the Centre for Apprenticeships and Skills was formed to respond to this and develop provision to contribute to the skills needs agenda. Apprenticeships provide an additional funding stream for the University,

but Middlesex also wanted to contribute to the normalisation of the apprenticeship for professional roles. Engaging with professional sales was seen as an opportunity to help professionalise a job that might not perhaps have been considered in this way previously. Collaboration with employers is seen as essential for this to happen.

Apprenticeships are also considered a way for HE to contribute to the government's industrial strategy objectives around boosting productivity and social mobility. Developing apprenticeship routes in more professions broadens the range of opportunities available to young people, and this was considered important by Middlesex University. Partnering with CCCG as a college group was felt to be an efficient way to increase the number of potential students that the university can work with; up to 40,000 learners across the two institutions. Helping to clarify progression pathways through FE and HE should encourage more learners from a broader range of backgrounds to progress to higher level skills and qualifications. Middlesex is also focusing on degree apprenticeships to meet the digital and leadership skills needs. Recent work with CCCG has included research with employers in the creative industries investigating innovative ways to meet their needs through degree apprenticeships.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER BENEFITS?

Widening access to professions: Supporting the apprenticeship agenda opens up access to professions for a broader range of learners who may not consider taking a traditional degree route. In particular, this should attract people who are already in employment.

Strengthening employer relations: The FE sector has a strong tradition of engaging with employers and delivering apprenticeships. So, by collaborating, HE can get access to a wider range of employers and learn from those with the most experience.

Return on investment: Employers are likely to get a better return on their investment through degree apprenticeships than graduate recruitment schemes. Working with the University allows employers to invest more in developing their own staff.

Supporting the apprenticeship agenda opens up access to professions for a broader range of learners who may not consider taking a traditional degree route.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Workplace-mentor tripartite relationships involve someone who's supporting the apprentice from the employer, a tutor from the university, and the apprentice, in a three-way relationship designed to support and promote professional learning. Discussions help identify the aspects of an apprentice's day-to-day work [that] will help them meet the requirements of the degree programme that they're on... That means that there's quite a lot of engagement at a granular level for each particular module.

Interviewee, Middlesex University

So, now degree apprenticeships have come about, or apprenticeships more generally ... there's an opportunity for universities, FE, private providers and employers to collaborate on much more equal terms, there's a strategic reason for people to collaborate. Previously, there was some distrust between the two sectors, between FE and HE after the introduction of tuition fees, but I think apprenticeships have opened up the collaborative space again.

Interviewee, Middlesex University

MIRA TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE (MTI)



A bespoke automotive skills training centre sited on the MIRA Technology Park, with industry-relevant courses delivered by an FEC, three universities and HORIBA MIRA.

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATION ABOUT?

The MIRA Technology Institute (MTI) is a 24,500 sq. ft. bespoke global skills and training centre on the MIRA Technology Park in Leicestershire. It is a unique collaboration led by North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College with HORIBA MIRA and Coventry University, Loughborough University and the University of Leicester. It has been developed in response to an increasing demand for specialist skills in the automotive sector. The Institute will deliver courses from Level 2 to Level 8 in an on-site augmented learning environment. The MTI building itself is nearing completion and will open in autumn 2018. The partners and their contributions are:

- **North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College:** Engineering apprenticeships, BTEC and EAL accredited qualifications.
- **HORIBA MIRA:** short technical and non-technical training courses at all levels.
- **Coventry University:** a foundation degree in metrology, automotive degree apprenticeships and employer-driven Master's level short courses. Future programmes will include automotive digital skills (short courses), and an MSc in connected and autonomous vehicles.
- **Loughborough University:** Postgraduate certificates and full MSc programmes focused on powertrain simulation and test.
- **University of Leicester:** specialist courses in advanced structural dynamics and advanced engineering management up to Master's level.
- There will also be a **Doctoral School** within MTI to support PhD students.

The MIRA Technology Park has Enterprise Zone status and is a purpose-built campus with advanced automotive testing facilities and 38 fully equipped laboratories. More than 35 major companies are based at the site. HORIBA MIRA are the lead employer partner. The MTI is being developed with £9.5m from the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LEEP) Growth Deal Fund, backed by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

Research by the LLEP identified current and future skills needs and, in particular, an urgent need for Level 4–6 qualified engineers with industry and task-specific experience. The research also identified a desire among employers in the region to “grow their own staff” but a lack of capacity to achieve this. Appointing staff to the most senior and specialist roles with the highest skill levels presented the biggest recruitment and skills challenge. The size, scale and breadth of the curriculum offer within the MTI was designed to respond to the findings of this research.

North Warwickshire & South Leicestershire College had a relationship with HORIBA MIRA, which ensured their curriculum offer prepared students for the manufacturing and automotive industry. The concept of the MTI grew out of a conversation about the potential for a learning space located within the workplace, with courses to support progression to higher level skills and qualifications validated through the local universities. Loughborough University and the University of Leicester were approached to contribute to this. Coventry University already had a presence on the MIRA Technology Park and was working in collaboration with HORIBA MIRA. The partnership was able to build on these existing links to develop the MTI.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DRIVERS?

The MTI was created in direct response to identified skills needs in the regional economy. The demand for specialist technical skills in the automotive industry has risen sharply but supply has lagged behind. HORIBA MIRA, driven by the need to develop new talent as well as upskill their current engineers so that they are able to adapt to the future of the industry, were the catalyst for the Institute. The MIRA Technology Park is centrally situated for the automotive industry and has a number of large employers close by.

The MTI is also intended to act as an anchor institution and play a key role in raising aspirations in the local community and addressing under-representation in the sector by attracting more female students. School visits will be arranged to contribute to aspiration-raising among local students. The hope is that the opportunity to study higher education within a workplace setting, rather than a university, will be more attractive to individuals seeking to progress from Level 2 to higher level study who may not have considered HE to be an option for them.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER BENEFITS?

Addressing skills needs: Situated on the existing Technology Park, the MTI will help to develop a local talent pipeline as well as upskill on-site employees.

Staff development: College and university staff will gain invaluable experience by working within the Technology Park. This will upskill them and help them develop their own teaching strategies and knowledge of emerging technologies.

Exposure: The MTI state-of-the-art building will be prominent in the community and be visible to businesses, young people and parents. It can be used for school visits and taster days to expose potential future students to the opportunities within the industry.

Responsiveness: Having an employer delivering some training means that it can be flexible and responsive, with short courses created and ready to deliver in weeks.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

A clear understanding of the benefits for each individual institution. Alignment with corporate strategy, so that's important, to get buy-in. A willingness to collaborate, and a real focus on business.

Interviewee, Coventry University

[The governance board] needed to have representation throughout, from all partners. It is that no real, big decisions are made unless all five partners have agreed it.

Interviewee, HORIBA MIRA

Be prepared, also, to get stuck in and get your hands dirty and make things happen. It doesn't happen as a result of just one or two organisations driving it. It has to be the collective, really, to make it work.

Interviewee, Coventry University

The main thing is we've all got this vision of what it will be like, and we're all excited by it.

Interviewee, North Warwickshire & South Leicestershire College

FIGURE 1:
MTI Skills Escalator



STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY CREATIVE ARTS PARTNERSHIPS



Partnership working between university, colleges, private providers and industry equips students with up-to-date skills and offers live design projects to work on.

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATION ABOUT?

Staffordshire University, Burton and South Derbyshire College and private provider **Liverpool Media Academy (LMA)** work collaboratively with an extensive network of employer contacts to provide students with industry-relevant courses and work experience opportunities in the creative arts sector. Between them, the university and colleges have a wide range of creative arts employer contacts who they engage with in various ways. These range from large organisations such as the BBC, through to studios, shows and entrepreneurs. Employers ensure that curriculum content is industry-relevant. Due to its geographic location, Burton College has links with three LEPs, which brings a wide industry reach to the partnership.

Employer partners provide students with live projects. For example, the University recently worked with **DPD**, who provided a live brief to design packaging to overcome current logistics problems; **Virgin Trains** asked students to come up with new ways to promote destinations on the West Coast mainline; and **Johnson Tiles** challenged students to create a collection of wall tile designs. Burton College has also worked with employers to provide students with live project experience, such as an extensive archive project with the **National Forest Company** and digital signage design with local company **Hardy Signs**.

The collaboration also offers opportunities for progression pathways and flexible learning. Burton and South Derbyshire College have worked closely with Staffordshire University over the past two years and currently share resources, staff and skills and have a university-wide progression agreement. LMA offers BTEC with progression to bachelor's degrees. Staffordshire University validate the degrees, and were also involved in the design of the courses, but with LMA given lots of freedom to ensure the courses fit the needs and demands of students. Onward progression to Staffordshire is available for study at level 7 but from September, LMA will be offering a Master's in film production in partnership with **Raindance** (a private training company who already offer this from their London base). So far, this has not gone to market – all of the 2018 MA cohort will be LMA BA graduates.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

When Staffordshire University underwent a restructure two years ago, it was felt that the crossover between the creative disciplines and technology should be recognised. The School of Creative Arts and Engineering explores the interface between the two sectors and encourages collaboration. The need to root their curriculum and student project work in industry means that the university are constantly looking for employers to engage with. Often this is through alumni maintaining links with the university when they move into employment. At college level, many of the LMA staff are active in the creative arts industry, particularly freelance tutors, and all employed staff spend 24 days a year in relevant industries as part of their CPD. This generates a lot of employer contacts and means that college staff remain embedded in industry.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DRIVERS?

Both the University and its further education partners felt that the main aim of collaborating with industry was to increase the employability of their students. All acknowledged that the creative arts is a rapidly moving sector and the only way of

ensuring that students are equipped with the skills that the industry needs is by having a two-way dialogue with employers. For LMA, a major driver of offering a BA through the partnership with Staffordshire University was to strengthen the links with industry, as this qualification is better respected and understood than the HND that they offered independently.

LMA have a high percentage of first-generation learners and, by working in partnership with the University, they can ensure that these students have a progression route to higher level skills in an environment they are comfortable in. The University also feels it is essential that it is as connected as possible to its local communities. This has driven its collaboration with colleges, to ensure that as many students as possible have access to HE provision wherever they live.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER BENEFITS?

A strong regional HE offering: Staffordshire University have recognised the important role that its college partners play in their local communities. Working in partnership offers HE to a broader range of students. Courses can be designed to specifically meet the needs of students and be embedded in local creative industries.

A range of progression routes: Broadening the HE offer with partners in a variety of geographic areas offers numerous options for progression. Students have a choice of provision: on campus at the University and/or in the local colleges.

Alternative learning: The HE offer at LMA is attractive to local students because of its 80 per cent practical content, a high-level of contact time and close links with industry in the area.

Linking to local industry: Colleges often have strong links to local industries that can be of benefit to students at all partner institutions. For example, Burton and South Derbyshire College have been provided with advertising projects by the Coors Brewery located in the town.

Colleges often have strong links to local industries that can be of benefit to students at all partner institutions.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

In terms of partnerships, relationships are key. Everything works from relationships. The success of the partnerships works on relationships, and also the downfall can be something like the relationship.

Interviewee, Staffordshire University

I think, actually, quite a few of our partnerships are quite mature now in terms of age, and actually we've reached an understanding about how we work together to properly contribute to the needs of the local area.

Interviewee, Staffordshire University

Don't underestimate the time, commitment, and investment it requires. If you go into it willing to do that, and see it through, you will get the rewards.

Interviewee, Liverpool Media Academy

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE ENGINEERING ACADEMY



*An alternative route into engineering
at the University of Strathclyde, with
a strong focus on widening access
and creating work-ready graduates.*

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATION ABOUT?

The Engineering Academy is a collaboration between the **University of Strathclyde**, **seven local colleges** and the **engineering industry**. This is a pioneering programme that offers an alternative route into the University of Strathclyde and employment in engineering. This programme opens up the University's engineering degrees to students who might not achieve the standard entrance requirements. Students study for an enhanced Higher National Certificate (HNC) during their first year, delivered by a partner college, with additional practical skills units, workshops and events delivered by the University to aid their eventual transition to Strathclyde. The entry requirement for the HNC is lower than the direct entry to engineering at Strathclyde, and can be reduced further for students from deprived areas (based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation), those with care experience or those attending schools with low HE progression rates. Students studying the HNC at one of the colleges are Strathclyde students and can access all university facilities.

Students who get an A grade at the end of year 1 of the HNC then transfer directly onto the second year of one of Strathclyde's engineering degrees in six different departments, including chemical and process, electronic and electrical, and mechanical and aerospace. Those who do not achieve an A grade (less than 10 per cent) still receive an HNC, which they can use to help secure employment. Those who wish to continue their studies can use the HNC to gain a place on a HND course or apply to any university using the HNC.

Employers including **Alexander Dennis**, **GeoSea DEMA (Belgium)**, **Babcock Marine** and **Transport Scotland** are involved in the Engineering Academy. They provide a small amount of sponsorship for students in years 2, 3 and 4 of the programme, offer mentoring and give students the opportunity to do paid summer internships in industry. They also come to the university to do presentations for students or workshops on interview techniques and other employability skills.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

Due to the cap on funded university places in Scotland, high-demand subjects such as engineering degrees tend to have high entry requirements and are increasingly over-subscribed. The Engineering Academy was developed in response to this, to ensure that students across Scotland have the opportunity to pursue engineering at degree level, including those in widening access target groups who, for contextual reasons, might not achieve the grades required to secure a place through the traditional route. Several Glasgow colleges were already looking at how they might work with Strathclyde to develop a skills-based engineering course. To ensure industry relevance, the university built on existing links and developed new relationships with employers.

The Academy was initially funded by additional support from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), but after this ended, the University allocated funds from the overall SFC monies to keep it running. The Academy is currently the only one of its kind in Scotland, but there are moves to develop an engineering progression pathway from HNC to university year 2 across the HE sector in Scotland.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DRIVERS?

This programme sits firmly within the University's widening access strategy and is supporting the institution to achieve its objectives by attracting students into engineering degrees who might not otherwise consider university as an option. Colleges see this as an opportunity to raise aspirations and support their students to progress to degree level study within a university, and to undertake a course that has a strong focus on making graduates work-ready.

Employers are motivated to engage with the Academy to help ensure the pipeline of graduate talent has relevant skills as well as practical experience when they enter the labour market. Employers also regard the initiative as an effective way to address skills shortages within the sector. Students learn more about the type of employer they might want to work for, gain experience of how the industry works and other practical skills to help them transition into the workplace.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER BENEFITS?

School-university progression: Students can start the HNC instead of staying at school for S6 (year 6). Progressing directly to year 2 of a bachelor's degree can escalate students to degree level in the fastest time possible while also giving them the first year in a supportive college environment.

Bridging the academic/vocational divide: Employers want graduates who are work-ready – who have the academic knowledge but also some work-based experience and practical skills.

Breaking down HE/FE preconceptions: Through collaboration, colleges and the University have learnt a great deal about each other's offers and their respective strengths.

Talent pipeline: Local employers can build relationships with Engineering Academy students throughout their studies. By providing relevant work placements and other industry-specific experience, employers can recruit graduates with the experience they are looking for.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Having a common goal, to rally around a common cause. So, widening access has certainly been the driver, the absolute driver for us.

Interviewee, University of Strathclyde

I think having adequate funding in place to make sure that it gets up and running for a long enough period that it's sustainable.

Interviewee, University of Strathclyde

Get the employers in early, and get their commitment, and they can input to the programme, and say, 'I think that's a great idea,' or, 'I don't like that idea.' They can have a big say, because you're doing it for the students, but you're doing it for the employers as well.

Interviewee, City of Glasgow College

UNIVERSITY CAMPUS ST ALBANS



A joint venture between the University of Hertfordshire and Oaklands College to provide flexible, part-time and employer-driven HE provision.

WHAT IS THE COLLABORATION ABOUT?

University Campus St Albans (UCSA) is a joint venture between **University of Hertfordshire** and **Oaklands College**. UCSA students study a University of Hertfordshire part-time honours degree, which is delivered at both Oaklands College and the University of Hertfordshire. Degrees are offered in business, leadership and construction. Courses are delivered by staff from both institutions, supported by external staff. All courses are delivered part-time, over evenings and weekends. Students are usually in employment, and most have been out of education for a long time; almost all are over 25, with the majority aged between 30 and 55. Cohorts are small, with around 12 students per year on each course.

Building on relationships that Oaklands College has established, UCSA has worked with employer groups in three core areas – nursing, construction and business – to identify future skills needs and ensure the courses delivered meet these. Employer engagement is particularly strong on construction, with employers involved in designing the curriculum for the construction management degree and UCSA delivering the course with the Building Research Establishment. Construction group **Jarvis** have an employee currently on this course and are looking at how staff from other parts of the group could benefit from the business degrees that UCSA offer. Having UCSA as a single point of contact for employers streamlines the engagement process. Around 90 per cent of businesses in Hertfordshire are SMEs.

UCSA recently had their first degree apprenticeship in chartered management validated (approval pending at time of writing) and plan to offer this from October 2018. This is a fast-track, two-year option targeted at current managers who will be able to get exemption from the first two years by accrediting their prior experience. This is in response to the needs of employers, who wish to upskill staff with lots of experience but no formal qualifications and who may not wish to commit to a four year course. **Hertfordshire County Council** is currently the largest employer linked with the two-year course, and conversations are happening with a number of interested other businesses.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

For the past 20 years the University of Hertfordshire has been part of a Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium with the four FE colleges to develop progression pathways from FE to HE. More recently, the University and Oaklands College set up UCSA as a joint venture, to provide more flexible education for people in the workplace. UCSA was established to be employer-facing and responsive, with provision that could not be fully met by either the University or the College independently. UCSA could address a need for part-time, employer-driven provision and be an extra income stream for both partners.

The move into apprenticeships is new for UCSA and is a development of its part-time education offer. Due to the University's expertise in accrediting prior learning, the chartered management degree apprenticeship was developed from the University's four-year, part-time course. To meet apprenticeship regulations, the University will be the lead provider on both courses and employers and their employees will be able to choose the most appropriate route.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN DRIVERS?

As well as providing an extra funding stream, through UCSA the University can provide higher level learning opportunities to learners who are not in the position to study for a full-time degree. There is also the benefit to local FE students who can access an alternative progression pathway to degree level qualifications that can be studied alongside their jobs.

UCSA provides local employers with the opportunity to upskill and reskill their existing employees. This supports the work of the LEP to escalate and retain skills in the county, particularly at graduate level.

WHAT ARE THE WIDER BENEFITS?

Employer-facing: UCSA can be flexible and responsive to changing employer demands, and provide a joined-up solutions for employers to save them having to deal with the College and University separately.

Alternative provision: In providing a separate space outside of either partner, alternative qualifications and programmes can be designed. Learners can gain a degree at a lower cost and on a flexible part-time basis, and potentially faster than by other routes due to the accreditation of prior learning.

Genuine collaboration: UCSA as a joint venture represents an equal partnership between the College and the University.

Growing industry partnerships: Engaging with an increasing number of employers to offer bespoke courses strengthens the relationship between education and industry; this has two-way benefits – all institutions and employers can share information and knowledge.

UCSA provides local employers with the opportunity to upskill and reskill their existing employees.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

There was such a well-established field here of four colleges and the University, there was a very busy educational sphere. So, being clear who your market is, and why you want to go into it, and doing a really good analysis of that market before you go into it, and thinking about how that sits within your wider collaborative provision locally.

Interviewee, UCSA

You've got to have a really top-level commitment to it and knowing what you want to get out of it.

Interviewee, UCSA

The first thing is people, having people who believe in what you're trying to do and then also the processes and policies then that underpin making that work... Everybody wants to work together across the colleges and the university and is keen to make it work for the benefit of all parties.

Interviewee, University of Hertfordshire

LEARNER STORIES



Students share their stories.

ANDREW MACLELLAN, STRATHCLYDE UNIVERSITY ENGINEERING ACADEMY

Graduate Andrew MacLellan was part of the first cohort at the Engineering Academy. He passed his HNC at Glasgow Clyde College and progressed to Year 2 in electronic and electrical engineering at Strathclyde University. He continued his studies to MEng level and is starting a PhD in September 2018.

Andrew was looking for alternatives to staying on for S6 (Year 6) at school. He looked at university courses but felt this would be a big jump from school, so looked more closely at college courses and apprenticeships. After coming across the Engineering Academy, he felt that this would be a good option for him in offering a practical course at college yet still progressing to second year of university. The links that the Engineering Academy has with industry were also a key factor in his decision to apply there.

College gave us more of a practical side of things, for jobs and stuff... they prep you for uni, if you pass the college course you get into the uni, so you have a head start... they also said you get more of a practical side of view, and connection with companies, I thought that would be a lot better than just applying to university.

Paid summer internships at three different organisations during his studies gave Andrew a range of industry experiences and valuable insights into the way that different companies in the engineering sector work. They also meant that he didn't have to worry about finding paid work during his summer holidays, and he could gain work experience and a wage at the same time. Andrew felt that his placements allowed him to narrow his focus into the type of engineering role he was most interested in and, after enjoying a research placement at the end of Year 3, decided that was the route for him.

The engineering academy introduces us to companies and the professional environment within engineering, how to speak to them, definitely the company connections are important. You get an understanding of how the environment is, how people operate, how to work in a team in a professional environment.

Overall, the Engineering Academy provided Andrew with a route to higher level engineering skills and qualifications that was appropriate to his needs on leaving school. The level of employer engagement at the Academy was instrumental in his decision to choose this route and has provided him with a range of invaluable experiences in the engineering industry. These experiences have directly affected his continuing studies and progression to PhD.

CHARLIE CHANDLER, MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY, CONSTRUCTION SITE MANAGEMENT DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP, VINCI CONSTRUCTION

Charlie Chandler left school at the age of 14 with no qualifications. He worked for a variety of employers in the construction trade and achieved a Level 3 NVQ after being taken on as an apprentice carpenter. Achieving qualifications vocationally was the only option for him. He considered progressing to an HNC, but in 2012 chose instead to move to VINCI in Rainham, Essex, where he took up a job as a working supervisor.

VINCI have a strong interest in CPD and Charlie found he had the opportunity to study for higher level qualifications. He decided to begin a BA in Construction Site Management remote study degree apprenticeship with Middlesex University in 2017 to learn the financial and managerial skills he needs to progress further up the ladder in the industry.

I want to carry on and be the best I can be. I want to show my kids that you can go down the technical route. I'm on this course, I'm holding down a job, I've got a young family and it's doable.

Charlie feels that he is only able to study at this level because of the flexibility of the course – the Middlesex University assessor visits him rather than Charlie having to travel to the University campus. This fits with his job as well as his young family, and he feels that without this flexibility, he would not be able to perform and progress as well at work. At 30 years old, Charlie is proud that he is studying for a degree, despite having dropped out of school, and values the fact that the University recognised his extensive experience gained from working in the construction industry for more than 10 years.

MAYAN CHRISTOPHIDES, MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY, BUSINESS TO BUSINESS (B2B) DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP, ROYAL MAIL

Mayan Christophides is studying for a degree apprenticeship in B2B Sales at Middlesex University alongside her job as an account manager for Royal Mail.

Following her A Levels, Mayan completed a foundation diploma before starting a degree in Costume Design. Although she enjoyed the degree, after the first year she decided that this was not what she wanted to do as a career so started looking for a job instead. She saw the Royal Mail position advertised online and was attracted by being able to study for a degree alongside the job.

The degree element is 100 per cent important to me. It's something I always wanted to achieve. In this society you really need a degree.

The degree involves attending Middlesex University three to four times a year and spending one day a week in work assigned as learning time, with some extra reading required on top of this. Three other apprentices work in the same office which provides a good support network. The apprenticeship was reported as a positive three-way process between the learner, Royal Mail and the university tutors.

Mayan hoped that the combination of learning and work experience would be of great benefit to her when moving through her career. She hopes to be able to progress with Royal Mail – perhaps with further studying if this is possible – but she feels she is learning valuable transferrable skills.

On an apprenticeship you are picking up work skills as well. A lot of people coming out of uni are finding that maybe they can't get a job in the area that they've studied in. I feel like this is going to be a big help... at the end you will have three years of work experience.

Mayan felt that she was not fully informed about apprenticeships at school and believed that she was 'pushed' down the full-time degree route without being aware of the other options available to her. Although she knew of apprenticeships, she associated this with trades rather than professional careers.

I'd never really considered an apprenticeship before if I'm honest. Sometimes there's a stigma attached to apprenticeships, that you potentially don't get a qualification that is actually the same as a degree. In school things like apprenticeships weren't broadcast in the same way, it was more, if you were going to have a trade, apprenticeships were really useful, but if you were going into something like sales, it wasn't really a thing.

She feels that it is not easy to find out about apprenticeships as a school-leaver and that more could be done to encourage young people to look at all available options, not just full-time degrees.

ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION



Partnerships between employers and tertiary education providers to develop pathways to higher level skills are still developing, particularly in response to shifting policy agendas. Yet there are clear potential benefits and opportunities to expand and extend such approaches.

Below we set out our recommendations for issues to consider further to support and grow collaboration between tertiary education and employers to meet needs for higher level skills.

The case studies that have informed this work are drawn from across the UK, recognising the diversity of initiatives and settings, and that higher education institutions across the whole country are developing innovative approaches and looking beyond traditional models. In terms of the issues for consideration set out below, much of this area is devolved and specific recommendations made refer largely to an English policy context.

- **Identifying regional skills needs:** A clearly identified skills need is one of the main springboards to collaborative working. Therefore, it is important that partnerships have access to granular data that pinpoints the issues in their locality. Gathering intelligence on skills gaps and shortages is, however, resource intensive and individual employers and providers are unlikely to have the resources in place to undertake the necessary research. The government should ensure that this issue is the principal focus of Skills Advisory Panels in England as they are developed. Panels should be enabled to work with FE-HE-employer partnerships to share intelligence and ensure appropriate pathways are developed in response.
- **Identifying a local focal point for collaboration:** A key strength of some of the models examined is the presence of a ‘one stop shop’ or single point of contact for employers with a skills need and/or learning providers with expertise in a particular skill area. Identifying who, locally, can help to broker introductions between employers and education providers could help co-ordinate and facilitate partnership development and would streamline the process and ensure that appropriate partners were connected. LEPs in England have a role to play in supporting such collaborations and ensuring employers are signposted to focal points where they exist.
- **Raising awareness of the opportunities and pathways to HE:** The HE and FE partnerships highlighted here provide important benefits to students, giving them better access to information on the options open to them across a range of providers. Further encouraging these types of partnerships could play a key role in ensuring students to make choices across different levels of education to best suit their needs. This is particularly important for students from non-traditional backgrounds. As set out in the latest UK government’s careers strategy for England *Making the most of everyone’s skills and talents*,² the National Careers Service must also proactively raise awareness of new routes to HE and career and skills development – among young people in schools and colleges, and adults in the workplace. It must provide appropriate information, advice and guidance to enable individuals to make informed choices about the best route for them. Partnerships developing pathways to higher level skills should work with widening participation teams and programmes such as the National Collaborative Outreach Programme, which is targeting young people with the potential to progress to HE, and their parents, to raise awareness of alternative routes into HE being developed. This could help partnerships to understand barriers to participation better and design tailored provision accordingly.

A clearly identified skills need is one of the main springboards to collaborative working.

² See www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-strategy-making-the-most-of-everyones-skills-and-talents

- **Role of regulatory bodies in encouraging partnership development:** Partnerships developing pathways to higher level skills can contribute to wider strategic objectives, such as widening participation in HE, improved graduate outcomes and social mobility. Ways to recognise the value and contribution of such partnerships within performance measures (such as the TEF) and other regulatory mechanisms (such as access and participation plans for English institutions) should be investigated. At the least, regulators and funders should be alert to barriers that may stifle innovation or the flexibility for partners to work together where an opportunity has been identified.
- **Funding to support development and increase reach:** Most of the collaborations identified in this report have grown out of pre-existing partnerships. But they require considerable investment in terms of time and resource to develop. The ability to deliver learning provision in flexible ways is paramount if learners from a range of backgrounds, including those in the workplace, are to be engaged. This can also require considerable investment to create the necessary infrastructure, such as capital funding for industry-embedded delivery centres and/or satellite sites within local communities. Both of these factors mean there is a significant opportunity for national funders to catalyse the development of more such partnerships. The Office for Students in England and other UK funding bodies should consider how best their investments in skills development can support partnership approaches that build on pre-existing relationships where real opportunities can be realised. Investment in specific models, such as Institutes of Technology in England, is significant and welcome. Further investment in a range of models has the potential to unlock a diversity of important and innovative approaches across the country.
- **Funding for learners:** Current funding mechanisms are tailored in favour of study for full qualifications. This leaves a gap for funding that encourages flexible/progressive learning, where learners can study in bite-sized chunks, with the opportunity to step-on and step-off programmes. There appears to be scope to use some of the collaborative arrangements that we have identified as potential test-beds to pilot targeted financial incentives. This might include preferential loan repayment terms (as recommended by UUK in response to the Post-18 Funding Review), testing modular funding arrangements and/or more flexible use of the apprenticeship levy. The joint UUK and CBI project on the economic case for flexible learning is due to report, with specific recommendations aimed at encouraging more flexible approaches to learning by autumn 2018. The report will set out how this particular recommendation can be further progressed.

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