Lifelong Learning Network Peer Evaluation report

Higher Futures and Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN

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# Table of contents

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** ......................................................................................................................... 2
2. **PREFACE** ................................................................................................................................................ 3
3. **STRUCTURE AND PROCESS** .................................................................................................................. 4
4. **NETWORK BACKGROUND** ..................................................................................................................... 5
   4.1 **Higher Futures** ...................................................................................................................................... 5
   4.2 **Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN** ...................................................................................... 6
5. **PEER EVALUATION OF HIGHER FUTURES** ............................................................................................. 7
   5.1 **IAG, Student Voice, and Tracking/re-engaging** ..................................................................................... 7
   5.2 **Progression and Curriculum** .................................................................................................................. 9
   5.3 **Partnership** .......................................................................................................................................... 10
   5.4 **Communications and Marketing** ......................................................................................................... 13
   5.5 **Employer Engagement** ......................................................................................................................... 14
   5.6 **Evaluation** .......................................................................................................................................... 16
6. **PEER EVALUATION OF GREATER MERSEYSIDE AND WEST LANCASHIRE LLN** ..................................... 17
   6.1 **IAG, Student Voice, and Tracking/re-engaging** ..................................................................................... 17
   6.2 **Progression and Curriculum** .................................................................................................................. 19
   6.3 **Partnership** .......................................................................................................................................... 21
   6.4 **Communications and Marketing** ......................................................................................................... 22
   6.5 **Employer Engagement** ......................................................................................................................... 24
   6.6 **Evaluation** .......................................................................................................................................... 25
7. **CONCLUSIONS** ......................................................................................................................................... 27
   7.1 **Lessons for the LLNs** .............................................................................................................................. 27
   7.2 **Messages to HEFCE** ............................................................................................................................. 28
8. **APPENDICES** ............................................................................................................................................ 29
   8.1 **APPENDIX 1: Peer Evaluation of Higher Futures by Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN** ...... 30
   8.2 **APPENDIX 2: Peer Evaluation of Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN by Higher Futures** ...... 33
   8.3 **APPENDIX 3: Higher Futures Network Structure Diagram** ................................................................... 35
   8.4 **APPENDIX 4: Higher Futures Role Descriptions** ................................................................................ 36
   8.5 **APPENDIX 5: GM&WL LLN Network Structure Diagram** .................................................................... 39
   8.6 **APPENDIX 6: Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN Role Descriptions** ................................. 40
   8.7 **APPENDIX 7: List of Meetings Between Partners, to Include All Events** ............................................. 42
   8.8 **APPENDIX 8: List of Partner Institutions** .......................................................................................... 43
1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the product of the 'peer evaluation' process that took place between two lifelong learning networks - Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire, and Higher Futures. These two LLNs were first paired in 2007, since then they have met on nine occasions and engaged in a reciprocal investigation exercise that assessed each other’s approach to different aspects of LLN activity. The report explains their different organisational structures and looks at findings of detailed discussions around a set of six common topics. Within these findings, we have highlighted examples of good practice and challenges expressed by the networks, and commented on the implications for sustainability.

Although there are numerous structural differences that influence how each network carries out its work, each was able to focus on areas of common interest to ask searching questions and explore how issues were handled from the perspective of a 'critical friend'. This was not a comparison exercise; the approach was designed to share experiences and enable the two networks to benefit and learn from one another. The queries posed by each network therefore vary considerably and reflect the issues or lines of inquiry that one was keen to raise with the other, rather than a series of identical questions. However, there were three common questions relating to the respective relationship with the lead HEI, strategies for sustaining dialogue between partners and evidence of changes in practice or culture in institutions.

The main sections of the report follow the same format, providing a summary account of the main issues discussed under each topic with each network. The appendices include a range of background information that helps to distinguish between the different structures and approaches of the two networks, and proforma documents used by each network to draw up its peer evaluation questions.

The report's conclusions draw together the threads of a wide-ranging exercise, distilling some of the core themes and issues into a synthesis that provides messages to HEFCE and lessons for the networks themselves.
2 PREFACE

The peer evaluation process has been designed by HEFCE to be one of the three elements of HEFCE’s overall Evaluation Strategy for the LLN initiative. Pairings of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) were established for the process, which brought together Higher Futures (the LLN for South Yorkshire, North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire) with Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN.

The intention of the peer evaluation process was to share good practice between LLNs through a formative evaluative process. The exercise has enabled both LLNs to ask tailored and joint questions of the other LLN with the approach of a ‘critical friend’. Both teams understood the pressures and challenges of developing the work of an LLN, although from the outset the teams acknowledged that the emphasis and delivery structure of the other was quite different. Therefore the report has allowed both LLNs to look in a unique way at each other, and concentrate more on the pressing theme of ‘sustainability’, rather than form direct comparisons.
3 STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

The LLNs first met together on the 19th July 2007 at the launch of the Higher Futures network. From this initial meeting, the networks met together periodically to discuss the evaluation process, but staffing changes in both networks meant the process was delayed until November 2008 when both networks were in a more stable position to undertake the process. Both LLNs have now commenced their third year of operation and the timing of the peer evaluation process fits into evaluative processes and ongoing sustainability work of both networks.

The LLNs agreed together to use the parameters for peer evaluation developed by the National Forum and to refine them to reflect areas of importance for investigation to both LLNs. The areas covered by the evaluation were as follows:

- IAG, student voice, and tracking/re-engaging
- Progression and Curriculum
- Partnership
- Communications and Marketing
- Employer Engagement
- Evaluation

Both LLNs felt these areas would illustrate both key differences of approach and areas of difficulty and/or challenge, allowing them as peers to investigate, advise and reflect, under the overarching theme of sustainability.

Each team took the areas in turn and devised a number of questions (approximately three in each area) to be posed to the other LLN, which were then refined in further discussions. The result of the discussions also highlighted three questions both networks felt were important to ask each other, in addition to the more individual questions. Once the questions were finalised, the teams agreed to provide each other with a set of ‘bullet point’ responses by email, before meeting for two separate events to discuss the responses in more detail. Both events took place in March 2009 and included colleagues from the wider networks of each LLN, who brought a different and unique perspective to the evaluation process. The final responses from these events were then gathered together to form this report.
One of the areas both LLNs decided not to evaluate was that of ‘Organisation and Governance’. Instead, it was decided that each LLN would outline basic information about their individual organisation and governance arrangements. Both LLNs acknowledge that their structures influence the question responses, but that should not detract from the aim of the process.

4.1 Higher Futures

Higher Futures is the LLN for the sub-region and its travel-to-study area, encompassing South Yorkshire, North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire (see Appendix 8 for listing of partners). The mission of Higher Futures is to create a higher education network to transform progression pathways and opportunities for vocational and work-based learners. Higher Futures chose to focus its work on five priority sectors, which are Engineering, Early Years, Sustainable Communities, Health and Social Care, and Public Wellbeing.

Through effective collaboration, Higher Futures set out to:

- Enhance the supply of higher education provision and transform institutional cultures, processes and procedures;
- Improve progression opportunities to higher education through vocational routes;
- Increase demand from employers and vocational learners for higher level skills and education;
- Improve access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) and transition support.

This would be achieved by:

- Building on existing areas of excellence and linking with other local partnerships, ensuring the continuation and integration of Higher Futures' effective working practices;
- Developing shared agreements and practices across the network through the implementation of a Vocational Learner Progression Framework - removing barriers, facilitating attitudinal change, supporting and increasing learner progression;
- Actively engaging employers to influence curriculum design, content and accessibility, and to generate increased awareness and take up of higher education by employers, training providers and vocational learners;
- Improving information, advice and guidance, and providing enhanced support, to ensure vocational and work-based learners achieve their potential.

The Higher Futures structure is based on a central directorate team of five posts, co-ordinating the work of colleagues based out in the network partnership of ten Further Education Colleges (FECs) and two Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Every partner employs a Higher Futures Information, Advice and Guidance, and Transition Officer (IAGTO). Sector Development Officers (SDOs) are based inside the respective FECs of the South Yorkshire Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) and in both HEIs, and work across all network partners. The governance of the network is overseen by the network’s Operational Management Group and Strategic Management Board, which include representation from all network partners, as well as external stakeholders. (See Appendix 3 for a network diagram).
4.2 Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN

The Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire (GM&WL) LLN was one of the first LLNs to be set up across the country in response to the government initiative to promote vocational and workplace progression into, and through, higher education. Based at Silkhouse Court in Liverpool city centre, partners include Edge Hill University, the University of Liverpool and the Open University, along with twelve further education colleges, providing a range of Foundation Degrees and Year Zero qualifications.

However, membership of the LLN is open to all tertiary and higher education institutions and other interested organisations/groups in the sub-region subject to the approval of the LLN Board. Membership exists in two categories, full partners and associate partners. Full partners are those seeking to offer Additional Student Numbers provision or progression pathways through the LLN. Associate partners are those who may have a key strategic role in the partnership, and are represented on either the Board or the LLN Executive Group (see Appendix 8 for a listing of partners).

GM&WL LLN is an initiative designed to support the progression of adults and young people onto appropriate Higher Education programmes, leading to jobs which demand higher level vocational and professional skills. The Network is initially concentrating on areas of regional skills shortages:

- Health and Social Care
- Creative and Cultural industries
- Hospitality, Tourism, Sport and Active Leisure
- Financial Services

Working closely with other organisations including Aimhigher and Connexions, the network offers support and help to individuals, including advice on:

- What study options are available
- The different levels of qualifications
- What the application process involves

The aims of the LLN:

- Make the whole higher education offer available to vocational learners across a lifetime of work and study.
- Design relevant qualifications through consultation with appropriate Sector Skills Councils, local employers and other key stakeholders.
- Develop the curriculum as appropriate to facilitate progression.
- Development of progression agreements and ensure that they operate effectively across the network enabling students to move between different kinds of vocational and academic programmes.
- Value vocational learning outcomes and provide opportunities for vocational learners to build on earlier experience and to re-engage with learning throughout their lifetime.
- Provide appropriate information, advice, guidance and support for learners on vocational pathways.
- Combine the strengths of a number of diverse institutions.
5 PEER EVALUATION OF HIGHER FUTURES

Both Network teams were present at the evaluation of Higher Futures, alongside Ian Philip, Director of External Relations at Dearne Valley College, and Sylvia Ashton, Co-ordinator of Higher Futures activities at Sheffield Hallam University.

5.1 IAG, student voice, and tracking/re-engaging

**Good practice**

- Higher Futures has encouraged the processes of changing perceptions towards vocational learners in the admissions process. This has been achieved through a variety of activities including:
  - Offering training (CPD) and awareness raising activities to admissions staff;
  - Working with UCAS and SPA in order to ensure fair and transparent admissions policies are employed;
  - Developing progression agreements between institutions; and
  - Through the IAG and Transition Officers, helping to recommend and progress the right learners who will go on to succeed.

- Efforts by Higher Futures to simplify and ease dialogue between the institutions involved in 14-19 diploma work was felt to be a good illustration of potential LLN engagement in the implementation process.

**Challenges**

- Higher Futures felt that it would have liked a longer project time frame in order to properly tackle the issues surrounding HE admissions of vocational learners.
- Both LLNs agreed that involvement in every 14-19 diploma line, and not just those of LLN sector areas, would require further staffing resource.

**Sustainability**

- Undertaking more systematic CPD activities, with both FE and HE staff, is something which Higher Futures felt they would like to embed and sustain beyond the life of the network.

5.1.1 Are there issues with admissions tutors in the universities re: progression agreement development? Are the Further Education Colleges (FECs) more optimistic about progression?

5.1.1.1 Higher Futures felt that the practice of recommending vocational learners for progression was an important factor in building trust and giving recognition to learners’ skills within the HE environment.

5.1.1.2 Issues facing progression agreement (PA) development can be dependant on whether the course being considered is a ‘recruiting’ or
'selective' course. In the latter case, Higher Futures has found that there may be concern that a PA will increase demand still further and/or compromise the choice of the best applicants. However, for the FECs, PAs can be seen as a way of encouraging recruitment, which leads to a more positive association.

5.1.1.3 FEC staff are generally more aware than HEI staff of the qualities and skills of vocational learners and their learning styles, through the volumes of vocational students they experience. The perceptions of these HEI staff can stem from their experiences of a very limited number of vocational students who are less able than others, don't succeed as well on the course, and are more inclined to be non-completers. Higher Futures has found that it is important, therefore, to recognise the background to this situation in order to challenge and improve these perceptions to reflect more accurately the vocational learner population. This work has included clarification of the syllabus behind vocational qualifications.

5.1.1.4 Higher Futures concluded that during its operation, it has tried to change perceptions and inform admissions tutors about vocational learners. It has been partially successfully, and would have liked a longer project time frame in order to properly tackle these protracted issues.

5.1.2 Is there a way forward for embedding the positive message within the universities which the colleges have taken on board?

5.1.3.1 Developing a relationship based on understanding and trust between FECs and HEIs that academically competent learners will be progressed, was felt by the group to be an important step in improving engagement with PAs.

5.1.3.2 Higher Futures has partially addressed this issue by providing CPD activities for admissions tutors within departments in HE, for example awareness raising, filling knowledge gaps, etc. This work has been followed by further requests for CPD activities from faculties, which has lead sector teams to plan more systematic CPD around these issues.

5.1.3.3 Higher Futures added that they have also started to engage with Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) and Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) to ensure that national policies on fair and transparent admissions policies (which match with LLN ones) are conveyed to relevant staff in our partner institutions.

5.1.3.4 The group concluded that this situation was unlikely to get any easier in the future as new qualifications come on stream, and therefore needs to be seen as an ongoing process.
5.1.4 What is your response likely to be to 14-19, Employer Engagement and FE/HE partnership, through both level 3 and level 4?

5.1.4.1 All partners in the Higher Futures network have agreed that they will accept Diplomas for entry. Progression agreements for Diplomas are therefore not essential at this stage, unless evidence becomes available to show that there is a problem with a progression route.

5.1.4.2 Higher Futures is involved to some extent in ‘employer engagement’ with 14-19 Diplomas via the work of the sector teams, and also through the involvement of the Information, Advice and Guidance and Transition Co-ordinator with the local authorities. The Co-ordinator’s role is to act as a HE proxy on local consortia. The consortia examine policy issues, which the Co-ordinator then follows up and makes referrals within partner institutions. This work could include, for example, gathering diploma information for marketing departments. Overall, this allows the Co-ordinator to play a unique role at the interface between consortia and HE/FE, which is appreciated by the local authorities. Interestingly, this work has also led to HE faculties to approach the Co-ordinator for advice on 14-19s through the LLN.

5.1.4.3 At present, engagement is limited to the Higher Futures sector areas, and the group raised the concern that the potential for engagement in more 14-19 work could absorb too much LLN resource, especially if HEFCE develops its policy for LLNs to support Diploma development nationally.

5.1.4.4 Higher Futures has also been involved in encouraging HE to participate in the Diploma Development Partnerships (DDP). They are represented on the planning groups and are active in providing support. Its FEC partners are already quite well involved in the DDPs.

5.2 Progression and Curriculum

**Good practice**

- Higher Futures has successfully employed 'bridging' models in order to raise the confidence of vocational learners and their progression to HE. However, it is too early to say whether this has increased retention rates amongst vocational learners.

5.2.1 How effective have you found your 'bridging modules' for yourself and students in enhancing transition and increasing retention?

5.2.1.1 The bridging module for 'sustainable communities' was very effective in raising the confidence of learners, several of whom progressed onto higher level provision. At the time of evaluation, it was too early to say
whether retention has been improved, but the intention was to follow this through via the learner tracking data.

5.2.1.2 There had been a similar experience on the 'Women into Engineering' bridging course, and a forthcoming course in 'Maths for Engineers' would further test the effectiveness of this strategy for transition to HE.

5.2.2 Your collaboration with Aimhigher in the practitioner research network investigates the experience of work based learners on Foundation Degree Programmes. What has this investigation discovered in relation to sustainability?

5.2.2.1 Higher Futures felt that at this stage it was not possible to comment on this question, due to the fact that practitioner research projects have only just commenced. Findings are due to be disseminated later in the year.

5.3 Partnership

Good practice

- Higher Futures emphasis on partnership working has developed over time from holding large multi sector events (stakeholder forum), towards more localised relationships through sector lead staff. This has reduced organisational staff time pressures, and improved longer term stakeholder relationships with key contacts.
- Both networks agreed that they have benefited from being geographically based around a city region structure, rather than a wider geographical area. This has allowed both LLNs to be more responsive in their local partnerships, and therefore more sustainable for the future.

Challenges

- Staff and capacity issues due to changes and fluctuations in personnel were found to be an ongoing issue for both LLNs.
- Both LLNs acknowledged the challenge of the current economic climate and how this affects current and future partnership and stakeholder relationships.

Sustainability

- Both LLNs agreed that their individual relationships with their lead HEIs have provided the networks with different benefits and challenges. Higher Futures felt that it had benefited from the neutral but supportive position of its lead partner, which has helped to engender the partnership ethos. GM&WL has benefited from its very close relationship with its lead LLN, which has already led to activities being embedded and sustained beyond the life of the network.
5.3.1 Your newsletter mentioned that at the Stakeholder Forum held in February 2008 several projects/ideas were raised which will be taken forward. What were these projects? How are they progressing 9 months on?

5.3.1.1 Higher Futures has formed a range of development projects with stakeholders around curriculum development, employer engagement, practitioner CPD support and workbased progression. These have evolved to date in three of our sectors (early years, engineering and health & social care), but activity has been much slower in the remaining two (public wellbeing and sustainable communities), due to staff and capacity issues.

5.3.1.2 Examples of these developments include:

- Health and Social Care - joint work with the Sheffield Teaching Hospitals Trust has created a progression route for clinical assistants into nursing degrees, and shared curriculum development to address issues with equivalence of Level 2 maths and numeracy skills.

- Engineering - A new Foundation Degree in engineering has been validated, with input from employers into the design and structure of the curriculum. This has strengthened links with several major companies in the area and provided the basis for exploring other developments.

- Early Years - A significant programme of CPD and workforce development has been developed with Rotherham local authority for early years staff, including a fast-track route to early years QTS for staff with extensive experience.

5.3.1.3 Higher Futures has developed a list of current employer contacts, which it uses to re-affirm partnership/stakeholder relationships on a periodic basis, through dissemination of materials and information.

5.3.2 How effective did you find the Forum for liaising with key stakeholders?

5.3.2.1 Higher Futures found that the Stakeholder Forum was a useful mechanism for bringing together a range of different stakeholders across all the sectors. However, it has now placed a much greater emphasis on developing contacts and links through the sector lead staff. This work is supported by directorate colleagues and IAG staff who have played a role in forging relationships with local employers through IAG work.

5.3.2.2 This approach resulted in more sector specific events and activities, in preference to organising more Stakeholder Forum events during 2008. In practice, the organisation of a Stakeholder Forum event was like a mini conference, which absorbed considerable staff time, so Higher
Futures believed this shift of emphasis has been beneficial in both time and longer term relationships.

5.3.2.3 Higher Futures has also exhibited at a number of local Employer Forum events, which it has found good for gaining further contacts and referrals.

5.3.3 What are the benefits/challenges of the relationship between the lead institution and the LLN?

5.3.3.1 Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) has been very content to take a neutral stance and not use Higher Futures as a vehicle to pursue its own priorities. This has helped engender the partnership concept of the network. This has meant the network has also had to position itself relative to the strategic priorities of SHU and work hard to demonstrate its value-added credentials.

5.3.3.2 This has resulted in Higher Futures being referenced within the new SHU Corporate Plan 2008 -13 and, latterly, occupying an important role as a partner in a major bid to HEFCE.

5.3.3.3 The greatest challenge has been to distinguish or differentiate the work of HF to other 'widening participation' initiatives within SHU, of which there is extensive activity taking place both centrally and in Faculties. Although it means there are many colleagues who are supportive, it can also lead to sensitivities surrounding roles and responsibilities.

5.3.3.4 The group acknowledged that this work was also affected by the changing economic conditions which are currently affecting all partner institutions. New allocations of funding to alleviate the situation were available, and HF felt that LLNs have an important part to play in meeting higher level skills.

5.3.3.5 In preparing the HEFCE Widening Participation Strategic Assessments in HE, both Universities were currently considering how to jointly reference the work of Higher Futures.

5.3.3.6 Overall, the group felt that SHU was an active member of the partnership, and has provided a positive and supportive environment for the network and its partner institutions. This balance has been achieved, in part, by SHU chairing the Strategic Management Board. Operational Management Group is chaired by the University of Sheffield.

5.3.3.7 The group felt that smaller geographical networks, based on a city region structure, had the ability to be more responsive and therefore have a more sustainable future than those networks with a larger, more complex basis.
5.4 Communications and Marketing

Good practice

- HF has devised a strong brand and logo. Both agreed it was important to audience recognition of the LLN. GM&WL felt they would consider re-branding their LLN if the opportunity arose through the extension of the network.
- Higher Futures has found events effective in the marketing of the network, but also in providing a catalyst for other areas of operation, such as IAG and sector development.
- Higher Futures 'Activity round-up' highlights innovative partner activity across the network, and was voted to be the most useful method of communication and dissemination in a recent survey of partners.

Sustainability

- Higher Futures has implemented a 'pathways' section to their website, detailing progression routes between Level 3 and Level 4 courses. Although this facility has been designed to be sustainable beyond the life of the network, as data can be transferred to partner sites and maintained through a database, further negotiation is necessary to determine its future.

5.4.1 Which marketing tools have you found to be most productive and why?

5.4.1.1 The HF brand was felt to be flexible, vibrant and, most importantly, recognisable, which has stood Higher Futures in good stead when marketing to all key audiences. GM&WL LLN noted that as part of their development and evolution, they would like to consider the possibility of re-branding in the future, emphasising similar values to Higher Futures.

5.4.1.2 Attending events for both learners and employers has proved a catalyst for the marketing of the network, and in supporting IAG (through data capture cards) and sector development (employer contacts).

5.4.1.3 The Higher Futures website has been developed as a 'portal' to signpost other relevant information or sites, and since it was launched, visitor numbers have steadily increased. One sustainable area of the site is the 'Pathways' section which allows learners to track progression routes between Level 3 to Level 4 courses. This part of the site has been developed from a database which can be easily updated and/or transferred to partner sites at the end of the project.

5.4.1.4 Higher Futures has been very careful to draw a distinction between the two different functions of marketing and IAG, which has been maintained and supported by the good internal relationships which Higher Futures has built up across the network team.
5.4.2 What communication channels do you have with your partners and stakeholders and how effective have you found these to be?

5.4.2.1 The 'Activity Round-up' is a briefing newsletter, circulated to partners four times a year, which highlights the most interesting and innovative activities taking place across the network. Higher Futures has found this to be an effective way to disseminate details of partner activity and encourage innovative activity within the partnership.

5.4.2.2 Higher Futures produces a marketing version of the HEFCE annual report, which is used to disseminate activity to stakeholders, and to generate new stakeholder contacts and relationships.

5.4.2.3 Events and meetings have inevitably proved the most effective way of ensuring face-to-face contact and two-way communication between the Directorate team and partners/stakeholders, by strengthening team relationships and communicating aims and activities.

5.4.2.4 The fortnightly Higher Futures news digest produces is a round up of news, events and publications relevant to its work, priority sectors and the region. Due to its popularity, sign-up is now available to individuals outside the network through the website.

5.4.2.5 Higher Futures has recently added a password-protected area for the wider Higher Futures team only, in order to provide a central point of information for the wider team.

5.5 Employer Engagement

Good practice

- Higher Futures has developed a model of employer engagement through offering opportunities for collaborative working which are relevant to those employers, and using this to meet the needs of vocational learners, for example the joint development of Foundation Degrees.

Challenges

- Engagement with employers has not been as easy to develop and capture across all the LLN sectors especially where there is a wide mix of public, private, and voluntary businesses or organisations.

Sustainability

- There may be opportunities for both FE and HE to work more closely together in developing strong employer relationships. Both LLNs have utilised their different employer relationships to bring them together for the benefit of vocational learners.
5.5.1 What difficulties have you had to face in terms of engaging with Employers to allow them to recognise the benefit of combining Higher Education and work skills in support of individuals' professional development? How have you done this?

5.5.1.1 Higher Futures felt the key lesson of engagement with employers has been the need to approach them with something to offer that is relevant to their interests, and not try to engage for engagement sake. That is less true of the employer intermediaries (e.g. sector skills councils) because they too want to develop links with HE/FE in order to represent their sector.

5.5.1.2 Higher Futures has achieved contact with employers in every sector, although it was noted this engagement was harder to develop and capture in the sustainable communities sector.

5.5.1.3 Engagement has been partially achieved by Higher Futures visiting employer contacts, logging contacts on the database for mailouts, and taking part in groups they were already involved in.

5.5.1.4 The group acknowledged that both FE and HE had a role to play in developing strong employer relationships. The group felt that HE held more targeted contacts based often around placements, whereas FE had developed more "on the ground" contacts through internal employer engagement units, especially with the workforce of small to medium sized businesses. Utilising and bringing together both of these sets of contacts has helped Higher Futures develop strong contacts with local employers.

5.5.2 The Interim Network review of April 2008 concluded that attention should be given to raising the profile of Higher Futures amongst employers and regionally based partners. What ways have been identified? What has developed since then to enable this?

5.5.2.1 At the regional level, Higher Futures felt that they have been extremely active in positioning the LLN on key groups and with the key regional agencies (Yorkshire Forward, Yorkshire Universities, Train to Gain, Sheffield City Region, etc.). This has been assisted by working with other LLNs in the region to raise their collective profile generally but there has also been a growing importance around high level skills policy and funding that the network has been able to take advantage of.

5.5.2.2 Higher Futures noted that it was likely that many employers still identify with individual institutions rather than the network.
5.6 Evaluation

**Good practice**

- Undertaking an interim review of Higher Futures helped highlight key future priorities and strengthen the case for new network developments, for example a scoping study into the Creative and Media sector.

5.6.1 *Overall, how useful did you find the Interim Network review for creating a clearer direction for Higher Futures into 2009? Have you considered any measures to be implemented as a result of this?*

5.6.1.1 The review was deliberate in highlighting priorities for the future in an independent manner. Some policy areas would have come on stream naturally (e.g. 14-19 diplomas) but it helped strengthen the case for new developments.

5.6.1.2 One measure Higher Futures implemented as a result of the Interim Network review was undertaking a gap analysis to identify opportunities in the creative and media industries sector. This is to be backed up by a development fund to pilot several initiatives during 2009.

5.6.2 *What evidence is there to demonstrate change in practices and/or cultures within the partnership?*

5.6.2.1 A major internal data gathering exercise is currently underway to try and address this question, so there may be clearer evidence soon. However, Higher Futures noted that there are numerous examples of collaborative working and sharing best practice across the network that will have undoubtedly had a beneficial impact on inter-institutional relationships and development of professional practice.

5.6.2.2 The final stage of external evaluation is likely to look more closely at the impact on culture. The developing work around sustainability will also reveal how successful Higher Futures has been in embedding change and creating a legacy beyond its original business plan.
6 PEER EVALUATION OF GREATER MERSEYSIDE AND WEST LANCASHIRE LLN

Both Network Teams were present at the evaluation discussion session of GM&WL, together with Jo Bullock, ‘Passport’ Contact, Riverside College Halton.

6.1 IAG, student voice, and tracking/re-engaging

**Good practice**

- Building strong links and relationships with lead contacts at each partner college has enabled GM&WL to expand IAG influence within institutions.
- The 'passport' scheme has been very helpful in targeting local learners under-represented in HE, supported by specific interventions at critical or important points in the academic calendar (e.g. student finance or UCAS talks to students in partner colleges).

**Challenges**

- Maintaining and monitoring the accuracy of the information systems on progression routes - three new subject strands in total comprise of over 200 additional progression routes - and new progression routes continue to come on board all the time.

**Sustainability**

- Nominated contacts in the partner colleges are able to see the advantages to and advances made by their own students and the college, allowing them to report back the case for sustainability.
- Having a clear picture of where students come from and how successful they are is key to sustainability and growth, allowing us to respond to changes proactively and when needed.

6.1.1 What is the model of delivery of IAG?

6.1.1.1 The main model for delivery is via the IAG Progression Officer with support from dedicated partner contacts in colleges. Each contact was specifically chosen for their wider role for delivering IAG in their college to the whole range of students. Primarily, these contacts liaise internally with colleagues and then field advice to the learner or refer the learner to the appropriate person for advice.

6.1.1.2 The IAG Progression Officer has very strong relationships with each partner contact and is in constant liaison. This is extremely positive and has proved essential in providing a high standard of advice and guidance to both the contact and learner, whilst ensuring fair strand representation.
6.1.1.3 There are regular visits to each college to talk to students from all course levels (BTEC, A Level, Apprenticeship and Access) under the progression scheme on a range of issues such as ‘The benefits of HE’, and ‘Interview Skills and Techniques’.

6.1.1.4 The IAG Officer is also available to be in colleges at specific times to deliver specific advice on a 1-2-1 basis. There is also a dedicated suite of booklets and information specifically for students in partner colleges under the progression scheme ‘The Passport to Higher Education’ as well as specific email and telephone line for students to get in contact at other times.

6.1.1.5 Individuals can also book appointments with the IAG Officer if they need additional support. By no means is impartiality compromised at any time and this is retained outside the network with all learners receiving equal treatment regardless of whether they are staying with the network or moving on to another FEI.

6.1.2 What steps will be taken to embed IAG for partners?

6.1.2.1 The Collaborative Provision Forum has been key in helping partners to provide feedback to Edge Hill as a lead institute. Although partners verbally feedback their comments and suggestions throughout the year, after visit days and at contact meetings, GM&WL is hoping to implement some form of additional monitoring process for feedback from partners at approximately 3 times in the academic year.

6.1.3 How is progression data obtained and updated and will it be used in the future?

6.1.3.1 The primary mechanism for flagging up all learners on a Progression agreement is through the admissions team at Edge Hill University. The system automatically flags up at the application form processing stage that the student is applying under an LLN progression scheme. Contacts within each partner college also ensure that students state that they are part of the LLN progression scheme in the ‘Additional Information’ section. This allows the LLN to ensure these students are given the interview they are entitled to, and updates on numbers can be requested at any point.

6.1.3.2 This monitoring is not solely based on Additional Student Numbers but across all courses, although at present there is no mechanism for capturing people who are in employment.

6.1.3.3 Additional data can be requested from the Enquiries Unit, such as number of enquiries for a particular course offered through the LLN or number of enquiries for a particular time frame. We can also cross reference HE data held between the Enquiries team and admissions to get a clearer picture of the progression of our students.

6.1.3.4 At events and when students request information via email or telephone we encourage the student to fill in their details for data
capture purposes. This allows us to keep in contact with enquirers and inform them of any new developments or changes within their subject interest area.

6.1.4 What transitional activities take place and how do you know they are effective?

6.1.4.1 The main transitional activities are subject strand specific visit days where students from our partner colleges visit Edge Hill University to experience University life. This involves interactive subject specific sessions from tutors, talks from current students, support from careers, students finance and accommodation departments. Lunch, refreshments and transportation are all paid for by the LLN.

6.1.4.2 Feedback from students and contacts within the LLN has proved that these transitional activities are very popular, leading to requests for more or repeated sessions, and for further information.

6.2 Progression and Curriculum

**Good practice**

- Vocational progression is seen as a key component of widening participation strategy.
- HE mentors provide support and guidance to FE colleagues throughout the validation process, encouraging staff within the colleges to engage in more and different LLN activities.

**Challenges**

- Some colleges have not been as active as others, resulting in varying levels of engagement. The challenge is to perhaps find different ways to engage these colleges.

**Sustainability**

- There is clear evidence of a shift in course validation practice within the LLN, and away from multiple links with HEIs outside the network.

6.2.1 What is different for student progression as a result of the LLN compared with a) what existed before? b) What other applicants get?

6.2.1.1 Prior to the LLN there was no specific or very structured partnership or relationship with a dedicated person within the colleges apart from that
which already existed within the Widening Participation Team at Edge
Hill University.

6.2.1.2 Since the LLN was formed, the network now works very closely with
10 key colleges within the area and has a designated contact in each,
which has created a very dedicated and close knit partnership. All
interventions and activity mentioned previously did not take place
before the LLN.

6.2.1.3 IAG intervention and activity is much more structured, defined and
intensive compared to what other students get outside the LLN
partnership. The LLN is also seen as neutral, rather than a
recruitment mechanism for the lead HEI.

6.2.1.4 Curriculum development is extensive and additional courses are being
added, the new courses are then added to the Progression passport.

6.2.2 Is there a learner entitlement within the PA around IAGT support?

6.2.2.1 Each learner under the PA is entitled to all of the intervention activities
mentioned previously. Colleges all receive the same number of visits,
materials, university visit days, etc. Added to this, individual colleges
can request additional or repeat session visits. Students can also
access the website, IAG email or telephone number at any time.

6.2.3 Which partners are involved in curriculum development as a result of LLN activity?

6.2.3.1 Birkenhead 6th Form College, Carmel College, Knowsley Community
College, King George V, Riverside College Halton, Southport College,
Edge Hill University, St. John Rigby, University of Liverpool and Wirral
Metropolitan College are all involved in curriculum development as a
result of LLN activity.

6.2.3.2 St. Helens College, Hugh Baird and Liverpool Community College
have developed programmes through the LLN but did not recruit for
September 2008 but will try recruitment for September 2009.

6.2.3.3 Riverside College Halton and Wirral Metropolitan College also
expressed their interest in running the FD in Counselling for 2010 and
talks are currently underway to implement this.
6.3 Partnership

### Good practice

- The Partnership has remained strong, particularly at Board and Executive level, which has been critical to developing a shared strategic commitment and growth of 'partnership culture'.

### Challenges

- The success in attracting funding for ASNs (Additional Student Numbers) requires an increase in the curriculum offer across the partnership to meet targets.

### Sustainability

- At the GM&WL Board Meeting on 30 April 2009, it was unanimously agreed that the LLN would be fully sustained by the partnership.

6.3.1 How has partnership working evolved or changed during the life of the LLN?

6.3.1.1 The membership of 'full' and 'associate' partners has remained the same, with particularly good commitment at Board level. Partner working has evolved at each strand level. For instance, the Finance strand was introduced and the working group looked at the introduction of the Foundation Degree in Accountancy.

6.3.1.2 During the past 3 years more partners have become involved in delivery and more qualifications have been delivered by partners.

6.3.1.3 Currently, the LLN is looking to develop partnerships which will reach out to more Apprentices.

6.3.2 Has a partnership model been developed to sustain the network after the funding period? How is it the same or different? Are others involved or integrated?

6.3.2.1 A 'Sustainability' paper was due to go to the Board meeting on 30 April 2009. The model, still to be developed, is likely to resemble the current model though it would operate across more vocational strands.

6.3.2.2 At the Executive meeting on 3 March 2009, the Chair stated that the LLN was seen to be good, worthwhile and a success story, confirming that Edge Hill was committed to leading the LLN.

6.3.2.3 There are considerable benefits from the close relationship that has been formed between Edge Hill as the lead HEI and the LLN. These
benefits include the resources which are available when drawing on help, support and expertise from within the University, for instance, finance, curriculum development and registry.

6.3.3 How helpful has evaluation been in identifying strengths on which to build new funding ideas?

6.3.3.1 There was a strong view from many respondents during the evaluation that priorities for the future included leading on future funding bids, employer engagement and a suggestion that securing of more ASNs (Additional Student Numbers) would be useful.

6.3.3.2 GM&WL has successfully secured 260 ASNs for 2009/10 and 225 ASNs for 2010/11. This follows a successful bid in 2008/09 for 350 ASNs.

6.3.3.3 A conclusion from the External Evaluation was that there is a determination to maintain the LLN’s partnerships.

6.4 Communications and Marketing

**Good practice**

- Tracking marketing and awareness raising campaigns to monitor the volume of enquiries and interest.
- Ensuring input and feedback from partners regarding marketing strategies and materials and that all concerns and suggestions raised at meetings are evaluated and analysed.

**Challenges**

- Maintaining partner representation at communications meetings and that all opinions are considered when planning any marketing.

**Sustainability**

- Communication between partners will be vital in expanding the marketing and communication work undertaken by the GM&WL LLN. It is hoped to set up a discussion forum on the website from 2009/10.

6.4.1 How have you measured the success and added value of marketing through the LLN, compared to that of partners?

6.4.1.1 The LLN manages the success of the LLN marketing by assigning each campaign a unique advertising number that we can then track to see how many enquiries etc. have been gained through each initiative. We also ask partners to feedback on the enquiries etc they receive
through the campaigns. This helps us to build a complete picture of each campaign and its results.

6.4.1.2 Edge Hill has always marketed to the learner going “straight to the source”, and this has proved beneficial. The dual role the Marketing Officer is integral to adding value to Communications and Marketing; using knowledge and resources available at the Edge Hill Campus.

6.4.2 What mechanisms have you put in place for communication with/dissemination to partners, and how have you ensured that this is a two-way process?

6.4.2.1 Since the inception of the LLN, there has been communication with partners through a regular communication meeting (3 monthly). This has enabled the partners to discuss the marketing initiatives that are being planned by the LLN marketing team and vice versa. The meetings have also provided an arena for discussion and communication between partners and have proved vital for resolving issues and planning initiatives. Although the attendance fluctuates, and the FECs are not always represented, the feedback is positive.

6.4.3 How will you ensure that the continuing dialogue between partners is sustainable beyond the life of the LLN?

6.4.3.1 Though it may be hard to monitor and guarantee that the dialogue between partners is sustained, the benefits shown through regular communication between the partners has proved that the dialogue that takes place between them is worthwhile and should continue past the life of the LLN. This is something that will be stressed to partners when the end of the LLN is approaching. A contact database of all partners will also be circulated to make sure that all have the details to continue the communication that has been developed.

6.4.3.2 Alongside the Communications Group meeting, other mechanisms used for communication include the newsletter and website. The Marketing officer would like to start a discussion forum on the website next year.
6.5 Employer Engagement

**Good practice**

- Liaise with local employers in order to keep up with what the local employers want and need in a changing economy.

**Challenges**

- A challenging economic environment and the continuing myth among employers that offering HE courses to employees will lead them to look for jobs elsewhere. We need to reassure them this will lead to a better qualified and engaged workforce, which will take their business into the future.

**Sustainability**

- The key to sustainability here is to listen to what the employers want and need, and respond accordingly. In this respect, there is some evidence that colleges would appreciate central support for strategic employer engagement work.

6.5.1 Employer Engagement is identified as a key challenge for the LLN, so what strategies have worked and why?

6.5.1.1 Some of the courses under the progression agreements require placements as part of the course, mainly in the Education and Health fields. Partners have very strong relationships with those employers who have a placement student on board, and are much more willing and accepting of FE and HE and how it can benefit their business. Similarly, employers have found those students on placement under the LLN scheme to be dedicated and committed to their work based learning.

6.5.1.2 Many Edge Hill courses and subject strands do not necessitate a work placement, although as its curriculum and strands develop in the future, they are hoping to build upon existing relationships with their current employers and forge new relationships with others.

6.5.1.3 All HE curriculum design requires input from employers. At present, more employers identify with partners as an individual institutions rather than Edge Hill University. It was acknowledged that more work needs to be done to engage with employers.

6.5.2 How effective has the network been in reaching WBL apprentices?

6.5.2.1 In the last year, GMWL has very successfully managed to reach WBL apprentices. This is mainly due to its collaboration and closer working
relationship with Aimhigher St Helens. A specific booklet was created to provide information for all WBL learners in certain subject strand areas. As a result of collaboration, the network was able to reach additional learners who Aimhigher had already dealt with.

6.5.2.2 The WBL apprentices are also entitled to exactly the same interventions and activities (outlined earlier) as other level 3 learners. For example, they also get their own specific ‘University Visit Day’ aimed solely at WBL apprentices.

6.5.2.3 As this project is still in its infancy we are still awaiting full feedback although individual feedback has been very positive. The network is hoping to build upon this in the future and has made tentative inroads with Merseyside Adult Learners Forum and Union Learn.

6.5.3 What is the role of the Outreach Workplace Development Officer and how does it relate to other employer engagement functions within the partnership?

6.5.3.1 This role is mainly funded by Edge Hill University but a small amount is provided by the network. This role has forged some very strong links with Union Learn. Activities and information that may benefit the LLN are passed on, including individual and employer contacts. The LLN also works very closely on the new Merseyside Adult Learners Committee. The Outreach Workplace Development Officer also attends the same events and is collaborating with the IAG Officer on the Apprentice Visit day.

6.6 Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good practice</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The relative success of GM&amp;WL in attracting mature learners in employment, by comparison with national trends.</td>
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<th>Challenges</th>
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<td>• Meeting ASN targets for 2009/10 and 2010/11.</td>
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<th>Sustainability</th>
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<tr>
<td>• At the meeting 30th April 2009, the Board gave a renewed commitment to sustain activity and maintain the current organisational structure and the LLN, base in Liverpool. The Board believes that the LLN will continue to be a dynamic force for widening participation through collaborative working across the partnership.</td>
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</table>

6.6.1 How were the different stages of evaluation linked and what have been the key lessons learned?
6.6.1.1 Manchester Metropolitan University successfully tendered for the Evaluation and they focused on triangulation to ensure the views of students and all key stakeholders. The summary of the report identified the key evaluative points for the network, but the main lessons were:

- High degree of student satisfaction with new programmes.
- Employers believe the LLN shows a high degree of responsiveness to their needs and to skills gaps.
- Partnership working between FE and HE has proved very beneficial.
- This LLN has done particularly well in attracting mature learners who are in employment. This recruitment compares favourably with findings from the national evaluation of LLNs, which shows that many have targeted the easier-to-reach constituency of younger learners.

6.6.1.2 Edge Hill seems to have positioned the network towards widening participation, how will this affect collaboration in the future?

6.6.1.3 Edge Hill has positioned the network towards widening participation and vocational progression will continue to be at the heart of strategy. The network is being responsive to the demands of the four strands and the industries they represent. SOLSTICE hubs have been created in 3 FE partner colleges to help widen participation.

6.6.1.4 The starting point is that only 40% of vocational learners go on to Higher Education. Collaboration in the future will be guided by this and partners will look at level 3 students in colleges, those in employment and 14-19 developments.

6.6.2 What evidence is there to demonstrate change in practices and/or cultures within the partnership?

6.6.2.1 Partnership and institutional impact was looked at within the External Evaluation and good evidence to show change has been positive.
7 CONCLUSIONS

The peer evaluation process has been a valuable exercise in sharing knowledge, experiences and understanding across two LLNs that, superficially, bear several similarities - size, geography, sectors - but which differ markedly in their structures and approach.

7.1 Lessons for the LLNs

7.1.1 The lead HEIs have played a crucial role in their respective networks, with invaluable support from partners, and are looking positively towards sustainability.

7.1.2 Sectoral focus has undoubtedly accelerated curriculum development, especially of foundation degree provision, across the partnerships and stimulated collaborative relationships between HE and FE to respond better to employer demand.

7.1.3 Vocational learners are clearly seen as an important and significant market for HE progression, but one that remains under-exploited.

7.1.4 Partnership working has been strengthened and enhanced through the LLNs, and extended joint working into areas not previously identified for HE-FE collaboration such as IAG and transition support.

7.1.5 The challenges for both networks are typified by the patchiness of impact in some respects (e.g. employer engagement, progression agreements). This illustrates the importance of seeing this work as the developmental beginning of a much longer term objective.

7.1.6 Practitioners have benefitted enormously from HE-FE interaction, knowledge sharing, joint working and collaboration, which need to be central to sustainability strategy.

7.1.7 Tracking systems have been set up with considerable staff time and commitment that needs to be embedded into ongoing practice.
7.2 Messages to HEFCE

7.2.1 Practitioner and staff development has been a major by-product of HE-FE collaboration in a range of professional practices covering curriculum development; information, advice and guidance; transition and progression to HE; employer and sector engagement. There is a danger this will dissipate without an enabling and renewing policy focus around HE-FE partnership that is vital to meeting the wider higher level skills agenda.

7.2.2 Although LLNs are a useful mechanism for engaging HE-FE in 14-19 development, continued support will require resource to work effectively across the full range of diploma lines.

7.2.3 A considerable amount of curriculum development has led to opportunities for part-time and work-based learning. This actively supports employer engagement priorities and related objectives such as apprentice progression to HE. These may be areas that could be linked to future development and network sustainability.

7.2.4 The reaction to the notion of 'progression agreements' has been mixed, and terminology may have generated some misperceptions, but has opened dialogue within institutions and subject areas that weren't previously active around admissions and entry issues. Agreements themselves are sometimes the product of this dialogue, whereas it is the process that has been most valuable.

7.2.5 The peer evaluation process is an innovative and helpful method of learning from each other that might have benefited from a stronger steer on its focus and priorities. It should not be underestimated too that success relies on a degree of knowledge and experience of everyone involved. In this respect, some training or briefing would be useful if this approach is adopted in future initiatives.
8 APPENDICES

8.1 APPENDIX 1: PEER EVALUATION OF HIGHER FUTURES BY GREATER MERSEYSIDE AND WEST LANCASHIRE LLN ............ 30
8.2 APPENDIX 2: PEER EVALUATION OF GREATER MERSEYSIDE AND WEST LANCASHIRE LLN BY HIGHER FUTURES ............. 33
8.3 APPENDIX 3: HIGHER FUTURES NETWORK STRUCTURE DIAGRAM ........................................................................ 35
8.4 APPENDIX 4: HIGHER FUTURES ROLE DESCRIPTIONS .................................................................................. 36
8.5 APPENDIX 5: GM&WL LLN NETWORK STRUCTURE DIAGRAM ............................................................................ 39
8.6 APPENDIX 6: GREATER MERSEYSIDE AND WEST LANCASHIRE LLN ROLE DESCRIPTIONS ................................. 40
8.7 APPENDIX 7: LIST OF MEETINGS BETWEEN PARTNERS, TO INCLUDE ALL EVENTS ........................................ 42
8.1 APPENDIX 1: Peer evaluation of Higher Futures by Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN


Name of LLN to be Evaluated    GM&WL Lifelong Learning Network
Name of Peer LLN            Higher Futures

The theme of sustainability should run through all the areas for evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas for Evaluation*</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Topics of interest</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IAG, student voice,</td>
<td>Annual Monitoring return</td>
<td>Learner Tracking</td>
<td>Higher Futures Annual Monitoring Return 207-087: Commentary – Executive Summary – page 14</td>
</tr>
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<td>and tracking/re-</td>
<td>Interim Network review</td>
<td></td>
<td>Issues with admissions tutors in the universities re: progression agreement development and,</td>
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<td>engaging</td>
<td>LLN Newsletter Nov 08</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interim Network Review, April 2008, page 17, the FECs are more optimistic about progression</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Is there a way forward for embedding the positive message within the Universities which the colleges have taken on board?</td>
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<td>Jackie’s article in the LLN Newsletter, November 2008, re; the 14-19 Diploma</td>
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<td>What is your response likely to be to 14-19 policy and FE/HE partnership?</td>
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<td>Progression and</td>
<td>LLN Newsletter Annual Report</td>
<td>Nature of Progression</td>
<td>How effective have you found your 'bridging modules' for yourself and students in enhancing transition and increasing retention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Reports to HECE</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>Higher Futures News winter 2008/2009 – you comment – your collaboration with Aimhigher in the practitioner research network investigates the</td>
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<td>experience of work based learners on Foundation Degree Programmes. What has this investigation discovered?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Document References</td>
<td>Questions/Remarks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>LLN Newsletter Annual Report Report to HEFCE Sustaining FE/HE interface Role of lead HEI</td>
<td>How can this be used in the sustainability of Higher futures into 2009? Your newsletter mentioned that at the Stakeholder Forum held in February 2008 several projects/ideas were raised which will be taken forward. What were there projects? How are they progressing 9 months on? How effective did you find the Forum for liaising with key stakeholders? Partnership and group structure – Is there an internal LLN group within Sheffield Hallam and what is the membership?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications and Marketing</td>
<td>LLN Newsletter</td>
<td>How effective did you find your 'postcard' marketing campaign 'Considering Higher Education?' in terms of the response generated? What other marketing tools have you found to be most productive?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer Engagement</td>
<td>Interim Network review LLN Newsletter Report to HEFCE Annual Monitoring Report Annual Report Engagement with Apprentices</td>
<td>What difficulties have you had to face in terms of engaging with Employers to allow them to recognise the benefit of combining Higher Education and work skills in support of individuals’ professional development? How have you done this? Section 5.4 of the Interim Network review of April 2008 concluded that attention should be given to raising the profile of Higher Futures amongst employers and regionally based partners. What ways have been identified? What has developed since then to enable this? Jackie’s article in the LLN Newsletter, November 2008, re; the 14-19 Diploma What is your response likely to be to Employer Engagement and FE/HE partnership?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Interim Network Review Annual Report Newsletters Sustainability post in Colleges</td>
<td>Overall, how useful did you find the Interim Network review for creating a clearer direction for Higher Futures into 2009? Have you considered any measures to be implemented as a result of this?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Network Team Structure – How was it decided which posts would be within each FEC partner? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different number of posts in each college?

* Pairings to agree on parameters
8.2 APPENDIX 2: Peer evaluation of Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN by Higher Futures


**Name of LLN to be Evaluated:** Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN

**Name of Peer LLN:** Higher Futures

The theme of sustainability should run through all the areas for evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas for Evaluation*</th>
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<th>Key Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IAG, student voice, and tracking/re-engaging</td>
<td>Passports Two year report to HEFCE First year review External evaluation report LLN proposal</td>
<td>IAG provision and delivery Transitional activities for learners Data collection and learner tracking</td>
<td>What is the model for delivery of IAG? What steps will be taken to embed IAG for partners? How is progression data obtained and updated and will it be used in the future? What transitional activities take place and how do you know these are effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression and Curriculum</td>
<td>Passports Plans for mini prospectus Two year report to HEFCE First year review External evaluation report LLN proposal</td>
<td>Nature of Progression Agreements CPD activities</td>
<td>What is different for student progression as a result of the LLN compared with (a) what existed before? (b) what other applicants get? Is there a learner entitlement within the PA around IAGT support? Which partners are involved in curriculum development as a result of LLN activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>LLN Proposal to HEFCE MoA LLNNews GM&amp;WL leaflet External evaluation report</td>
<td>Sustainability and funding Expansion/inclusion of Associate members Future partnership model Collaborative structures</td>
<td>How has partnership working evolved or changed during the life of the LLN? Has a partnership model been developed to sustain the network after the funding period; how is it the same or different; are others involved or integrated? How helpful has evaluation been in identifying strengths on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Communications and Marketing | First Year Review  
Two Year Report to HEFCE  
LLNews  
GM&WL website | Adding value and measuring success  
Communicating with partners  
Sustainability | How have you measured the success and added value of marketing through the LLN, compared to that of partners?  
What mechanisms have you put in place for communication with/dissemination to partners, and how have you ensured that this is a two-way process?  
**How will you ensure that the continuing dialogue between partners is sustainable beyond the life of the LLN?** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Employer Engagement | First Year Review  
Two Year Report to HEFCE  
External evaluation report LLNews | Large companies v SMEs  
Choice of sectors  
Progression from WBL | Employer engagement identified as key challenge for the LLN, so what strategies have worked and why?  
How effective has the network been in reaching WBL apprentices?  
What is the role of the Outreach Workplace Development Officer and how does it relate to other employer engagement functions within the partnership?  
Has the network fulfilled a brokerage role between the partners and/or employers, business support services, sectoral agencies? |
| Evaluation | External evaluation report  
Annual reports  
Edge Hill Strategic Plan 2008-13  
LLNews | Internal and external focus  
Links to sustainability strategy | How were the different stages of evaluation linked and what have been the key lessons learned?  
**What evidence is there to demonstrate change in practices and/or cultures within the partnership?**  
Edge Hill seems to have positioned the network towards widening participation, how will this affect collaboration in future? |

* Pairings to agree on parameters

**BOLD** - Questions to be asked of both institutions
8.3 APPENDIX 3: Higher Futures network structure diagram
8.4 APPENDIX 4: Higher Futures role descriptions

8.4.1 Directorate posts

Director:

- Implementation of the aims and objectives of the Higher Futures business plan by developing and implementing a communication strategy for the Network.
- Liaison with core team coordinators and officers across the Network through effective regular communication.
- Creation of promotional materials including the development and marketing of a Higher Futures website and a quarterly newsletter highlighting progress on delivery of the project and achievements.
- Organising events, conferences, promotional and publicity activities as required;
- Consulting with partners in the network as appropriate to operational activities including establishing structures that provide opportunities for incorporating the active views and participation of learner representatives.
- Co-ordinating marketing campaigns as appropriate and monitoring the results.

IAG and Transition Co-ordinator:

- Implementation of the aims and objectives of the Higher Futures business plan through the development of an operational plan for the IAG strand of activity.
- Coordination of a team of IAG & Transition Officers, based in all partner institutions, to develop an IAG service, delivered in liaison with existing IAG services in the network institutions.
- Liaison with other guidance staff, academic staff and managers to ensure full awareness of the programme and cooperation with its objectives.
- Ensuring Higher Futures IAG services engagement with Work Based Learners and employees in the priority sectors with assistance from employers where appropriate.
- Developing communication resources and co-ordinating staff development in partner organisations to obtain student commitment, participation and utilisation of the services developed.
- Developing effective use of management information to support and develop the service.
- Developing systems to support the service, including an effective tracking and monitoring system.
- Oversight of sector based projects and developments.
- Liaison with faculty sectors and central admissions teams in HEIs to improve pre-entry and admissions services for the target learner groups.
- Liaison with Higher Futures Operational Management Group and Management Board.
- Contribute to Higher Futures policy development and implementation.
- Liaison with external agencies (local, regional and national) including local authorities, Connexions, IAG organisations, UCAS and SPA, as appropriate, to raise awareness and obtain support for Higher Futures activity.

Access and Progression Co-ordinator:

- Develop an operational plan for the Access and Progression strand of the Higher Futures Business Plan.
Co-ordinate team leadership of the activities of Sector Development Officers and Access and Progression Officers.

Lead the development of Progression Agreements from inception to formal approval and implementation.

Work in partnership with HEIs and FECs to ensure policies, processes and procedures which support progression and access are embedded within institutions.

Lead consultation with Sector Working Groups and Special Interest Groups to inform access and progression strand.

Support the development of new curricula and/or learning support facilities relevant to LLN Business Plan.

Identify and develop CPD/staff development to support aims and objectives of the LLN.

Work interdependently with other officers of LLN to ensure that activities are holistic and integrated.

Develop and maintain networks with other organisations, initiatives, agencies and bodies to promote Higher Futures and make use of best practice from elsewhere.

Develop systems to support the service, including an effective tracking and monitoring system.

Develop quality systems /procedures.

Liaise with Higher Futures Operational Management Group and Management Board as appropriate.

Undertake other duties as may be considered necessary for the effective operation and success of the Network.

Information and Communications Officer:

Assisting in the development and implementation of a communication strategy for Higher Futures.

Be responsible for the brand management of Higher Futures.

Act as a central point of contact for internal and external enquiries and liaison with stakeholders.

Devising and writing of promotional materials, including the development and marketing of a Higher Futures website and newsletter, highlighting progress on delivery and achievements.

Organising events, conferences, promotional and publicity activities as required, and evaluating outcomes.

Planning, preparing and co-ordination the production, print and distribution of materials for disseminating the work of Higher Futures.

Support the Network through effective, regular communication.

Support project activity through gathering, analysing and utilising web-based or other appropriate information sources to contribute to the project.

Administration Officer:

To act as project administrator, providing direct support to the Higher Futures Director, co-ordinating business activities and providing a complete secretariat service for the organisation of the Strategic Management Board, Operational Management Group and associated Special Interest Groups, involving a range of external partners and agencies.

To be responsible for the organisation and maintenance of a HEFCE grant of £3.2m, devising budgeting, reporting and monitoring systems to support the Director and external network team in the management and reporting of project finance.

To act as the central point of contact for Higher Futures, for all internal and external contacts, providing information and assistance to support the effective delivery of
business and services, and liaison with partners, external agencies, SHU Departments and Faculties.

- To work with the Information and Communications Officer in the implementation of communications strategy, involving the organisation of external events and production of a range of communications and marketing materials.
- To be responsible of maintenance of the Directorate office and its budget, the ordering of equipment and supplies, processing of invoices, and use of SHU Finance system.

8.4.2 Network posts

Access and Progression Officers:

- Changing processes and procedures within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- Development work on progression agreements.
- Development of a new and adapted curriculum.
- Liaison within their base institution to change admission procedures and processes for recognising work-based and vocational learner achievements.

Information, Advice and Guidance and Transition Officers:

- Identification of the appropriate learners at level three and four.
- Providing ongoing individual support for learners.
- Offering specific support for applications, interviews, pre-entry activities and induction, group work, and organising or working with a student mentor scheme.
- Facilitating progression for individuals to higher education via liaison with partner organisations, academic departments, student services and other areas.
- Introducing Higher Futures and the IAG role to relevant staff in the organisation.
- Liaison with IAG and Transition Officers at other partner institutions to support transition.
- Tracking and identifying destinations of Higher Futures learners.
GM&WL LLN Departmental Structure

Gary Mallon
Project Manager

Owen Simpson
Marketing and Communications

Rachel Farley,
Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) / Progression Officer

Jennifer Mottram
Project Administrator
8.6 APPENDIX 6: Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN role descriptions

8.6.1 Directorate posts

**Director**

- Working with senior managers from partner institutions and the Executive Group Chair, to develop the vision of the Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN, ensuring the delivery of specific performance targets.
- Develop and oversee partnership and contract agreements in line with HEFCE and institutional guidelines on consortia and LLN partnerships.
- Accountable to the Executive Group and LLN Board for the effective deployment and management of the budget and resources on behalf of the network.
- Lead a group of core staff and provide effective operational management including responsibility for appraisal and staff development.
- Develop an effective framework and mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and reporting to the HEFCE and the LLN Board.
- Collaborate on the promotion and development of foundation degrees in terms of curriculum development and employer engagement.
- Build strong and mutually productive relationships with staff in the partner institutions to ensure the sustainability of the LLN.
- Liaise with external agencies building strong local networks including strategic alliances with neighbouring LLNs.
- Engage and work with professional communities and key organisations (e.g. AoC, FDF, SSDA, LSDA, RDAs, HEFCE).
- Identify and share good practices within the partnership and externally by organising appropriate dissemination events.
- Develop and deliver an effective communications and dissemination strategy in conjunction with other LLNs in the region.
- Secure external support and funding, where appropriate.
- Participate in or leading relevant committees and groups.

**Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) / Progression Officer**

- Provision of an outreach advice and guidance service to those in employment, unemployed or in Education, or those who could benefit from opportunities in higher education.
- Development of employer links in the provision of advice and guidance services to employees.
- Increase recruitment to Foundation degrees, Other Degrees and continuing professional development (CPD) for the four strands of the LLN: Health & Social Care; Creative Industries; Tourism, Hospitality, Sport & Active Leisure and Financial Services.
Marketing Officer

- Develop and maintain excellent communication between all key partners in the LLN providing a professional, helpful and friendly service to all.
- Facilitate promotion of collaborative provision offered by the LLN partners.
- Develop and manage the LLN website in conjunction with specialist staff and produce an LLN newsletter and other communications to promote the LLN.
- Develop and maintain relationships with LLN partner institutions and external organisations and assist in the co-ordination of local and national events.
- Develop and promote a range of student case studies that will provide an example to motivate further lifelong learners.
- Attend meetings and deputise for the LLN Project Manager as and when required, and prepare reports for LLN Board, Executive Group and other meetings as requested.

Lifelong Learning Network Receptionist/ Administrator

- Assist the Project Manager, Lifelong Learning Network and team in providing the appropriate administrative and customer service support to ensure an efficient and effective development of the Centre at Silkhouse Court.
- Keep accurate and up-to-date records and provide financial administration support for the Project Manager in the collation of data from internal and external sources using spreadsheets and databases in the production of reports.

8.6.2 Network posts

Progression Passport Champion

- Explain the implications of the Passport to students
- Explain the implications of the Passport to colleagues
- Ensure that students engage with the Passport and take full advantage of the opportunities
- Organise drop in support sessions for Passport students
- Be the named college link for LLN activities involving Passport students – such as open days
- Link with appropriate HE staff
- Attend Progression meetings with colleagues from other colleges and the LLN team
### APPENDIX 7: List of meetings between partners, to include all events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; July 2007</td>
<td>Launch of Higher Futures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; November 2007</td>
<td>Peer Evaluation meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; May 2008</td>
<td>GM&amp;WL LLN Conference (Rob Harrison, Jackie Powell, and Christina Metcalfe attended)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; October 2008</td>
<td>LLNs Developing Professionals in the North West (Rob Harrison attended)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; October 2008</td>
<td>Team visit</td>
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<tr>
<td>20&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; November 2008</td>
<td>Peer Evaluation preparation meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; February 2009</td>
<td>Peer Evaluation preparation meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March 2009</td>
<td>Peer Evaluation of GM&amp;WL LLN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; March 2009</td>
<td>Peer Evaluation of Higher Futures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.8 APPENDIX 8: List of partner institutions

8.8.1 Higher Futures

- Barnsley College
- Chesterfield College
- Dearne Valley College
- Doncaster College
- Longley Park Sixth Form College
- North Nottinghamshire College
- Northern College
- Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
- The Sheffield College
- Sheffield Hallam University (lead partner)
- Thomas Rotherham College
- The University of Sheffield

8.8.2 Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire LLN

Full partners:

- Birkenhead Sixth Form College
- Blackburne House, Carmel College
- Edge Hill University
- Hugh Baird College
- King George V College
- Knowsley Community College
- Liverpool Community College
- Open University
- Riverside College Halton
- Skelmersdale College
- Southport College
- St Helens College
- St John Rigby College
- University of Liverpool
- Wirral Metropolitan College.

Associate partners

- Aimhigher
- Cheshire and Warrington Lifelong Learning Network
- Greater Merseyside Learning Providers’ Federation
- Knowsley 14-19 Consortium
- Liverpool City of Learning, Learning & Skills Council
- Merseyside Colleges Association
- North Liverpool Academy
- Open College Network (North West Region)
- Open College of the North West and Sector Skills Councils.