

Higher Education: An Alternative Way

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This paper will explain the alternative ways to study for and achieve higher education qualifications through the further education system. It will describe the range of provision offered by St Helens College in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University and its other partner universities as an example of the higher education provision offered in this way across Britain. It will examine the ways in which they work in symbiotic partnership together with employers and employer organisations, sector skills councils and other organisations in the design and flexible delivery of vocationally-orientated higher education provision. The paper will also describe support mechanisms to encourage widening participation in higher education and progression routes to higher education including Access and Year Zero programmes and 14-19 Specialist Diplomas.

It is based on my own experience of 14 years of design, development and delivery of higher education programmes at St Helens College, my work as a reviewer of higher education provision and strategic development of higher education in further education college for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, my work as an external consultant for the validation of HE in further education college and my research work for other organisations including the Higher Education Academy and Foundation Degree Forward. My earlier research in this area was presented at the Liverpool John Moores University Learning & Teaching Conferences in 2004 and 2006 and at the Media, Critical and Cultural Studies conference in 2005. Since then, further developmental activity has been undertaken in conjunction with partner universities, lifelong learning networks and subject networks and by organisations such as the Higher Education Academy.

St Helens College has been delivering vocationally-based higher education for 40 years but its main developments in this area have taken place over the last 15 years. It is now the largest provider of Foundation Degrees in the North West of England and one of the 25 largest providers of higher education in the further education sector with over 40 higher education and professional courses offered.