

The Collaborative Development of a Foundation degree in Railway Engineering

Tim Mulroy
Stuart Birchall
Faculty of Arts, Computing, Engineering & Sciences
Sheffield Hallam University

Sarah Bardell
Foundation Degree Manager
Network Rail

Foundation degrees have replaced many Higher National Diplomas in the UK in the last few years. Foundation degrees are designed with employers, and combine academic study with work place learning to equip people with relevant knowledge and skills to improve performance and productivity. In Foundation Degree programmes, academic knowledge and understanding integrate with, and support the development of, vocational skills and competencies, taking account of the need for appropriate academic rigour. External reference points such as the FHEQ, the NQF, subject benchmark statements, National Occupational Standards, Sector Skills Council frameworks, and the HEFCE prospectus (*HEFCE 00/27*) are important reference points, and should be considered during the design and validation of Foundation Degrees. Foundation Degrees are intended to provide students with the knowledge, understanding and skills that employers need. In order to achieve this, it is important that employers are fully involved in the design and regular review of Foundation Degree programmes. It is also beneficial if employers are involved, where possible, in the delivery and assessment of the programme and the monitoring of students, particularly within the workplace.

This paper will describe the history of the relationship between Sheffield Hallam University and Network Rail, and explain the methodology used to create and implement a Foundation Degree in Railway Engineering. The paper will also examine the outcomes of the programme, and the experiences of a major national employer and University working together to create an enhanced student experience.

Keywords: Collaborative, Work based Learning, Foundation Degree