

Information for employers

Questions about higher education

What is higher education?

Higher (or tertiary) education is a programme of advanced study, often but not always taken after Level 3 study by anyone with the underpinning skills to benefit from the course. Some programmes are linked to vocational qualifications or to membership of professional bodies, while others, such as higher national diplomas and foundation degrees, include employers in the design and assessment of learning.

Who should take the initiative in higher learning?

It may be the employer or the employee who suggests the benefit of higher study, possibly as part of annual appraisal and continuing professional development. It may also arise from an external assessment by, for example, Investors in People or Train to Gain.

Where does higher education take place?

Higher education does not have to mean three years locked away in a dusty academic library. In fact a degree need not be taken at a university at all. Although accredited and validated by a university, the course could be studied at work, or in a college of further education, or by distance learning, either at home or at work. In particular, foundation degrees (which are equivalent to the first two years of a traditional degree) are designed to be taught and assessed either in part or entirely in the workplace.

How long are the courses?

As long as a piece of string!

An honours degree takes three years full time, during which an employee may work with the company during university vacations and for work placements. A higher national diploma, higher national certificate (HND, HNC) or a foundation degree may be studied full time for two years, or part time over three years. On the other hand an Open University (OU) course may be spread over several years. Alternatively you may wish to arrange for an employee to take a specific module relevant to their work, which addresses a need identified in their annual appraisal. And don't forget the professional and business courses. A wide range is available lasting weeks rather than years, in topics such as personnel, management and information technology. There're more information on the websites of individual universities and colleges.

Why do we need employees to study at such an advanced level?

The country needs employees with advanced skills and knowledge simply so that organisations and businesses can keep ahead of the game in an increasingly competitive world. By the year 2020 England will need 1.73 million more people educated and trained to

Level 4 and above (see fact sheet 'How will my organisation or business benefit?') With investment in study the employer is likely to benefit from better staff performance, improved retention and motivation, and above all commercial or organisational success.

Where would an employee look for a relevant course?

A student who is also an employee is unlikely to go away to study (unless your company has branches elsewhere), so the first step would be to look at the colleges and universities within travelling distance of home and work. Also look at distance learning courses such as those from the Open University.

What would the cost of these courses be, and who would fund the study?

See 4.3 - the cost of work based education.

For more information about higher education opportunities:

<http://www.learning-opportunities.org.uk>