

Higher York

Meeting the Criteria for a Lifelong Learning Network

Overview

Higher York is an innovative HE partnership between Askham Bryan College, the University of York, York College, York St John College and the City of York Council. The purpose of the partnership is to forge progression, curricular, support, and infrastructure links that will give greater choices and chances to potential students and contribute to the skills needs of York and the North Yorkshire sub-region. It will be intentionally light in terms of infrastructure and governance, and will be firmly driven by learner needs. It enjoys high-level commitment from all participating institutions and is firmly aligned with their individual strategic priorities.

The Network builds on preliminary work undertaken by *Higher York* in Phase 1 and is aimed at:

- encouraging and enabling more local people into higher education and training, supporting the existing work of Aimhigher and local providers
- increasing choice, and improving opportunities, for local people to enter and progress through higher-level vocational and academic programmes
- delivery of 3 Aimhigher strategic objectives which target under-represented and 'hard to reach' groups
- integrating information, advice and guidance about FHE choices (both pre-entry and post-qualification) available locally
- strengthening student support activity
- additional cross-institutional student union provision
- making explicit links between academic provision and local/sub-regional need

In achieving these objectives, the project has three work strands:

Strand 1: Lifelong Learning and Curriculum

Higher York will jointly undertake demand-led curriculum developments that address the lifelong learning needs of the area. The focus will be on widening participation, increasing access and progression, integrating further (especially vocational) and higher education pathways. Curriculum developments will focus on a number of disciplinary 'clusters' that have been identified during Phase 1 of the initiative. In addition, a small number of additional disciplines will be added during Phase 2.

Strand 2: Students and the Wider Community

Learners will be at the heart of *Higher York*. In addition to the emphasis on pathways and progression, cross-institutional student union support and social activities will be developed, informed by and involving student union officers. Enhanced information and guidance provision will be constructed.

Building on HEIF 2 and HEFCE's Knowledge Transfer Capability Fund, the recent North Yorkshire Sub-regional Investment Plan (SRIP), and the work of the sector skills councils, *Higher York* will help ensure that, collectively, partners' provision is effectively linked to demand. Working with businesses, voluntary organisations and appropriate community groups, it is intended to construct curricula that reflect skills gaps and needs, and build capacity across the partnership.

Strand 3: Higher York Gateway and Infrastructure

The core of *Higher York* will comprise a small central co-ordinating team developing initiatives, ensuring delivery, and tracking. Staffing will cover: curriculum, progression and quality; information, guidance and advice; student support; and data provision and tracking of initiatives.

The total budget for the 30-month project is £1,397,072. The amount requested from HEFCE is £922,072 with the remainder being met from own funding. Full details of the costings and the expenditure profile are given in the main bid document.

HEFCE support requested:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Staffing	130,403	231,968	238,701	601,072
Operating Costs	64,500	102,000	112,000	278,500
Infrastructure	20,000	10,000	12,500	42,500
TOTAL	214,903	343,968	363,201	922,072

Remainder comes from own funding

Criterion 1: LLNs will offer a focus on vocational routes into, and through higher education. What is the scope of the Network?

Higher York builds upon a two-year initial project that has enabled partners to scope both opportunities and needs in York and the surrounding sub-region. The Network will link college and university education in York and North Yorkshire in ways that bring new students – particularly vocationally-orientated ones – into Higher Education and respond to local and sub-regional need whilst ensuring respect for quality and standards.

The scope of the Network is to:

- expand vocational options at levels 3 and 4
- create new opportunities for people with vocational professional qualifications to access HE
- ensure synergy with sub-regional work-related learning initiatives for the 14-19 age group e.g. City of York 14-19 Pathfinder project, York College WBL
- design approx. 22 new courses and 13 Foundation Degrees the majority of which will be occupationally related
- create 1,530 additional students, of which circa 500 are likely to be ASNs
- reflect the diversity of the sector ensuring learners can return to Higher Education to access the full range of HE opportunity, build on earlier learning, or achieve their first entry into HE.

Four main disciplinary clusters have been identified as the focus for joint development and increased scope/range:

- Art, Design and Creative Industries
- Business and Management
- Health Sciences
- Sport, Leisure and Tourism

Other disciplinary areas to be jointly developed during phase 2 (generating additional numbers to those above):

- Archaeology
- Bioscience
- Electrical Engineering and Electronics.
- IT

Additional disciplinary areas will be explored on a demand-led basis.

Criterion 2: They will combine the strengths of diverse HE and FE institutions. Does the Network include research intensive institutions? Does it include the most significant local FEC providers of HE?

The partnership brings together four complementary institutions spanning the full spectrum of a leading research-intensive university (York), an ambitious and growing HE college (York St John), a successful FE/sixth-form college (York College), and a widely-regarded specialist college for land-based industries (Askham Bryan College).

Criterion 3: LLNs will link with the RDA and at least one sector skills council and build on one or more local strengths e.g., CoVEs, CETLs, NTIs, knowledge exchanges

Both during Phase 1 of Higher York and during the preparation of the SDF bid, key stakeholders have been closely involved and the full bid document contains firm endorsement from organisations such as Yorkshire Forward (RDA), North Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council, Without Walls (Local Strategic Partnership) and North Yorkshire Partnership Unit. All these bodies see *Higher York* as an important driver in local skills and economic agendas.

Planning for the next phase of *Higher York* highlights the significance of close alignment with local and sub-regional strategies. It will build on existing local strengths including CoVEs at York College (Rail Engineering and Signal Engineering; Hospitality and Catering, Construction – Stonemasonry) and Askham Bryan College (Food Chain Bioscience). There will be strong links with proposed CETLs at the University of York (Centre of Excellence in Work-Based Learning) and York St John College (Collaborating for Creativity). Also, both the University of York and York St John College are involved in collaborative CETLs (White Rose Enterprise and Assessing Learning in Practice Settings respectively).

The project will also work alongside aspects of work funded under HEIF 2 at the University of York and will build a local skills dimension into three of the RDA's clusters - Bioscience, Digital Industries, Food and Drink.

The partnership already has significant links with Sector Skills Councils, especially via York St John College and York College. These include: Skillset (film and media); Skills for Health (via Workforce Development Confederation), Skillsmart (retail); ConstructionSkills (ex CITB); Summitskills (electrical, heating, ventilation, plumbing, air conditioning). Emerging relationships include SEMTA (Science/Engineering); SkillsActive (active learning and leisure); Creative and Cultural Skills (arts, museums and galleries).

Higher York is represented on significant forums and steering groups eg Yorkshire Forward Director of HE Strategy; North Yorkshire Area Consortium of Education Business Link Organisations (NYAC); York and North Yorkshire Adult Information Advice and Guidance Strategic Board, City of York LLP.

Criterion 4: They will work closely with Aimhigher to ensure that schools, colleges, employers and others are aware of the opportunities offered

The project has co-operated closely with regional Aimhigher in its development and is designed to fit well with, and to complement, Aimhigher work and aspirations, including the Aimhigher Healthcare strand. The partnership is represented on the regional Aimhigher Steering Group. Specifically, it will deliver three Aimhigher North Yorkshire strategic objectives for under-represented and 'hard to reach' groups. It also has firm links with other relevant partnerships and projects, eg York and North Yorkshire Progression Partnership, City of York and North Yorkshire LLPs, City of York 14-19 Pathfinder. Both the HE Regional Association Chief Executive and the Aimhigher regional co-ordinator have been involved in the project formulation.

Criterion 5: LLNs will clarify existing progression opportunities and engage in collaborative curriculum development where this is necessary to facilitate progression. How comprehensive is the Network mapping of progression opportunities to existing programmes offered across the Network? Has the Network identified areas where curriculum development is necessary, and made a commitment to this?

The Network will develop guaranteed routes between partners, agree the criteria, provide better information and guidance, and undertake this in a co-ordinated and cohesive manner – uniting a number of different but related activities under one strategic banner. This will:

- ensure transparency and clarity
- systematise existing opportunities
- create new opportunities for vocational learners
- create a collaborative forum for engagement with other regional providers and stakeholders.

The Network will improve vocational learning opportunities (in line with the recommendations of the Tomlinson review, 2004) by:

- providing better vocational programmes
- rationalising vocational pathways
- creating a series of vocational options which may be combined with general and academic subjects in mixed programmes
- improving work-based learning
- creating stronger incentives for learners to take vocational programmes

Mapping and consultation during phase 1 of *Higher York* has identified the progression opportunities to existing programmes, and areas for curriculum development across the Network to facilitate progression in the subject areas listed above. It has also identified the opportunities to progress between extramural courses and degree awarding courses at the participating institutions.

The Network will build on existing HE/FE practitioner networks such as the Strategy and Resources Group of the local LLP and the York and North Yorkshire Progression Partnership (Y&NYPP) and on progression routes and the CAT framework already established at levels 2 & 3 by Y&NYPP within North and West Yorkshire (eg access programmes and progression routes in Advice and Guidance, Counselling, Allied Health Professions, Creative Technologies).

Criterion 6: They will offer the advice and guidance necessary to provide individualised learning plans, and offer the varied and flexible means of delivery required so that learners can meet their objectives

The main bid document describes how activities over the period are designed to develop and extend flexible arrangements for learners across the Network, including:

- a *Higher York* Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) function which complements existing provision and supports a single point of access for enquiries about lifelong learning opportunities
- stronger and more integrated student support, including student-led provision
- work with learners to create personalised learning plans
- pilot study on introduction of personalised learning plans.
- extended student mentoring scheme across HY and 14-19 Pathfinder project involving at least 25 students

- develop a joint Higher York Student Union (HYSU) strategy, including virtual advice centre providing generic IAG about studying and living in York.

The Network will:

- effectively manage the learning environment
- pilot transfer of personalised learning across Higher York partners with a minimum of 50 students – incorporating planned local JISC proposals to develop e-portfolio, e-learning passports and e-based advice and guidance
- deliver more HE in FE sectors
- develop different delivery styles and modes
- promote these new opportunities to the community

Criterion 7: LLNs will add to current provision rather than re-badging FE-HE partnerships. For example, they will guarantee progression to any award offered within the network for which learners are adequately prepared and from which they can benefit, enabling learners to move between programmes and institutions

The Network has agreed to put in place durable, embedded, and measurable arrangements which will create additionality. This includes a local CAT scheme and guaranteed progression to any award offered across the Network that the learner is adequately prepared for, and can benefit from. Development of progression routes and the local CAT scheme will be targeted at the eight identified disciplinary clusters in the first instance and those activities already initiated through Y&NYPP. Further roll out will be demand-led.

Criterion 8: LLNs will develop some kind of progression infrastructure, such as credit frameworks, to underpin the guarantee of progression. They will be concerned in the first instance with what works. But whatever means are used to ensure progression LLNs will be expected to contribute to the development of CAT systems

The Business Case Summary and main bid document stress the commitment of the partners to the development over the project period of clear mechanisms, guaranteed progression routes, a local CAT scheme and enhanced information advice and guidance ensuring all entry and progression requirements are transparent to learners. The Network will:

- build on the work undertaken locally by York and North Yorkshire Progression Partnership (Y&NYPP) and Aimhigher North Yorkshire, which has already established a credit framework in certain vocational areas (notably Engineering, Guidance, Nursing, Mental Health Allied Health Professions (eg Occupational Therapy), Agriculture and Land-based Technology)
- extend the credit-based framework further in these areas and in the eight academic/vocational clusters identified in the bid
- build on existing local developments such as the *Yorvik* tracking system designed and implemented for Aimhigher and CAT purposes by Y&NYPP
- provide a strategic planning forum to: coordinate and plan all CAT and progression activities; ensure consistency; extend the reach of what is already being undertaken
- address current and future guidance about: the National Qualifications Framework (NQF); National Framework for Achievement (NFA); credit accumulation and transfer
- take account of information and advice from various sources including:
 - *14-19 Curriculum and Qualification Reform* (Tomlinson Review, 2004)
 - *'New Thinking for Reform'* (QCA 2004, National Open College Network - Credit Qualification Framework)
 - guidance and advice about the likely characteristics of a National Validation Scheme for non-accredited learning – such as *'Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in non-accredited learning'* (RARPA)
 - the credit-based framework currently being developed for FE by NOCN/ national LSC/ QCA which will articulate with HE CAT arrangements

The Network will work with other regional providers and share best practice from NOCN, other LLNs and CAT schemes as appropriate, to create a coherent framework of credit awards and qualifications which:

- better meets the needs of learners and employers
- develops an innovative curriculum
- fits into and within the NQF.
- builds on successful credit frameworks and regional developments – especially but not exclusively offered in Further Education and the adult education sectors
- is demand led, providing a comprehensive framework of credit-based units and qualifications which facilitates and supports learner progression
- maps units to national occupational or other relevant standards
- employs straightforward and transparent quality assurance mechanisms
- incorporates a range of qualifications and units which meet different learner needs ie vocationally-related, general education/subjects, generic/key skills which encourage access and progression to HE
- is flexible and responsive - developing and delivering learning and training packages to meet changing needs/demands of learners employers and providers, and recognising learners' achievements
- recognises a wide-range of achievements and progression opportunities
- is founded on a joint understanding of programme/technical specification, the use of a common language, and fit for purpose assessment, procedures, systems etc.

Criterion 9: LLNs will establish targets for the number of students (a) accessing initial HE from vocational pathways, (b) progressing within HE to programmes on offer within the Network

Initial targets are:

- 500 ASNs
- minimum of 15 new progression routes
- 13 new Foundation Degrees
- 4 new Undergraduate Degrees
- 2 new Postgraduate programmes
- 5 new extra curricular programmes
- 20% increase in Access provision
- under-represented and hard to reach groups (delivery of 3 Aimhigher objectives)

The Network will build on the existing vocational pathways established by Y&NYPP and will also develop vocational pathways and progression routes within HE to other programmes on offer within the Network. It will build on existing systems and local developments to create one unified, cohesive and transparent system.

Criterion 10: LLNs will be willing to participate in an evaluation of the networks

Evaluation and dissemination activities will be a part of the project and *Higher York* has already established a culture of working with other similar initiatives elsewhere in the sector. The Network will carry out its own evaluation and is willing to participate in an evaluation of LLNs. It sees the dissemination of good practice across the sector as a core responsibility.