

## Endorsement service pilot

34 endorsements were undertaken, of these:

- 6 were conducted through visits
- 28 were desk-based

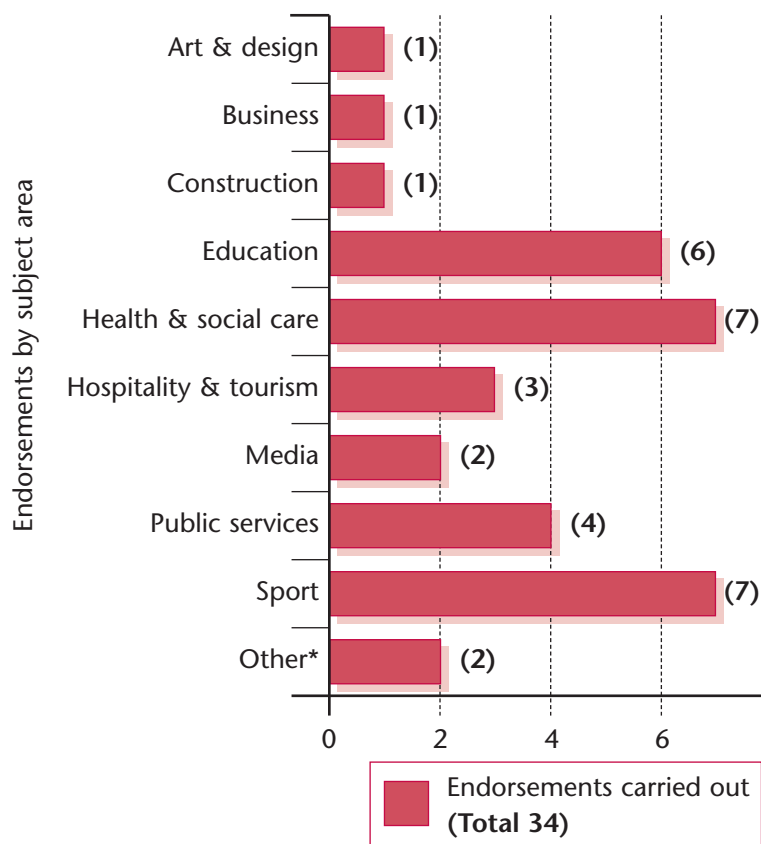
20 providers and 17 awarding bodies took part in the pilot.

Outcomes of endorsement:

- 22 programmes endorsed
- 6 programmes not endorsed
- 1 programme was endorsed in part
- 5 endorsements are ongoing

There were 34 endorsers, of these:

- 15 were Foundation Degree endorsers
- 19 were sector endorsers



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## Foundation Degree provision 2007-08 (fdf May 2008)

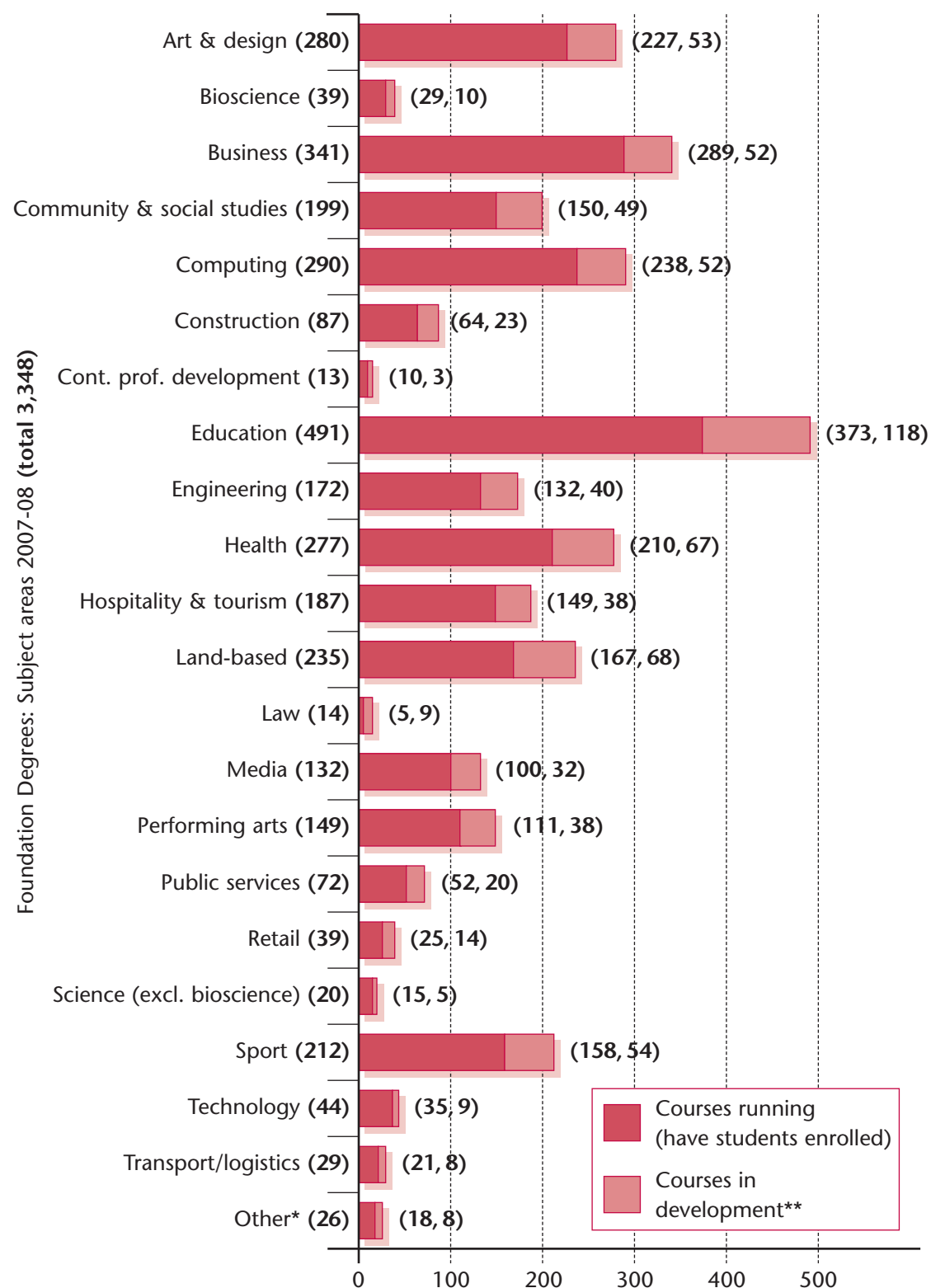
There were 2,621 Foundation Degrees (Fds) running, with student enrolments, within the UK (fdf, May 2008). A further 770 courses were in development.

- 874 Fd programmes delivered by higher education institutions.
- 2,465 Fd programmes delivered by further education colleges.
- 19 Fd programmes delivered jointly by a higher education institution and a further education college.
- Remainder delivered by employers, private providers or others.

Number of Fd programmes in development: 840

Number of awarding bodies validating Fd programmes: 87

Number of providers delivering Fd programmes: 310



\* eg heritage, theology, archaeology, languages

\*\* Includes any stage from concept through to validated and awaiting enrolments

Source: fdf database of Foundation Degree courses

## Foundation Degree Forward Endorsement Service

# Information bulletin 2009

## Introduction

During 2008, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was invited by Foundation Degree Forward (*fdf*) to undertake an evaluation of their recently-implemented Foundation Degree endorsement service. The endorsement service is intended to support institutions in the validation, quality assurance and review of Foundation Degrees. The endorsement process is voluntary and is designed to integrate into existing quality assurance and, where appropriate, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' (PSRBs') systems.

This information bulletin provides an overview of QAA's evaluation and includes details of the main findings of the *fdf* endorsement service.

The *fdf* endorsement service aims to demonstrate that:

- employers can have full confidence in the professional underpinning of a programme
- students can be assured that their programme incorporates the relevant employer skill development requirements
- education providers can market their programmes as fit for purpose and can demonstrate that this is the case.

The QAA evaluation sought to answer four key questions:

- did the endorsement method operate effectively in practice?
- what did the endorsement service reveal about real employer engagement with Foundation Degrees, in practice?
- what are the emerging benefits from the endorsement service for stakeholders?
- what is the future role of the endorsement service?

## Outcomes of the evaluation

QAA found that there was extensive support for the endorsement service. The process had operated effectively and the preparatory activity had created an opportunity for Foundation Degree providers to reflect upon their practices. The evaluation concluded that the endorsement service should continue, as it provided an external verification of the involvement of employers and the vocational relevance of the Foundation Degree.

The **endorsement framework** was considered comprehensive, allowing providers and awarding bodies the opportunity for reflection on their own programmes and also to identify and share good practice across the institution.

The **methodology and operation** of the endorsement process were considered by respondents to be in line with expectations of the service. The handbook, training and key questions were found to be appropriate and well constructed.

The endorsement service was able to clearly identify the extent of employer engagement in the design of the programme. Variability was found in employer involvement in Foundation Degrees, ranging from none or limited involvement to extensive and sustained engagement.

Stakeholders felt the service highlighted 'real' **employer engagement**, and could assist in developing, increasing, maintaining and sustaining employer engagement.

Benefits of the endorsement service included:

- the quality 'kitemarking' of programmes
- the interaction between providers and employers/sector representative bodies in the design and delivery of Foundation Degrees
- external verification of the vocational relevance of the Foundation Degree programme.

The evaluation identified the following **good practice** in the endorsement process:

- the effective and efficient operation of the process. The handbook, training and associated support and guidance provided was clear and helpful
- the endorsement framework was comprehensive and allowed opportunities for reflection on their own programmes and also to identify and share good practice across the institution
- the inclusion of a Foundation Degree specialist and employment sector representative on the endorsement team was considered a strength of the process
- the endorsement process encourages the development and sharing of good practice, including the development of new programmes
- the service highlighted 'real' employer engagement and the need for significant improvements and developments in sustained employer engagement.

## Recommendations

As a result of the evaluation, **recommendations** were made to:

- ensure that the guidance and support material provided is clear to all stakeholder groups, through handbooks, training and briefing events
- review the method of endorsement and consider a move towards a process based on a visit
- explore the possibilities of integrating the endorsement process into existing institutional quality assurance processes, namely validation, in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the endorsement service
- clarify the purpose of endorsement and the role of the endorsers where endorsement takes place at a validation event
- explore a two-stage approach to endorsement, with initial endorsement taking place during validation, and the second stage taking place at a later date to confirm on-going and sustained employer engagement
- consider the operation of the endorsement service and the form in which it should continue in order to ensure sustainability and minimal cost and burden
- raise the profile of Foundation Degrees and the endorsement service with employers and employment sector representatives
- support colleges and awarding bodies in initiating and maintaining arrangements for continued employer engagement
- develop a formal quality Kitemark for endorsed Foundation Degrees, to demonstrate the external verification of their vocational relevance, and establish a formal branding for the scheme.

## *fdf* endorsement service findings

The *fdf* endorsement service concluded that, in the main, when developing and delivering Foundation Degrees, providers had:

- taken account of the relevant frameworks, PSRB requirements and National Occupational Standards
  - considered local demand in specific sector areas in assessing the viability of programmes, and often engaged with employers and employer representative bodies in assessing demand and developing programmes
  - involved employers in the design, delivery and assessment of programmes, but there was extensive variability between providers in relation to nature, extent and sustainability of engagement with employers
  - ensured the centrality of work-based learning to the programme, which was typically aligned with assessment - through work-based tasks or projects. Good practice was identified where employers provided an input into the design of, and involvement in, assessment
  - made high quality learning and support resources available to students, and had well-qualified and experienced staff delivering programmes
  - clarified academic progression honours degree programmes and vocational progression routes typically as a result of liaison with employers and representative bodies, and the associated professional frameworks
  - provided a range of information for students, and appropriate student support resources, to include support in the work-based element of programmes, through work-based mentors.
- Through the endorsement service, endorsers identified the following **areas for improvement** for providers, within their reports:
- employer involvement in the design, delivery, assessment and monitoring of modules and work-based learning should be formalised and evidenced
  - where appropriate, the mapping of the programme should take place against the relevant National Occupational Standards
  - arrangements for work-place mentors should be formalised and training provided
  - explicit reference should be made to work-based learning assessments within external examiners reports
  - colleges should promote the options for and benefits of AP(E)L for entry and during the programme
  - module specifications should show how the model of work-based learning is embedded within the curriculum.