

# THE PROGRESSION STORY

Sue Betts & Dr. Kate Burrell, Linking London Lifelong Learning Network, April 2011

**“In the era of lifelong learning we need to be able to offer and deliver what might be described as a systemic approach to higher education: progression routes that offer to all students the opportunity to move in and out of higher education throughout their working lives.”**

*Sir Howard Newby, Colin Bell Memorial Lecture,  
University of Bradford, 30 March 2004.*

## To achieve “Clarity, Coherence and Certainty of Progression” Linking London 2006-2010

### Executive Summary

This paper has been written to explore an issue that is at the heart of the “Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) story”, how a London LLN went about trying to improve progression for vocational learners and to bring about a step change in institutional behaviour. The context of the origins and development of LLNs are briefly summarised, with detail on the specific issues facing Linking London in its work on progression. We conclude with a section on the potential role for LLNs in the current context, and some recommendations for the future.

### 1. Beginnings

The landscape for vocational progression<sup>1</sup> is a ‘muddled terrain’. Advanced level (A level) qualifications were developed in the 1950s, to aid Universities in their selection process. There has been no similar national agreement or consensus reached on the role, worth and variety of ‘vocational’ qualifications at level 3, and what progression or entitlement to higher education they open up for students<sup>2</sup>.

The Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) were set up specifically to combat an issue that had been around for many years. Development of BTEC National Diplomas and Access to HE Diplomas in the late 1980s and early 1990s, had led to expectations from both staff and students about progression to Higher Education (HE). The LLNs were designed to bring ‘greater clarity, coherence and certainty to vocational progression opportunities’<sup>3</sup>. They were set up and financed under the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). This was “third leg” funding (not teaching, not research but innovation) granted specifically to make a difference, and to bring about change. They were also not the first initiative of this kind but the culmination of many interventions to improve access to HE for students from lower socio-economic groups and from those in work or currently under-represented in HE.

During the first years of the new millennium an initiative known as ‘Partnerships for Progression’ or P4P, as it was affectionately known, was designed to secure similar certainty in terms of expectations on progression. In 2004 the landscape was re-modelled again and Aimhigher was launched on 1 August, with the specific aim of widening participation in Higher Education by raising the aspirations of young people from under-represented groups for Higher Education.

Lifelong Learning Networks were first announced by Sir Howard Newby (Chief Executive of HEFCE, October 2001 - March 2006) in the Colin Bell Memorial lecture of 2004,<sup>4</sup> and were required, by the

<sup>1</sup> “Vocational Progression” in the context of this paper can be defined as the ability of learners to move into and through Higher Education, primarily from level 3 to level 4 and beyond, from programmes of study that are designed to provide entry to or advancement in, a specific sector of employment.

<sup>2</sup> “90% of those gaining two or more A levels by the age of 18 were likely to be in Higher Education by age 21. The comparable percentage for those with a Level 3 vocational qualification was much lower - estimated at just 40-50%.” Little, Brenda and Connor, Helen (2005). Vocational ladders or crazy paving? Making your way to higher levels. Learning and Skills Development Agency, London, UK.

<sup>3</sup> The Joint Progression Strategy and Lifelong Learning Networks, June 2004. Annex A of the Joint letter from HEFCE and the Learning and Skills Council (HEFCE Circular letter number 12/2004).

<sup>4</sup> Colin Bell Memorial Lecture. ‘Doing Widening Participation: Social inequality and access to higher education’ by Sir Howard Newby, 30 March 2004, University of Bradford.

funding council, to demonstrate “clear blue water” between themselves and Aimhigher. The Schwartz Report was published six months later and espoused principles on which many of the LLNs’ progression agreements were based<sup>5</sup>.

Two years later, the introduction of variable tuition fees for the academic year 2006-07 necessitated the creation by the Labour Government, of the independent Office for Fair Access (OFFA). In a similar situation to today’s current climate created by the recent publication of the recommendations from the Browne Review, the concern was that the introduction of variable tuition fees would deter potential students from entering Higher Education. OFFA required institutions wishing to charge more than £1,200, to write an “Access Agreement”, which detailed a variety of information and support strategies aimed at widening participation (WP) to non-traditional learners. Likewise, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA), which was created in 2006, was set up to continue the development of fair admissions, to disseminate examples of good practice, and was similarly independent.

## 2. The birth of Linking London and other Lifelong Learning Networks

The bidding process to become LLNs was initiated by HEFCE in June 2004. However, interestingly, in 2008 it was revealed by Sir Howard Newby, that in actual fact, the LLNs were the third choice in a solution for progression. The first choice would have been the development of institutions incorporating progression throughout the levels of education, based on the American Community College model. The second option was the merger of FE and HE to ensure seamless progression and, if that was not possible, then funding to set up partnerships or networks of colleges and universities was the way forward<sup>6</sup>.

LLNs should have been a joint HEFCE and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) initiative, funded by both. However, as they developed it was HEFCE that financed the initiative with £103 million from its Strategic Development Fund to support the roll out of LLNs<sup>7</sup>. The LSC, despite not funding the LLNs, did remain interested in their progress and in 2008 a piece of evaluative research was carried out by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) on their behalf. Linking London was one of the four LLNs interviewed for that research, but the report remains unpublished.

Some questions naturally arise from the creation of so many initiatives. Why, and in such quick succession? Does this suggest a degree of failure amongst previous one? If you are running similar but different initiatives concurrently, does this suggest a multi-pronged attack being instigated to solve what had become a rather intractable problem?

In order to create a LLN, groupings of institutions had firstly to submit a Business Plan to HEFCE. If the Business Plan looked suitable, additional material in the form of a Feasibility Study, identifying risk in achieving the objectives and targets as outlined in the plan, could be required. In the early stages, there were often conditions attached to the LLN grant – partnerships should contain at least one research intensive institution although, subsequently,

this rule appears to have been relaxed. Linking London’s bid through Birkbeck finally received approval with three conditions attached in January 2006. Originally the national initiative was to be rolled out incrementally with the first four or five LLNs acting as pathfinders or pilots. However, this plan was modified and within a relatively short space of time thirty LLNs had been approved across England, including two LLNs with a national remit (the National Arts Learning Network and VetNet).

## 3. Progression Agreements – the theory and the desired

Securing the “clarity, coherence and certainty” of progression has always been at the core of the work of LLNs. The previously mentioned Schwartz Review of 2004 recognised the potential of the then proposed LLNs as a means of clarifying progression routes in regions<sup>8</sup>. What has not always been clear or shared has been the way to achieve that goal.

Just as LLNs ‘were developed through an iterative process’<sup>9</sup>, and have operated following different business models (in line with flexible guidance from HEFCE) across the country, so progression agreement policy and practice has developed in a similar way. Progression agreements have taken a variety of forms and the numbers of agreements brokered have been calculated by different LLNs in a variety of different ways<sup>10</sup>.

By June 2005, the HEFCE Update<sup>11</sup> had argued that ‘the arrangement adopted for progression into and through higher education’ was at the heart of any LLN and that ‘progression accords or agreements that put learners on vocational programmes on the same footing as students on academic programmes are the way these objectives will be met’.

It is worth noting here that much of the driving force behind HEFCE’s work on the LLNs was the Director and Head of Widening Participation. His motivation to debate and discuss the varying interpretations of the ‘mechanism to facilitate progression’<sup>12</sup>, led to HEFCE, with support from the LLN National Forum and the majority of LLNs, running a seminar on progression agreements during which four LLNs presented their interpretation of this work.

<sup>5</sup> Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice. Admissions to higher education steering group (Sept 2004). “The (Schwartz) Steering Group recognises that compacts and related schemes do much good in encouraging and supporting learners in progressing to higher education and supports the continuation of this work. Compact schemes and other measures that confer an advantage in the admissions process may be adopted if they can be objectively justified and it can be demonstrated that the scheme is proportionate to its aim. Raising aspirations and improving access to HE for those from disadvantaged or under-represented groups is generally a legitimate aim”.

<sup>6</sup> Speech at LLN National Forum Conference 2009.

<sup>7</sup> According to David Eastwood – a later Chief Executive of HEFCE – the largest discretionary grant ever given to a single initiative. Speech at LLN National Forum Conference 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Issue B23, p28. Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice. Admissions to higher education steering group (Sept 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Seminar report on progression agreements and accords, May 2008, Lifelong Learning Networks.

<sup>10</sup> Summative evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Network programme, a report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England. SQW, September 2010.

<sup>11</sup> HEFCE Updates for LLNs were designed to keep the sector informed of progress in Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) policy and practice, and to discuss recent key developments and emerging policy issues. Termly updates were produced by HEFCE from 2005-2009. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln/updates/>

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 5

The four LLN approaches and responses were:

- In LLN 1 progression agreements were highly targeted, programme to programme agreements specifying a number of places for those offering given vocational qualifications
- In LLN 2 progression agreements were also highly specific but without guaranteeing places. They started from a group of related BTEC qualifications and set out to compile a progression table, recording programmes that learners could access and conditions for entry
- In LLN 3 there was an overarching progression accord populated by a number of progression agreements, with each agreement focused on a specific area of the curriculum
- In LLN 4 they started by mapping generic skills and curriculum content in a range of qualifications. Transferable skills and content were then aligned to specific HE qualifications and progression opportunities identified.

The seminar report highlighted some of the complexities of this terrain, and is well worth reading to fully appreciate the issues that LLNs were grappling with. It is fair to say that LLN 1 above was on the hard contractual end of the process, supported by the use of additional student numbers (ASNs) to ensure progression for vocational learners. LLN 2 for example focused on sector-based approaches.

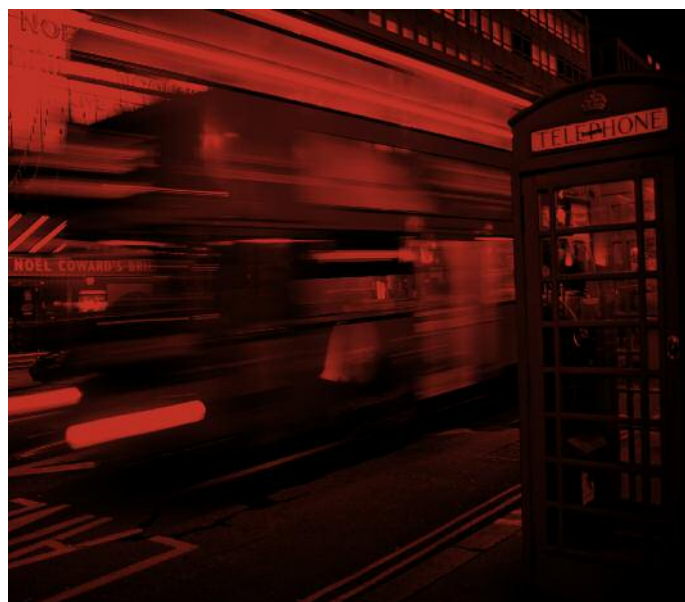
The development of network-wide agreements, which had in fact been one of HEFCE's main desires, still looked a long way off. The difficulty of doing this in one step was acknowledged. However, HEFCE saw their emphasis here as important for two reasons – the offer to vocational learners needed the same clarity as the offer to academic learners, and without a wider consensus about the value of vocational learner outcomes could not see this being achieved. Secondly, network-wide would involve ALL institutions, even if one or two partners have specific requirements to incorporate, therefore opening up and broadening 'the field of opportunity'.

HEFCE saw an emphasis, in the papers that followed, and in the seminar discussion and presentations, on 'process' rather than agreements, and was concerned that it was actual progression agreements that might make change more likely to follow. In the 'What Next?' section of the report, HEFCE urged LLNs to reflect on this report as a work in progress, to build on these first steps, in an effort to improve practice.

#### **4. Progression Agreements – the reality and issues for Linking London**

When LLNs first engaged with developing partnerships there was perhaps from HEFCE (as illustrated by the £103m committed spend) a belief that vocational progression should be simple and straightforward – or with a will, money (ASNs and development funds) and a committed partnership, progression could be sorted out. The reality was far more complex, with institutional practice difficult to influence in some quarters, and the vocational landscape a shifting and complicated (little understood) terrain.

In fact, complications of geography, was the first challenge during



the initial period of setting up the individual LLNs in London. There were rumours about a Pan London proposal and how an overarching body had been dissuaded from applying for funding to run one Pan London LLN on the grounds that it would have been too big. This led to business plans being developed to cover most of the capital led by Birkbeck, University of London (Linking London), University of East London (Creative Way), Kings (S.E. London), Kingston (South London) and University of West London [formerly Thames Valley University] (West London).

In setting up the Linking London Board and deciding on ex-officio members, we invited the London Director of Aimhigher, the Director of Skills at the LSC, representatives of the three main Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) that we were involved with (Skills for Care, Skills for Health and Lifelong Learning UK) and our link HEFCE Officer, to join us in termly board meetings.

Linking London with its 35 member institutions began as a very large and diverse partnership, which necessitated the adoption of a pragmatic approach to the development of 'clarity, coherence and certainty' in the area of vocational progression. Partially in recognition of the unique nature of London, the large amount of HE (50% of the nation's total) in the capital and on the basis of a very good developing relationship with HEFCE, regular meetings were set up with all five Directors and the five Chairs of the LLNs with HEFCE Officers, held at Centre Point. For four years, these meetings took place on a termly basis and were very useful sounding boards for the LLNs and their leadership, and helped ensure a synergy across London with some of the emerging priorities in the world of progression and FE/HE.

Despite this strategic collaboration being present from the beginning of the network, there has been little success in working towards the creation of a Pan London progression agreement, due to a lack of consensus. There was a bi-LLN attempt to work collaboratively across London in the area of Hospitality but little came of it.

There was also a noble aim, through the work that we set up with Skills for Health through the successful Pan London Health project, to attempt to reach agreement on a common progression agreement. However, in 2009 after three years of using our own agreements, an attempt was made again to come to a decision. Unfortunately, one LLN put their foot down and firmly refused to get involved. That, in reality, left three of the LLNs to work collaboratively from July 2010 onwards. Moving forward, in theory at least, we are agreed that if any progress is made in the area of progression for apprentices we will use a common progression agreement. Our colleagues in the other two LLNs (West and South) are happy to use the one developed by Linking London.

Concurrently to 'official' progression agreements being generated, Linking London developed 'Memoranda of Understanding' (MoUs) with most of our partners. These were strategic agreements that were signed at Linking London board meetings during 2006 - 07, mainly to clarify that members were signed up to the LLN venture and at some later date would be prepared to share data about learners' progression.

The MoUs clearly demonstrated that, from the start, partners were committed to working towards progression agreements and provided a sound basis for further discussions with institutions by providing a framework for sharing information, data and acknowledging the 'in principle' agreement to working together. We hoped that this senior management commitment would ensure swifter and easier working on the ground when staff knew that developments had institutional support and would give the LLN the validity it required to achieve its objectives.

At the same time as discussions were being held to work towards a Pan London agreement, we also made the decision to work on our own progression agreements. This made sense in terms of building relationships with our partners. We began the process in 2006 by starting to map the provision of all our partners, our main focus, as identified in the business plan, being the public sector.<sup>13</sup> In the early days, Linking London progression agreements were highly specific course-to-course agreements supported by Additional Student Numbers (ASNs) from HEFCE (400 ASNs over three years, which amounted to approximately £1.3m). Progression agreements were developed between FECs and HEIs, employers and HEIs with a focus on curriculum relevant to the Public Sector<sup>14</sup>. It is worth noting that despite incentives, some public sector employers found the signing of progression agreements particularly challenging.

Linking London's progression agreement has, however, changed over time, as and when it was needed to perform specific functions. Several versions were developed within Linking London for a variety of different purposes: qualification based; some for those in the work place and, most recently, borough-wide agreements. Securing signatures and 'buy in' to them has been challenging for all LLNs, including Linking London<sup>15</sup>.

Progression agreements require the signatures from two or more institutions, at senior, middle and tutor level. In most cases, it is a bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreement with the signatories from two or more institutions. Therefore, in any one progression agreement,

there may be many different progression routes. The template used by Linking London makes explicit reference to the best practice principles used in the Schwartz Report.

The method of brokering is, of course, highly specific to the institutions involved. Generally, once a member institution (Partner 1) expresses an interest in getting involved in a partnership with another institution (Partner 2), the Linking London contact person will broker an initial meeting during which both partners identify what they would like out of the relationship. Several meetings and discussions will take place during which curriculum articulation is discussed and routes mapped. Within each institution it is essential to get buy in at a strategic level as well as operationally. A 'signing ceremony', attended by each partners' marketing and communications department, provides the opportunity for internal and external publicity and promotion, and is often a forum for an enthusiastic start to adding richness to the partnership. In order to make these agreements come alive, we have been supporting partners with the communication of progression agreements to the relevant admissions staff within institutions and by the development of student publicity material.

As described above, Linking London has taken a specific approach to developing progression agreements, in that individual sending and receiving courses are identified in the progression agreement. The homing in on specific routes initially, has worked for our network, and has paved the way for subsequent routes within the agreements to develop. The filling in of the gaps represents our 'matrix model of progression agreements'. In our fifth year of operation, we are seeking to ensure that as many routes, as possible, are identified in a 'progression agreement matrix'. At the time of writing, we have seventy six progression agreements, of which fifty six are classed as 'active' in the sense that our link contacts within institutions can confirm that activity of some description is taking place, be it progression of learners, staff exchange between institutions or sharing of materials, and we have evidence from partners of the benefits to learners in, amongst other things, increased motivation for study.

However, anecdotally partners clearly find that it is the actual process of developing the progression agreement, that is a valuable experience for all institutions concerned, plus at times the 'unintended consequences' of such activity.

Linking London's work in the area of Diploma progression highlights the use of progression agreements in the understanding of new qualifications, with the tangential effect of encouraging inter-departmental working within HEIs and the engagement of a potentially new cohort of learners. The process of developing

<sup>13</sup> However, by 2008 with the agreement of the Linking London Board it was decided that we would work across all sectors wherever partner progression agreements were required. This also allowed the LLN to work across the curriculum areas of the new emerging qualifications, such as the new 14 - 19 Diploma.

<sup>14</sup> Linking London's initial piece 'Progression Agreements: Two Years On', written in 2008, is still relevant to those early days as LLNs found their own way forward in relation to progression.

<sup>15</sup> Seminar report on progression agreements and accords, LLN National Practitioner Forum, May 2008, noted PAs as being the "most difficult area of work for LLNs".



progression agreements for new qualifications, whilst the qualification itself is in its own development phase, seems to be, through the experience of Linking London, the most productive, easy, and definite way of ensuring routes and certainty of progression, as opposed to doing so in retrospect (a recommendation that we have made to government should any new qualifications be developed from 2011 onwards).

It may well be that, as we move into the latter part of year five, work towards a Pan London network-wide agreement will again be raised. There is an overlap in membership across London LLNs with a few HEIs, and as the HEFCE funding period comes to an end there seems little point denying students access to as wide a range of progression opportunities across London as possible.

Another major output with relevance to progression from Linking London over the past five years has been the work produced by network partners through the development project fund. By July 2011, Linking London will have allocated £700,000 worth of funding to over fifty projects carried out by network partners aimed at ensuring progression from level 3 to level 4 in a variety of contexts. Institutions involved in many of these projects will already have links with sending and receiving institutions, so while progression agreements themselves were only detailed in approximately 10% of projects, in many instances the projects provided a framework for the start of a strong and sustainable, long-term relationship.

In addition to specific development fund projects, in 2008 - 09, a small pot of Linking London funding (£7k) was made available to partners as a financial incentive to develop progression agreements. While this pot made it possible for a small number of partners to leverage support internally to buy their own time to commit to progression work or indeed to convince their institutions of the worth of developing progression agreements, the small numbers of partners who took up the offer might suggest that the financial incentive was, on the whole, not necessary. Only one of the institutions involved has not developed progression agreements outside of the financial incentive scheme; however, the agreement developed with the funding was a multiple route agreement from several level 3 qualifications to a large variety of level 4 provision. In total three new agreements were created, which translates into forty plus progression routes, as a consequence of the £7k funding.

### 5. Sustainability/Continuity

From the beginning, the Linking London team was well aware that progression agreements need both strategic buy in at the top and operational buy in at the level of practitioners, to ensure the usefulness of the arrangement – one without the other is not a recipe for sustainability. Linking London's approach therefore started at the programme level and through events like signing ceremonies sought institutional buy in, with variable success rates.

The main challenge, however, as far as the sustainability of progression agreements is concerned, is who has ownership and therefore drives the activity of progression agreements already in existence and the creation of new progression agreements. Currently, Linking London staff often provide the reminders and encourage-

ment to link contacts in our member institutions, to maintain and develop the relationship between sending and receiving institutions.

We are embedding progression work as far as possible within member institutions through termly update meetings, email and telephone contact, and a special series of bespoke Spring Seminars in early 2011. Staff development activities need to challenge perceptions of progression agreements, as even five years in, we still need to counteract a lack of understanding of what progression agreements are and are not. Of course, any staff development activity will present a time commitment, with progression work being seen as only a small part of an institution's core business.

There have been some issues of continuity within the past four years for progression agreements brokered early on, due to staff turnover within sending and receiving institutions and promotion (or role change). We are still battling to find the solution to these particular issues and so ensure that progression agreements are fully integrated and embedded into the fabric of institutions. Full blown partnership agreements could be the next stage, for some.

Progression agreement work can also challenge the notion of the autonomy of an institution. Some other LLNs raised issues of 'restrictive practice' as a reason not to do progression agreements that offered guaranteed places, and over time the offer was 'softened' to try and engage with highly selective institutions who did not want to consider 'guarantees'. There is scope for interpretation around the words 'due consideration' as an offer which appears on progression agreements and what that actually means in practice. Why would institutions change their practice?

We are, currently, working on progression legacy documents which should contain all the relevant templates and instructions to enable users to instigate and broker progression agreements between institutions. We will also share an individualised progression agreement matrix with members, which will easily highlight qualifications and subject areas that are served with progression agreements, and, therefore, the obvious gaps. Ultimately, progression agreements provide the documentary evidence of learner focussed, effective partnership working within an institution. Having robust tracking and monitoring mechanisms in place will allow for reliable data to be collected and used as evidence of impact, e.g. in Widening Participation Strategic Assessments (WPSA) returns and the new Access Agreements. Evidence can also be used as proof internally that progression interventions are cost effective and worthwhile to institutions.

### 6. Conclusion - Today's Landscape

In the current climate of funding cuts and potential associated job losses, progression could appear to be on the back burner - in terms of priorities - for members of our network. Even since the start of this year, we have seen a change of government, a review into 14 - 19 vocational education, the publication of Lord Browne's recommendations on the changes to students' finance and the announcement of the end of Aimhigher. These factors, plus the changing nature of demand for HE from 2007 - 10, has meant that HEIs have far more student demand than they can cope with. This has

impacted, in some quarters, on progression work and the unwillingness of some universities to take 'vocational' learners, even those on long established courses.

Should the full extent of the Browne Review recommendations be implemented, these will be the most drastic and far-reaching that the sector has ever seen. As was the concern in 2006, with the introduction of variable tuition fees, it is not known what effect such changes will have on the progression of vocational learners.

Now more than ever, we need to highlight the value of progression agreements for our partners in the longer term. We know what they do for learners; we need to articulate to partners that progression agreements can be the start of a serious institutional commitment to work around the transition of vocational learners and therefore greater learner diversity and preparedness for study at level 4 and beyond.

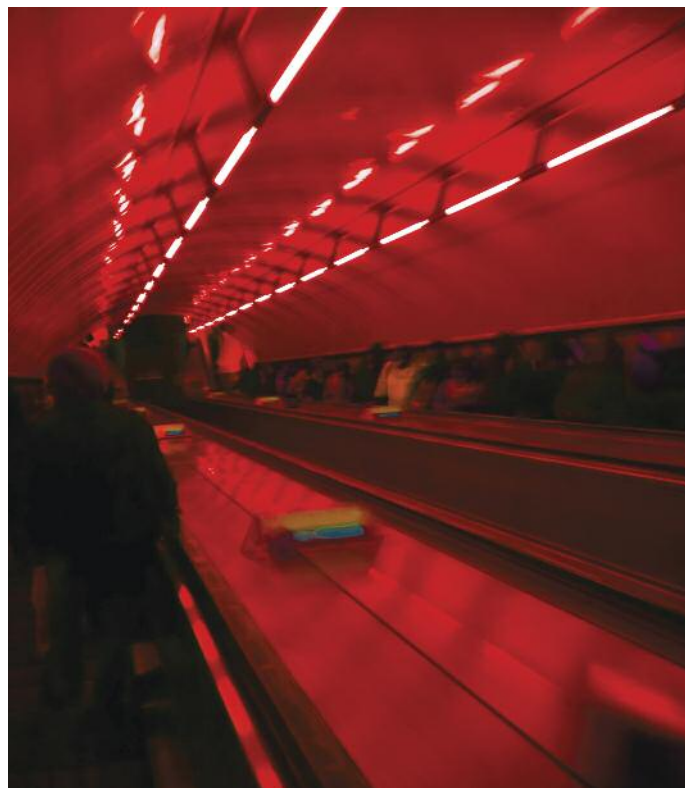
## 7. What Next?

Four and a half years of work has highlighted unfinished business and key issues that still remain: Is the sending award - 'fit for purpose'? Are progression possibilities identified in the planning, building and delivery of vocational qualifications? Not all vocational qualifications are the same and some adult focused Universities, currently, require matriculation at level 3 in only two thirds of their intake of students. How do we support access to higher level learning for apprentices should they wish to progress?

Should we also be considering other unintended consequences of progression work? In certain institutions could progression agreements make progression more complex for vocational learners than their academic peers? There has been of lack of agreement amongst LLNs about how we were going to achieve, as HEFCE requested, a 'step change' in progression. Has this meant that institutions could 'come along for the ride' and not fully change their practice?

Perversely, in discussion with partners, there is a dialogue emerging around the perceived value of vocational courses in the light of the higher fees. The emphasis on 'Key Information Sets' and value for money may make students far more discerning about the 'value' of their education in the world of work. Ironically, the 'day' of the vocational qualification may have arrived.

In summary, collaborative partnership working has been mentioned in key statements, White Papers and ministerial speeches, of late. Linking London can provide an existing framework for partnership working in relation to ensuring the certainty of progression of vocational and under-represented learners, which closely aligns with the coalition government's agenda around social mobility. We will continue to be the architects of this work for our network members, whilst embedding and sustaining our progression work to date, and helping institutions recognise the value in using progression agreements to help make strategic partnerships and vice versa. In order to do so, we are producing a Progression Toolkit during the summer term 2011, which will include this publication, a progression agreement matrix which could be used by institutions to identify new areas of opportunity for progression, information about the



progression advice helpline and a final report collating data from all Linking London brokered progression agreements.

In support of the toolkit materials, Linking London recommends<sup>16</sup>, that in order to secure progression and support an institutional mission to achieve "progression for those learners that want it and are able to benefit from it", there are a number of issues that need to be addressed. These can be organised into the following broad categories:

### **An institutional commitment to progression requires:**

- A. Strategic commitment and operational buy-in
- B. A thorough communication strategy to communicate opportunities to learners
- C. Progression to become a key part of institutional outreach/widening participation plans<sup>17</sup>

### **Who will make progression work?**

*Identifying and empowering the progression champion(s) within institutions*

- D. Progression is written into the Key Performance Indicators for a designated senior manager (or "Progression Champion") in order to challenge pre-conceived institutional ideas about vocational qualifications, to drive forward the progression agenda internally and to take ownership of institutional progression agreements

<sup>16</sup> Note that these recommendations are not exhaustive, but are based upon the knowledge, experience and learning of the past 5 years of Linking London.

<sup>17</sup> For HEIs, this may take the form of a Higher Education Progression Framework [www.actiononaccess.org/resources/files/Progression%20Framework%20Guide.pdf](http://www.actiononaccess.org/resources/files/Progression%20Framework%20Guide.pdf)

- E. The progression champion will be closely aligned with the institutional outreach/widening participation strategy
- F. The progression champion will be able to delegate some of the operational work to practitioners (tutors/lecturers etc) within institutions, clear lines of reporting should be established

**How to make progression work.**

- G. The “Progression Champion” should have control over some resource in order to buy out staff time to work on developing new and maintaining existing progression agreements
- H. Receiving institutions ring fence a number of places per year on courses for vocational and under-represented learners
- I. “Progression” including its review, evaluation and suggestions for improvement, is a standing item on Senior Management Team agendas in FE and HE, and there are internal channels to communicate ideas and developments with marketing and promotion managers
- J. Effective data sharing between sending and receiving institutions is integral to partnership working, provides evidence of impact, and should inform both the Widening Participation and Strategic Assessments (WPSA) and Access Agreements, including the annual monitoring reports.

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**“The hope given words in 1997 still has currency in 2008: that widening participation initiatives will improve and increase access to learning to a much broader cross-section of the potential learners, giving them opportunities for success and progression, thereby creating a lifelong learning society.”**

*Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, referring to her original report Learning Works (1997), in Unfinished business in widening participation: the end of the beginning (2008).*

The Linking London Network is a membership organisation of universities and colleges in Central, East and North London which aims to improve the progression of vocational learners into and through Higher Education. We are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and partner subscriptions, and are hosted by Birkbeck, University of London.

If you found this guidance document useful or would like to discuss our work in area of vocational learning, please contact: [info@linkinglondon.ac.uk](mailto:info@linkinglondon.ac.uk) or phone the progression advice line on 020 7380 3226.

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