



Research into the use of Industry Associates in Further Education

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A report to the Gatsby Charitable Foundation

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INTRODUCTION

Research shows the valuable role of Industry Associates to augment and complement teaching across further education (FE) provision. Many FE providers work with Industry Associates in a range of ways, although a number of challenges exist to maintain current practices and to support continued development.

Throughout this report the term Industry Associate is used to describe individuals who work in industry, and also contribute to technical education teaching through, for example, co-delivery of a session, masterclasses or delivery of short elements of the curriculum.

In 2022, York Consulting LLP (YCL) undertook an online survey and round table discussions with FE stakeholders exploring the use of Industry Associates in curriculum delivery.

A total of 106 respondents completed the online survey and 29 FE staff (drawn from 25 institutions) took part in round table discussions during August and September 2022. Participants included college Principals and Deputy/Vice-Principals, Heads of Department and Careers and Employer Engagement Leads.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Use of Industry Associates

The majority of survey respondents were from FE colleges (84%) with other respondents from independent training providers, adult and community learning providers, sixth-form colleges and local authority providers. Four-fifths of respondents had used an Industry Associate within the past five years, although there was variability in the frequency and methods of delivery used.

The remaining fifth of respondents identified not using such individuals, or not knowing whether they had. The most common reason provided for not going ahead with such arrangements included lack of time, both on the part of the education institution and industry employers.

Industry Associates role

A range of labels are used to describe the external individuals from industry used in the delivery of FE, such as, Employer Partners, Guest/Associate Lecturers, Guest/Professional Speakers and Industry Professionals/Experts.

Over half of survey respondents (57%) noted that whether the individual has teaching experience or training is not a consideration for FE providers in working with Industry Associates, although a further third (35%) suggested it is preferred, but not a requirement. Discussions with FE stakeholders identified that some organisations have processes for Industry Associates to undertake short pedagogy training sessions, whereas other providers ask Industry Associates to deliver alongside teaching staff, who are responsible for classroom management and teaching support.

“Industry specialists who come in to deliver training or knowledge sharing sessions receive half a day of training from the college on pedagogy to help with the planning of their session”.

[Executive Principal of an FE college group]

The majority of survey respondents (92%) suggested that the purpose of using Industry Associates was for ‘specialist curriculum input and for up-to-date industry expertise’ (86%). Additionally, over two-thirds (69%) indicated that Industry Associates are brought in to increase student engagement. Over two-thirds of respondents (68%) also identified the use of Industry Associates in their course promotional content and marketing.

During the roundtable discussions participants highlighted that a proportion of their staff are part-time teachers for a substantial proportion of their time alongside being part-time employees in industry. Whilst this role is not included in the definition of Industry Associates, clearly part-time teachers are by their nature bridging between industry and the classroom and input their ongoing industry expertise throughout the development and delivery of the curriculum.

Some FE providers also highlighted that although teaching staff may be current or recent experts in industry, additional individuals are brought in also to support delivery where their area of expertise or specialism is different to that of teaching staff.

Consistency of delivery

There is variability in the use of Industry Associates within FE establishments with less than half (44%) identifying that such arrangements were common across most or all curriculum areas. Survey respondents were asked to name up to four courses and qualification levels where Industry Associates are used. The findings show that these individuals are used in a wide range of courses with levels varying from level 1 to level 7, but most commonly level 1 to level 4.

Discussions through the round tables explored this variability. Respondents identified sectors where it is easier for them to engage with employers, such as construction and engineering, where employers commonly recognised the importance for them in training their future employees and addressing skills gaps.

“There is less capacity to engage with the arts as many employers are independent or self-employed.”

[Head of People Services at a college group and Institute of Technology]

“Creative and digital sector businesses are commonly SME’s so are too small to release staff”

[Principal and Deputy CEO at a college group]

There was evidence of a consistent approach where Industry Associates are used, with four-fifths (82%) suggesting that delivery was replicated year-on-year to each cohort of students. Most survey respondents (75%) indicated that Industry Associates deliver three

or more sessions showing that this is integrated into provision and more than a one-off element. The majority of respondents (76%) also identified that it is common to bring in different individuals, from different employers, throughout the academic year, suggesting working relationships have been formed with multiple employers.

Respondents noted that the individuals deliver a variety of sessions including covering industry standard techniques, hands-on workshops with products and, to a slightly lesser extent, industry standard equipment. Discussions with FE providers also identified that some Industry Associates deliver sessions relating to their careers, rather than knowledge or curriculum-based sessions, which aim to boost student understanding of the workplace and provide real-world context and examples.

A number of participants at the round table discussions highlighted that the recent increase in the use of technology and virtual delivery has increased the frequency and consistency of delivery from external sources.

“The use of technology as a result of the pandemic has given the ability to increase the breadth of visiting speakers due to easier access.”

[Vice-Principal of an FE college]

“Better relationships can now form with the introduction of online delivery. Employers are now creating videos in their workplace to share with students which can then be used year-on-year in the curriculum.”

[Principal of a college offering FE and HE provision]

Accessing Industry Associates

The survey highlighted that FE institutions were accessing Industry Associates most commonly through long-term partnerships with businesses, for a large proportion through either personal relationships or by making direct contact with local businesses. Some discussions centred around the sustainability of relationships formed by staff members, with participants identifying that relationships can be lost over time through staff turnover.

“These relationships are built up through time and are often complex and there is a risk of losing them when staff leave.”

[Principal and CEO of an FE college]

Some institutions emphasised strategies they have employed to reduce this risk, highlighting the importance of systematic approaches to engaging with employers, rather than relying solely on individual teaching staff due to their curriculum commitments. For some, they highlighted the use of a centralised team or individual to manage communications and engagements with employers to both limit the burden to teaching staff and remove the potential for duplication of communication.

A number of colleges mentioned the role of Corporate Social Responsibility agendas and Social Value as engagement tools when communicating with employers.

“We use the Corporate Social Responsibility agenda as a hook in with local employers. Large employers set aside five days [per year] for each employee to volunteer in local organisations so communication with employers relates to this.”

[Principal and CEO of an FE college]

The survey highlighted that most commonly Industry Associates engage on a voluntary basis, with a small proportion paid for time and/or expenses.

A small number of FE institutions described how their strategic approach to engagement with employers, centred around a tiered contribution model (e.g. bronze, silver, gold, platinum) whereby employers receive rewards depending on their involvement and engagement. Examples of engagement include delivering a 1-hour session or provision of work experience placements, up to delivering regular sessions and whole topics or contributing to curriculum. Examples of rewards and benefits used are:

- Inputting into the curriculum content
- Training for staff
- Pathways to become a fellow
- Access to employer masterclasses
- Free use of facilities
- Publishing branding
- Plaques
- Social media marketing
- Service level agreements for training
- Having an account manager
- Discounted membership of networks/services to support employer training and recruitment

Participants described that as employers reach different benefit tiers, they see more direct benefits for themselves, creating deeper strategic relationships that are less likely to be lost when individuals leave.

Others mentioned more direct links with employers, discussing their skills requirements or gaps to be able to input these into curriculum and delivery in order to fulfil employer recruitment needs.

Some institutions mentioned the Industry Associates developing their career to become part-time or specialist teachers. In these circumstances individuals continue their practice or CPD in order to remain current, and in some cases, continuation of their licences to practice. Examples include the employment of medical professionals continuing both their CPD and their membership and commitments to staff banks to continue practicing during academic holidays. This supports an institution’s access to current skills and practice but also helps bridge the gap in remuneration as such individuals can often command higher salaries in industry than in FE.

Teaching staff knowledge

Over four-fifths (83%) of survey respondents identified that teaching staff in their organisation spend time with local businesses updating their industry knowledge. This is most commonly achieved through industry visits during the academic year and attending industry networking events. A smaller number of respondents also used 'industry exchange' and longer secondments. Some organisations identified dual roles, where some staff are part-time in their teaching role while still practicing part-time within industry.

Some institutions highlighted designated periods in the academic year such as CPD weeks, while others said teaching staff had a number of days allocated to be out in industry updating their knowledge, with some institutions organising these arrangements centrally for staff.

"Some staff have five placement days out in industry each year, which the college organises as part of CPD, whilst other staff practice alongside their teaching roles."

[Deputy Principal of a college offering FE and HE provision]

'Industry exchange' was identified as a method of updating teaching staff industry knowledge by 20% of respondents. [The term industry exchange is used to describe an engagement with a particular business whereby a teacher spends time updating knowledge & skills in the business and an industry professional spends time in the FE institution.] Key reasons for not organising industry exchange arrangements included a lack of time or capacity to set up these arrangements. A smaller proportion also identified not knowing this was an option.

Challenges

Challenges faced by institutions in engaging with businesses include geographical location of the FE institution and business. Many suggested that virtual engagements can combat this to an extent but are limited in opportunities offered in comparison to in-person visits.

Some identified a lack of funding and focus on arrangements where employers engage with both students and staff to update knowledge. Comparisons were made to the HE sector where there was perceived to be greater funding for such arrangements.

Respondents noted differential pay rates in FE compared with industry, schools and HE as a challenge to drawing in industry experts into FE teaching roles.

In relation to industry exchange and the updating of teachers' knowledge and skills through spending some time in industry, some respondents noted time related challenges and potential conflicts, with other non-industry-related CPD taking priority.

"Time is the key challenge. There is pressure on non-industry related CPD such as safeguarding and pedagogy that we don't have five days to spare out in industry."

[Deputy Principal of a college offering FE and HE provision]