
Regional Tertiary Pathfinders Programme

Project Overview: NE Sustainable Learner Pathways

The tables below provide insights into projects delivered through the Regional Tertiary Pathfinders Programme, which aimed to strengthen collaboration between colleges, universities, employers, and local authorities.

Each project includes two tables:

1. **Collaboration & Impact** – covering the history of partnerships, project focus, geographic reach, and target beneficiaries.
2. **Delivery & Leadership** – outlining governance structures, project characteristics, stakeholder involvement, and key aims.

These tables highlight the context in which projects tested new ways of working, enhanced learner pathways, and improved regional skills planning. For further details, please refer to the System-Level Report.

Definitions of Project Characteristics

History of Working Together

- **None** – individuals and teams had not worked together previously.
- **Emergent** – individuals and or teams and organisations had previously done some work together. Relationships existed which could be built on and developed.
- **Previous positive experience** – individuals, teams and organisations had a history of successfully working together, in some cases over many years. These existing relationships were an accepted part of ‘how work was done’ and could be built on and further developed and strengthened.

Project Focus

- **Tight** – the project was tightly focussed on delivering specific products/pathways/outcomes.
- **Broad** – the project explored a broad range of topics or areas for improvement and developed associated products/pathways/approaches to deliver outcomes.
- **Multi-theme** – the project explores multiple themes which may be distinct or may intersect and overlap with each other, delivering products/pathways/outcomes related to the themes.

Target Beneficiaries

- **Providers** – colleges, universities and schools, benefit from the work done through the project e.g. increase student numbers, develop complementary provision which reduces competition etc.
- **Learners** – new products, pathways and provision are developed which improve the opportunities, experience and outcomes of learners.
- **Employers** – employers establish positive working relationships with the colleges and universities and become involved in the design of products/provision to meet their needs. Learners acquire the qualifications and skills needed by employers.

Geographic Reach

- **Regional** – for the Pathfinder programme this means aligning to the boundaries of the Regional Economic Partnership (REP).
- **Sectoral** – aligned to the needs of a particular sector e.g. Health, Energy.
- **Local Authority/Community Planning Partnership/Local Employability Partnership** – working within a particular LA Boundary rather than across the REP.

Starting Emphasis

- **Efficiencies** – cost saving as a result producing the desired outcome with little waste of time or resources.
- **Pre-considered improvement** – changes and improvements which had already been identified as needing to be made but which this programme gave the opportunity to catalyse and deliver with renewed focus and pace.
- **Innovation** – the development and delivery of a new method, idea or product to achieve desired outcomes.

Leadership and Sponsorship

- **Diffused** – responsibilities are spread between organisations and groups.
- **Central individual** – a leader/coordinator acts as the main driver for change and delivery.
- **Small group** – a small number of people champion and lead the work acting as a guiding coalition.

Who Was Involved at the Outset

- **Project beneficiaries** – learners, employers and organisations which would benefit from the outputs/outcomes from the project were involved from the outset.

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- **Frontline staff** – staff who would be developing/delivering products/courses were involved at the outset.
 - **Senior decision makers** – senior staff able to provide authorisation and create the conditions for project success were involved at the outset.

Character of Project

- **Pragmatic** – projects were identified and developed based on practical considerations and a realistic view of what could be achieved.
- **Adaptive** – projects evolved to take account of changing contexts or as a result of gaining more understanding/information about what was needed/possible.
- **Radical** – project affecting fundamental/far-reaching change.

Table 1

Project: NE Developing Demand-led, Aligned, and Sustainable Learner Pathways			
History of working together	None	Emergent	Previous positive experience
			Historically a close partnership existed between NESCol and RGU particularly through the existing articulation arrangements. RGU provided a range of support, including in-person workshops, to NESCol students progressing to RGU. This collaborative project helped deepen the partnership around articulation and joint curriculum planning.
Project focus	Tight	Broad	Multi-theme
	The project focused on refreshing and developing new and smoother articulation pathways for learners aligned with emerging regional skills needs. The move to establish a		

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	joint-offer letter from NESCol and RGU at the outset of the learner journey into college supported this.		
Geographic reach	Regional	Sectoral	Local Authority/CPP
	These arrangements focus on meeting the needs of regional learners.	This pilot project considered specific subject areas relevant to current and emerging skills needs and employment in the region.	
Target beneficiaries	Employers	Learners	Providers
	Employers will benefit from the increased regional talent pool to recruit from.	Learners benefit from a smoother and enhanced progression pathway in subject areas that are relevant to the regional economy.	RGU benefits from the clear flow of students from the college to the university. These are students who would not necessarily chosen University/degree study as a first choice.

Table 2

Project: NE Developing Demand-led, Aligned, and Sustainable Learner Pathways			
Leadership sponsorship	Diffused	Central individual	Small group
	Strategic Working Group had senior representatives from both institutions.	Senior leaders from both institutions developed the initial proposal and promoted the project. Project Leadership delegated to the Project Lead.	
Who was involved at the outset	Senior decision-makers	Frontline staff	Project beneficiaries
	Senior leaders from both institutions. The Project Lead was agreed. Members of the Strategic Working Group, including senior staff from both institutions, came together to provide strategic oversight, and ensure implementation and delivery. The Strategic Working Group, a joint project Planning and	Academic/teaching/curriculum leads, data specialist teams, widening access officers and marketing and recruitment teams from each of the institutions came together as working groups to develop and deliver on the project. The Project Coordinator had a key role in working with and reporting on the business and	Consultation with previous articulating students and potential regional employers/industry representatives.

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	Delivery Board was established to enable integrated planning, development and delivery.	actions of these designated groups.	
Character of project	Radical	Adaptive	Pragmatic
		Development of smoother, supported pathways in subjects essential to the regional economy.	
Starting emphasis	Innovation	Pre-considered improvement	Efficiencies
		Discussions beforehand through subject level review meetings. Improvement and refresh of curriculum and articulation pathways and linking with regional employment opportunities.	Joint curriculum planning, sharing of data and marketing.