

Case Study

Acorn

Background

Established in 1992, the multi award-winning Acorn is one of the UK's leading recruitment and training companies with a network of branches, on-site locations and specialist divisions throughout England and Wales.

Acorn places some 6,500 people into nearly 1,000 national and international businesses every week, with a client list that includes a host of household brands and large public sector organisations. All benefit from utilising Acorn's professional expertise in attracting, selecting and recruiting high-quality and reliable staff, covering contractors, agency workers and permanent placements

The Proposal

Cardiff Metropolitan University's Centre for Work Based Learning (CWBL) was approached to join forces with leading UK-wide recruitment and training company Acorn Learning Ltd, to co-create and launch Wales' first foundation degree franchise to a private work based provider.

The co-developed programme was to be a unique, foundation degree, the first of its kind in Wales, designed to develop skills and business in a flexible and dynamic way.

The Programme

The Foundation Degree (arts) in Applied Professional Practice aims to give a blend of learning together with the experience of studying within the university; attending lectures and workshops, using a range of resources and capabilities, while allowing the delegates to continue working. It allows delegates to demonstrate competence through a work based project, rather than a traditional dissertation.

The focus of the course is to develop the delegates' leadership and management skills with a view to encouraging personal development. The course is specifically designed to be flexible and allows those already working in management, or looking to progress into a management role, to tailor a schedule that suits the individual over two and a half academic years.

Rather than a dissertation, delegates can demonstrate competence with a work based assessment which can be tied in with business objectives. The time spent away from the workplace is minimal with only 14 half days out of the office over the course of an academic year, with an extra full induction day in Year one. It is a very flexible way to study at a Higher Education level.

This work based programme is specifically designed to allow students to study in a way which most suits the individual, whilst being accredited by a leading university.

There are also opportunities for academic progression with a chance to turn the foundation degree into a full undergraduate degree.

The degree will be delivered by Acorn, and is accredited by Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Objectives

1. To create a foundation degree that is mutually beneficial to employers and employees
2. Improve further career and promotion prospects
3. Making a university degree more accessible
4. Demonstrating commitment by employers to develop their potential and existing managers

What CWBL did to develop the Programme?

Cardiff Metropolitan University's Foundation Degree (arts) in Applied Professional Practice was co-created between the team in CWBL and Acorns Learning and Development staff experts. Flexible, open frameworks of modules were designed to meet the industry needs identified by Acorn, and the rigorous academic standards required by the university to attain accredited learning at CQFW levels 4-5. Delivery and assessment were based on emergent work based learning strategies and delivery techniques, incorporating work based assessments and open project modules, that allow delegates to submit assessed work on projects that they are already working on in their professional life. Once the modules were designed and validated, Acorn franchised the degree from Cardiff Met, offering the programme to new and existing clients.

Co-creation and subsequent validation of the degree marks the creation of the first flexible work based Foundation Degree franchise to a private work based provider in Wales.

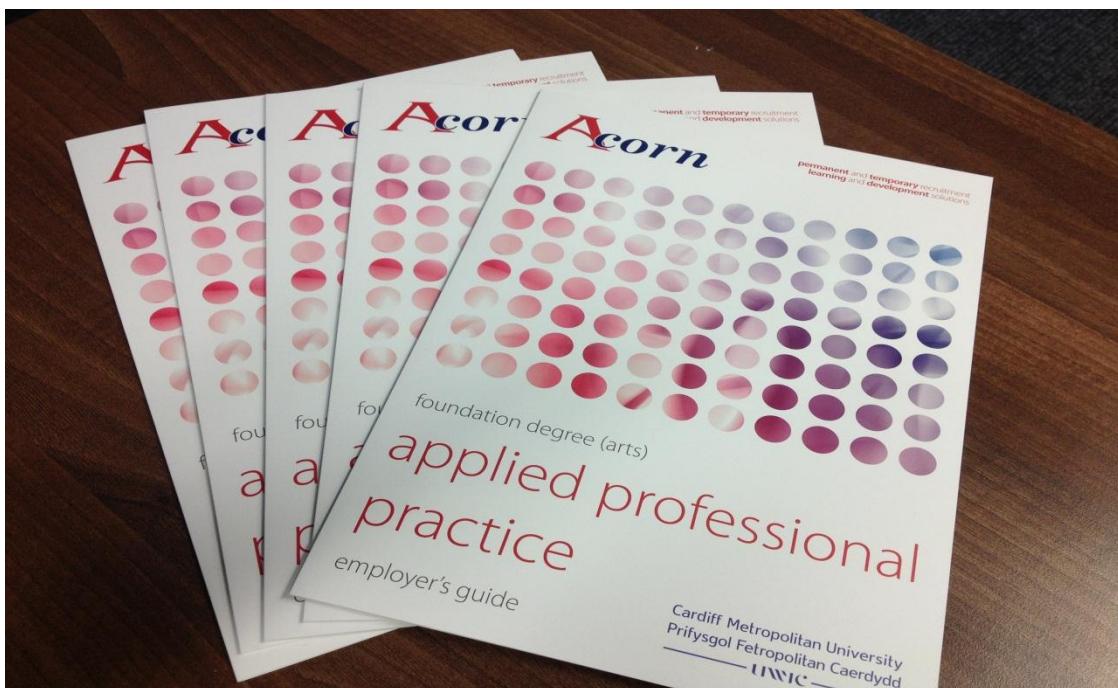
Benefits

The Foundation Degree is flexible; a delegate can choose which topics they would like to study and which route they would like to take. There are exemptions available for prior learning, if they have studied or have a vast amount of work experience that matches the learning outcomes of the programme modules. The option is available to top up to a full bachelor's degree once the Foundation Degree has been completed. This is an opportunity to see improvement in a delegates' future career and promotion prospects, as they will have demonstrated their new abilities/competencies gained throughout the programme through work based learning assessments.

Results

The Foundation Degree has been delivered since 2013, and currently has two cohorts undertaking the full degree. In February 2015, CWBL and Acorn will welcome our 3rd cohort onto the Foundation Degree.

In November 2015 our first delegate group will successfully graduate from Cardiff Metropolitan University, with a Foundation Degree (arts) in Applied Professional Practice, and will be in attendance at the main Cardiff Metropolitan University graduation ceremony.



Statement from Richard Bassett
Senior Commercial Trainer- Acorn Group

'The Foundation Degree in Applied Professional Practice has been a unique and rewarding teaching experience. The wealth of experience students bring from their diverse workplaces allows them to connect with the leadership and management based syllabus of the programme at a practical level.

They have shown through the work based projects they have undertaken that the skills and knowledge gained are beneficial to their own development and to the organisations that employ them.

As a tutor I have enjoyed the challenge of helping our students link their existing skills and knowledge with an understanding of the management theory that underpins them, I have watched their confidence grow and seen them branch out to explore new aspects of the leadership and management role.

The work based element of the programme has been truly inspiring; each student has been able to tailor their learning to the needs of their organisations, their role and their personal development goals.

The projects that have been submitted demonstrate the creative and insightful application of their academic leadership and management studies to practical workplace problems; whilst achieving positive outcomes from their employer and expanding their own knowledge and experience in the process.

They have challenged my personal understanding of leadership and management theories and given me new perspectives to consider; it has been an incredible teaching and learning experience for me. `

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to see a fantastic insight into the exciting new programme offered by CWBL in collaboration with Acorn.

Testimonials

"Good management is vital to any organisation and ensuring that staff have the right skills for the job is key.

By providing higher level study, employers can demonstrate to their staff the value they hold in them as well as improving business performance, loyalty and staff retention"

Dr Peter Treadwell

Cardiff Metropolitan University

"The motivation behind creating this degree was that it should be mutually beneficial to employers and employees. From a business point of view, the course offers on-the-job learning, improved staff retention rates and demonstrates commitment, by employers, to the development of their managers"

Sarah John

*Acorn's Learning & Development
Commercial Director*

"Having recently successfully completed the National Vocational Qualification Level 3 CII Insurance course I now have the opportunity to take my learning to a higher level. The FdA in Applied Professional Practice will offer me the opportunity to examine my existing skills and seek a knowledge and understanding into how I can best refine them"

John MacLaughland

Foundation Degree Student

"Having discussions about the current business landscape is a first for me and has helped make the course an exciting alternative to the run of the mill business courses I am used to"

Ian Smith

Student Representative

Interested in developing your leadership and management skills and reaching the next level in your career? Contact CWBL for details on the Foundation Degree (arts) in Applied Professional Practice via email cwbl@cardiffmet.ac.uk, or telephone 02920 20 5510. See more details at [our website](#).