

CaseStudy

Travel industry Fd is high-flying success

Travel Operations Management Foundation degree developed for the travel and tourism industry, with fdf (Foundation Degree Forward) and a higher education consortium.

Thomson parent firm TUI is confident that its aim to retain more staff, develop the skills of its workforce and create the next generation of talented managers will be boosted by the launch of a Travel Operations Foundation degree (Fd). TUI has benefited from working closely with **fdf**, which has used its expertise to help structure a two year Fd striking a fine balance between theory and vocational education.

Angela Maguire, London Region Co-ordinator at **fdf**, comments:

"The unique way in which this Fd was developed is inspirational to other sectors, and sets an example of how competing companies can work together on training and development, raising the skills level within their organisations."

"The way the industry is responding to the qualification is encouraging and will hopefully lead to many more providers adopting it so it can truly become an industry standard. fdf has led this development and has engaged 45 employers – around 95 per cent of the sector – at the consultation stage. Therefore we can celebrate the fact that this is a Fd that truly meets the needs of the travel sector."

The content for the Fd is unique as TUI has tapped into the knowledge of industry peers and business rivals to build the profile of the degree and the graduates it would produce. This enabled TUI and **fdf** to identify the required competencies, skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the wider travel industry.

TUI has been piloting this innovative qualification for the sector since September 2007. There was a clear vision to develop a qualification that would be recognised across the industry as opposed to an in-house training certificate with more limited appeal.

TUI invited applications for the trial programme from its entire staff taking into account the variety of positions and skill sets required across the industry. Applicants hailed from diverse fields – from pilots to travel agent representatives and call centre operatives.

Jennifer Lyons, TUI Regional Sales Manager and an Fd student, says:

"I started at TUI 18 years ago and have worked my way up from an in-store travel agent to a regional sales manager – responsible for 45 TUI shops. After numerous sales and training courses to reach my current position, I felt it was time to get a better understanding of the wider business rather than have a silo of sales knowledge."



Jennifer Lyons, TUI Regional Sales Manager

"My previous training hasn't linked theory and practice to customer service, so the Fd is helping me get a better understanding of other aspects of the business and why it works – from tour operation to economics and people motivation. Since I understand more about why I, and my teams, work in certain ways, I feel it will help my career progression based on that broader knowledge. As I left education at the age of 16, the Fd is really important on a personal level for self-achievement, in addition to my professional development."

The course - which is jointly funded by TUI and the Higher Education Funding Council for England - is mostly delivered through online tutorials that students complete in their own time with support from TUI managers. This is complemented by face-to-face tuition from university lecturers.

The university consortium – consisting of the University of Wolverhampton, Coventry University and University College Birmingham – has written course materials, developed these into online content and provided personal tutors, while students typically work alongside internal TUI mentors at work.

Andy Smyth, Accredited Programmes Manager at TUI, adds:

"The aim is for people coming into the industry to recognise it as a gateway to personal development, and for sector organisations to recognise the Fd's value as an industry standard. The Fd goes beyond valuing TUI's own workforce, to valuing that of the sector, and, we hope other organisations will utilise the opportunity to bring additional higher education level skills to the industry."

Kathryn Ward, Director of Sales and Operations at TUI, and an Fd student, has worked for the company for 21 years after starting out as a sales advisor. She is also a keen advocate of the value of work-based learning.

Kathryn comments: "Having worked towards my degree in 'reverse' by working and then studying, I feel at a huge advantage as I already understand the context of the business and workplace. Now, however, I'm being equipped with the theory that underpins the organisational model. For the first time I've been able to use research skills to understand how my role fits into the whole industry, as well as get a grasp of other areas such as value airlines, that I don't currently work with."

"The Fd is a good format for my work-life balance, particularly as the majority of the course is online, so I can fit it around my free time and study at my own pace."

"From a business and management viewpoint, I'm passionate about training and development, so it was important for me to live and breathe the qualification to see how it adds value to the workforce and organisation. When I complete the Fd, I'll be able to mentor future students, with a real understanding and empathy of their experiences."

At the core of the Foundation degree sit modules including business, operations, financial, IT and people skills, focused around the travel and tourism sector.

The Institute of Travel and Tourism, Tourism Society and ABTA, endorse the course and were consulted throughout its development. Claire Steiner, Director and Chair of Education and Training at the Institute of Travel and Tourism, says:

"This is a qualification developed by the industry, for the industry. It's about employers saying what they need, and creating the workforce to meet this."

"The Fd is going to be central to companies that want a clear progression qualification for employees that allow staff to develop specifically within their sector. This in itself has obvious recruitment and retention benefits. It develops the existing pool of staff and creates a transparent progression and a higher education path for new entrants into the sector, who may be coming from a further education background."

"This is an attractive proposition as students can continue to support themselves financially whilst studying and concentrate on developing their career without the need to take a break."

Peter Robinson, Senior Lecturer in Leisure Industries, at the University of Wolverhampton, is delighted at the interim results of the pilot project.

"Some 96% of students have achieved A-C grades in the first modules undertaken. The success of the course so far highlights the relevance and need for such a qualification in the sector," he explains.

Around 40 other companies across the sector are currently considering rolling out the Fd in phase two, including Birmingham International Airport.

From summer 2008 the Fd will be rolled out across the industry and tailored for staff in cruise lines, agencies, operators and airlines. Its development will also see the introduction of more face-to-face tutorials, master classes and workshops, coupled with assessed training in the workplace. Additional higher education institutions have joined the accreditation consortium to deliver the qualification: the University of Brighton, the University of Bedfordshire, the University of Greenwich, the University of Derby and the University of Sunderland.

For further information please visit the **fdf** website at

www.fdf.ac.uk

or contact the **fdf** Press Office at fdf@fourcommunications.com