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Reflections and lessons from the apprenticeship journey
Case studies from Higher Education apprenticeship delivery

November 2017

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Interviewee: Dr. John Lanham, Assistant Vice-Chancellor

Theme: An institutional strategic approach to degree apprenticeships

Summary

This case study is a reflective account of the institutional journey taken by UWE Bristol in its engagement with, and readiness to deliver, degree apprenticeships. UWE Bristol received early support from both the executive team and wider key staff for the implementation of apprenticeship provision, achieving effective alignment between the core aims and objectives of the apprenticeship reforms (employer-led, productivity and social mobility) and the university's core values and strategic ambition. A successful submission to the HEFCE-led Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund (DADF) in 2016 provided a basis for wider institutional engagement. UWE Bristol launched a portfolio of Degree Apprenticeships in September 2017.

Introduction

The University of the West of England – UWE Bristol – is a large, modern university with a ~27,000 full-time equivalent student population across four faculties and a national reputation for providing programmes that equip and enable graduates to follow professional careers. As a strategic partner in the city-region, UWE Bristol collaborates with over 2,000 businesses via student placements, internships, live projects and programme of knowledge exchange and business support services. It also works closely with the region's FE providers with ~1,500 students studying for UWE Bristol validated qualifications at partner colleges. These local partnerships have for some time supported a portfolio of apprenticeship delivery led by UWE Bristol in aerospace, healthcare sciences, and river and coastal engineering and have allowed early engagement in capacity building initiatives including the Higher Apprenticeship Fund in 2012 managed by the National Apprenticeship Service. These developments have created a perfect foundation for UWE Bristol to transition from apprenticeship frameworks to the newly created degree apprenticeship standards.

A Strategic Opportunity and Response

By autumn 2015, UWE Bristol recognised the apprenticeship reforms and the introduction of degree apprenticeships offered it a significant regional and national opportunity. Two strands of activity emerged; one led by the Faculty of Business and Law interested in the development and delivery of the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship and the second in engineering.

As interest grew there was recognition of the need for a collective corporate response with a strategic approach across the whole university. As a result, a cross-university role was created – Assistant Vice-Chancellor, Regional – to lead and coordinate apprenticeship developments.

Key ambitions for this role were to:

1. integrate Degree Apprenticeships with existing taught programmes
2. manage, approve and operate Degree Apprenticeships within UWE Bristol's provision

3. embed approval, operation and quality processes required for apprenticeships within UWE Bristol's existing systems and adapt where necessary to comply with apprenticeship funding rules and requirements

Accepting a New Philosophy and Culture

Although there was a desire to embed and mainstream degree apprenticeships within academic taught programmes and for apprenticeships to be firmly rooted in the core day-to-day business of the university, there was also recognition that the employer as the purchaser of the apprenticeship changes the dynamics of key relationships. The conventional UCAS/applicant/student relationship – business to customer – no longer applies. Rather the model proceeds on a business to business basis and requires a different or revised set of systems, staff roles and processes.

From Project to Strategy

Work started on identifying occupations and employers where UWE Bristol had synergy with developments in degree apprenticeship standards. Success in the June 2016 DADF first round established a consortium of four regional FE/HE partners, led by UWE Bristol which used the £350,000 allocated to support the development of six degree apprenticeships for launching in September 2017. This has had significant strategic importance locally. The collaboration has enabled UWE Bristol to combine its experience of programme design, approval and delivery at level 6 and level 7 to meet professional skill needs, with the FE college partners experience of the apprenticeship funding system, direct delivery and compliance, to mutual benefit.

A UWE Bristol Strategic Board was established to ensure that Degree Apprenticeships become a part of the wider university strategy for HE delivery. The project focused on tactical issues that need to be addressed before degree apprenticeships can be launched successfully. Changes have already started to influence the university which has for example revised its quality assurance and enhancement framework to reflect the requirement for degree apprenticeship programmes to evidence implementation of the 20% off-the-job requirements as part of programme design and approval processes. The necessity to be an approved provider of apprenticeships on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers also forced tactical and operational issues to be exposed and resolved. This activity contributed to a growing level of corporate and collective knowledge of apprenticeships. It is evident that staff in all areas are more familiar with the rules, language and expectations of employers, apprentices and funding bodies.

“Degree Apprenticeships @ UWE” – The Value of Experience

1. It important that degree apprenticeships aligned with the university's strategy, value and ambitions as was the Vice Chancellor's endorsement of them as a key strategic priority in the annual university update
2. Focusing on parity / differences between a traditional degree and degree apprenticeship route ways, misses the point; employers want fully competent professionals and apprenticeships are another way of achieving this – professional registration is the ultimate objective and degree apprenticeships offer an alternative, not lesser, route to this goal
3. The changing nature of degree/apprenticeship policy can be frustrating, resource intensive and perplexing but the same is true for many higher education policies; the temptation to wait to engage until the policy becomes more certain denies the opportunity to be part of the community that shapes and develops this important feature of the apprenticeship offer

4. The expansion of apprenticeships to level 6 and level 7 offers the chance to take a different approach to linking education and training with professional-level work-based learning – we can learn from the FE sector, but the KSB's of level 6/7 programmes can offer HEI's a platform to develop some innovative, employer/employment based programmes
5. Understanding the different types of employers supports effective engagement: there are those who know what they want and how they intend to invest their levy or co-investment; those who are shaping ideas and want to engage and finally; and those who are largely unaware of apprenticeships. Changes to funding and systems mean there is still considerable employer education required
6. Despite many employers and individuals seeing the value and benefit of apprenticeships, there are many schools and colleges for whom a Degree Apprenticeship is not seen as a credible route to acquiring a degree or entering a professional career which means there is still considerable awareness raising and showcasing to be done

Conor Moss, Director of Education and Employer Partnerships

Theme: A perspective on the journey

Background

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships at Sheffield Hallam University are the responsibility of a relatively new, central, Directorate of Education and Employer Partnerships with a wider remit to support student employability, establish a clear role for SHU in the region, and lead the university's business readiness strategy. This involves working with employers on their workforce development plans, activity which usually features Degree Apprenticeships.

How SHU works with employers is not new; the university has a long and successful history of developing leadership skills in a range of sectors through an applied curriculum and through part-time sponsored degrees. What is different and new however is that the impact on provision of fees, and the removal of flexible and part-time provision, has meant an opportunity to reengage through Higher and Degree Apprenticeships. This opportunity comes with its own complexities and challenges.

The Challenge

Transitioning from a more traditional HE presents its own challenges despite the number of similarities. Developing a curriculum to be apprenticeship ready, and preparing university staff to understand the differences between a part-time programme for employers and degree apprenticeships takes time. This is a journey that SHU have been on for some time and will continue over the next couple of years. Equally challenging is balancing two very distinct markets: a regional market that makes Degree Apprenticeships accessible to SME businesses through open courses *and* supporting employers nationally on the development and delivery of closed courses.

The Journey

SHU's journey so far has seen its approach aligned to apprenticeships in subject areas where work-based learning was already a large element of delivery. In construction, management, and engineering in year one; healthcare and digital in year two and in 2017, further healthcare programmes and broader management components. By September 2018 SHU will be offering 16 higher-level apprenticeships which represent a doubling of the degree apprenticeships approved, validated, and delivered. For each of its programmes SHU is working hard to create apprenticeships that are regionally focused, and which deliver its strategic goal of working with larger organisations that require bespoke provision for larger single cohorts. It has been a very deliberate strategy to deliver to both markets.

The Solution

Good examples of how SHU is creating employer-responsive provision are in health and adult social care. A Foundation Degree has been approved and there are now seven delivery partners, with FE colleges using the Foundation Degree as their Higher Apprenticeship, and with pathways progressing to provision at SHU in allied health and nursing apprenticeships. SHU has realised that to meet employer demand, it cannot do all the delivery and engagement despite having significant health status and contracts as a university. The diverse nature of the workforce in health and adult care and their support needs requires wider collaboration including working very closely with the NHS Trusts as employers.

The solution to designing relevant health care provision was to validate a single programme as a standalone foundation degree and, using SHU's work-based learning framework map it to the relevant apprenticeship standards. This achieved a successful model for developing degree level and sub-degree level programmes, quality assured by the university and professional body recognised. This approach has now been adopted for all of SHU's apprenticeship programmes. Although the delivery models vary across the SHU portfolios, all apprenticeships contain three core components: specifically, work-based projects, negotiated learning through prior learning and academic credit for CPD and a personal and professional development pathway to underpin the requirements of the behavioural components of the standard.

The Value of Experience – from Idea to Action

1. Select sectors with significant employer demand/skill shortages.
2. Don't underestimate the extent of employer engagement needed to get Higher and Degree Apprenticeships launched, therefore leverage existing partnerships and engage with regional stakeholders.
3. Think about learner engagement, especially for open programmes and regional demand.
4. Degree apprenticeships are different and therefore factor significant resource for staff engagement and development.
5. The benefits of delivering apprenticeships in HE extend beyond the staff who are teaching on degree apprenticeship programmes. Highlight the returns that it will give in terms of a personal/professional learning experience, fodder for research in applied curriculum and taking what is learned and turning it into relevant and meaningful core curriculum.
6. Lessons and evidence gained from designing and delivering a response to apprenticeship delivery will enrich a university's wider curriculum.

Quotes:

“our core mission is regional first and national alongside”

“it would be remiss of us not to ensure that all of our provision for degree apprenticeships was accessible to the small, medium sized businesses within the Sheffield City Region”

“for an institution like ours that wants to be employer engaged, wants to produce highly employable graduates, then degree apprenticeships should be a journey to achieving that”

“...and that’s our real drive; ensuring degree apprenticeships encourage social mobility”

Ian Rowe, Director of Knowledge Exchange and Business Development**Theme: Working with employers*****Background***

Leeds Trinity is, in HE terms, a small university with 3,500 students who are mostly undergraduates recruited as 18-year olds. With no science or engineering Leeds Trinity University's foundation is as a teacher training college with a strong commitment to its values of inclusion, widening participation and working with first generation university entrants in traditional vocational disciplines: in teaching, healthcare and journalism. It is this core offer that has helped provide a secure foundation for the development of apprenticeship provision over an intense two-year period that resulted in the first apprentices on campus in October 2017 from Leeds Teaching Hospitals to start a Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship with a second cohort planned for February 2018.

The Challenge

The concept of apprenticeship was brand new to Trinity back in 2015 but there was an open commitment from the university's Executive Team to make apprenticeships meaningful to its future. With a good reputation for employability, there was already an active network of nearly 3,000 employers that provided work placement opportunities which provided a strong basis for engagement around degree apprenticeships. However, delays in the Government's ITT for delivery to non-Levy paying employers has meant the university has had no funding to support their typical SME employer organisations which in turn has meant overcoming a further challenge of working with public sector organisations more than with private or commercial businesses. This particularly relates to the procurement of apprenticeships by public sector bodies that present a very different landscape for any university, of any size, particularly in terms of scale and level of apprenticeship provision required.

The Journey

In late 2016, Trinity through its contacts with the Leeds Academic Health Partnership became aware that the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust were looking to strengthen their cross-institutional provision of leadership and management training and that this would be at a various job and skill levels; from fairly junior administrative positions to senior clinical directors, all funded from the Trust's sizeable apprenticeship levy. Trinity quickly realised that a single apprenticeship provider would be unable to support all of the requirements so initiated discussion with regional FE college partners and other local universities with a view to creating an apprenticeship delivery network of training providers that could respond holistically to the NHS demands. As a result, a Professional Skills Partnership involving Leeds Trinity, University of Leeds, Bradford College and Barnsley College was launched, initially to respond to fulfilling the NHS contract (now with 130 apprentices registered on programmes at levels 3-5) but with the potential to respond collectively to other public-sector requirements for optimising the apprenticeship levy.

A new management degree at Leeds Trinity had to be created and validated to put the emphasis on workplace learning, that would be sufficiently flexible enough to accommodate the NHS' ways

of working. Using its own work-based learning framework and in close dialogue with the hospitals, around content and how the programme would be delivered, a highly flexible approach to delivery has been agreed. A further area of development that was unexpected, has been in supporting the NHS as an employer to select the apprentices. This involved helping build a skills profile for all applicants and running drop-in information sessions and enrolment days to ensure that apprentices are recruited to the right apprenticeship route and can travel the distance.

The Solution

Initial thinking was that apprentices would attend university on a typical one day a week basis but that's not how it works for the NHS. Apprentices are now on campus every six or seven weeks for a block of two days with limited timetabling around Christmas and New Year in recognition of the pressure on hospitals at these times. Each apprentice has a work-based mentor and line manager and hospital-based mentors who will work with the university's academic team on the learning that happens in the workplace. Weekly drop-in sessions are held by academic tutors on site at the hospitals for both apprentices and work-based mentors. The plan is to create a mentor network to connect hospital managers and supervisors to the apprenticeship provision. While this might work for a large public sector organisation like a hospital trust, solutions for the SME employer are also being considered by Trinity including employer mentoring support programmes for all sized employers from any sector or industry.

Lessons Learned and Actions to Take

1. Stepping into the apprenticeship market as a university and to be effective in planning for delivery will take a minimum of 12 months. You will need to have a high level of expertise and knowledge inside your institution on the technical aspects of apprenticeships; of the funding system, processes for contract compliance and data requirements.
2. Engaging with other parts of the HE sector that are leading provision in apprenticeships and have developed considerable expertise and knowledge over the past three to six years is essential and in Trinity's experience the sector is good at sharing its knowledge and experience of apprenticeships, good and bad.
3. Do not rush into delivering apprenticeship provision or diversifying your existing curricula, particularly in response to levy paying employers, without doing a lot of homework first as higher and degree apprenticeships are very different products to traditional undergraduate degrees. Managing reputational risk is crucial.

4. As an HEI you will probably end up with a dedicated apprenticeship team of experts either located centrally or across university functions. At Trinity, it was decided relatively early in development that the university would locate all the technical aspects of apprenticeships within its functions which has not required necessarily any additional capacity and depend on existing teaching excellence in the relevant departments for leadership in apprenticeships. What has been built by way of additional resource is increased capacity around employer engagement and the bringing in of expertise from other organisations with relevant higher and degree apprenticeship experience. Recruitment from FE was followed by the appointment of a first professor of work-based learning at Trinity that together gives academic staff the confidence in the high quality of workplace learning that can be achieved through apprenticeships.

Quotes:

“...the building blocks for what we’ve managed to achieve in two years at Trinity, in degree apprenticeships, were there in the DNA of the institution.”

“we have benefited from having a good history in the Leeds City Region for HE collaboration and this is bringing the benefit of higher and degree apprenticeships to local employers...”

“Our success in the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund led by HEFCE has provided us with invaluable experiences in terms of how the apprenticeship system works, how other institutions are working to develop their qualifications for degree apprenticeships and the work of the policy and government agencies; it has been terrific”

“...well who knows where the policy will go but we think this is going to be a significant part of our business, and it’s an area that we will succeed in as it fits well with our existing mission and ambition”

“Apprenticeships are driving innovative thinking in areas such as cutting-edge pedagogy and in influencing undergraduate provision. The different use of technology, the differing approaches to teaching and learning and of accessing new opportunities are all a reflective part of engaging with apprenticeships and this is good for other areas of the university too.”

Interviewee: Adam Greenwood, Head of Skills Partnerships

Theme: Validation and approval of curriculum

Background

The University of Hull was established in 1922 and celebrated its 90th anniversary, which coincided with Hull's year as UK City of Culture, in 2017. With a student body of around 22,000, Hull is proud to be a research-led university but in recognition of its position as an anchor institution and the only university based in the Humber region, it has developed considerable activity with businesses and employers locally including in the development of higher and degree apprenticeships.

The university's Academic Partnership Office has provided leadership in promoting the benefits and raising the corporate consciousness of apprenticeships across the institution. It has started to build capacity internally to deal with the demands of scale and to develop relationships with externally partners including those on the Employment and Skills Board of the Humber Local Enterprise Partnership.

Hull commenced apprenticeship delivery with just four apprentices on the Higher Apprenticeship Framework in Life Sciences and Chemical Science Professionals at level 5. It welcomed its first major cohort in June 2017 of Chartered Manager Degree Apprentices with 18 apprentices from Hull City Council and a further 13 from other business organisations including Associated British Ports (ABP), Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust and the university itself. The university is constantly looking ahead to anticipate apprenticeship numbers and has projections for the next five years; although the fluidity of apprenticeship policy, particularly with regards to degree apprenticeships and their development, makes forecasting difficult.

The Challenge

Hull realised early on that to deliver apprenticeships successfully, there was a need to be much more agile and flexible in curriculum design to meet the expectations of employers. Initial conversations highlighted there was a gap in understanding how HE programmes are designed, with employers not necessarily understanding the processes, or the amount of time, that universities need to validate and assure the quality of provision. So, one of the biggest challenges has been to manage expectations around programme approval and to bridge the gap between employer demand and the university's existing operating model.

The Journey

Aware of some existing and emerging practice in the sector in terms of positioning work based learning and the introduction of more flexibility in the design and approval of learning in the workplace, Hull were particularly interested in the potential that an institutional 'work based learning framework' could bring. By commissioning an academic expert, Hull began the process of writing a work based learning framework, led by the Academic Partnership Office in consultation with the Learning Enhancement and Academic Practice Team and interested staff from a number of faculties. The aim was to achieve a mechanism by which Hull could rapidly develop partnerships with employers, professional bodies and other stakeholders to design and develop flexible provision which focuses on the learner in their work context, is time and resource effective, is tested and quality assured and would be available across the whole university including for the creation of higher and degree apprenticeship provision.

It took a while to complete and Hull undertook a validation exercise of the work-based framework itself. What helped the process was that an academic at Hull University Business School was developing a programme that mapped to a newly created Degree Apprenticeship in supply chain leadership at level 6 and was keen to use the work based learning framework as a basis for the programme. At validation, the academic exemplified what the framework could do and how, and promoted its advantages. Advantages include:

- valuing the prior learning of the individual and their employer
- allowing the individual and relevant work stakeholders to plan their own programme
- delivery typically by blended learning; and
- offering flexibility to meet individual and organisational need by focusing on the development, conduct and learning from work based projects.

The Solution

Hull's work based learning framework has introduced a naming convention that clearly supports professional practice and achievements in work base competency including in apprenticeships. The framework is built on a stock of four shell modules from UK levels 4 (1st year undergraduate) to 7 (postgraduate) that can be amended and used in conjunction with existing taught modules *and* a set of rules governing how the module stock can be used to construct pathways, including for apprentices, to all the main higher education qualification outcomes. Starting with a learning review and a professional development module the remainder of the programme is then negotiated, with teaching and learning focused on the individual and the needs and context of their work with meaningful assessment in the work context. Traditional written dissertations can then be more easily replaced with more meaningful work based projects to achieve better outcomes for the employer and the learner. Quality assurance is at the level of the module / apprenticeship / partnership and framework which means there is more ability to be responsive to demands from employers.

Lessons Learned & Actions Taken

Critical success factors identified that enable significant new ways in which programmes are designed and developed include:

1. a committed core team of staff,
2. a clear university-wide philosophy on learning in the workplace (learning which tends not to fit into traditional subject boundaries),

3. institutional systems and structures that support flexible delivery, support of high level champions, and
4. a willingness and ability to engage in a partnership of equals with the employer and the apprentice.

As a result, Hull has introduced a standing panel which specifically meets to consider the use of the work based learning framework and the viability of any programme development in a two-stage process: development consent approval and, validation of design detail. This now prevents long delays in considering revisions to, or introduction of, new programmes. The development consent stage has been brought in line with the university's Apprenticeship Governance Group, chaired by the PVC (Education), to ensure more effective alignment with its ambition for apprenticeship growth.

Quotes:

"we've been building a relationship for some time with Hull City Council and our approach has been to link with some really key strategic partners in and around the region, and to start building a programme based on their requirements."

"we can see really quite significant growth in the degree apprenticeship area which will help as higher education changes significantly over the next few years, particularly with the reforms that have been brought in through policies such as the Teaching Excellence Framework, accelerated degrees and changes in student financing – which all bring uncertainty and opportunities to the sector."

"work based learning has been a distinctive feature of the UK HE landscape since the early 1990's – higher and degree apprenticeships are a welcome feature of this landscape at Hull."

"Hull has changed quite a bit in the way that we approve programmes specifically when it relates to work based learning and apprenticeships."

"getting senior-buy in from your institution is one of the most important things...having an executive team sponsor who can help demonstrate the university's strategic intent is a really, really useful thing to have."

Liz Gorb, Director of Apprenticeships

Theme: Delivery Models: integrated / blended / distance / virtual

Background

Manchester Met has been delivering degree apprenticeships for three years, a journey that started with a pioneering new IT programme – Digital & Technology Solutions. The programme was the UK's first integrated degree apprenticeship, and was the result of detailed work between employers, including Lloyds, Capgemini, IBM, Barclays, Fujitsu, Ford and BT, a group of universities, including Manchester Metropolitan, and the Tech Partnership. From that early involvement, the university recruited a diverse group of 60 highly-motivated apprentices onto a first cohort, from employers such as Lloyds Banking Group and AstraZeneca, and smaller digital age companies in and around the Greater Manchester area.

The Challenge

Manchester Met understood that part of its challenge was about scale. The university is one of the UK's largest, with more than 38,000 students and a growing apprenticeship cohort of 650 apprentices. Systems and processes were designed for 'traditional' students and in many areas required a complete rethink to accommodate the needs of degree apprentice learners.

Apprenticeships are designed as an accessible way to study, which inevitably leads to a diverse mix of learners. Many are starting a degree apprenticeship straight from school or college, but other are using the programme as a means of career change or to advance within their current role. The University has also chosen to be more flexible with its entry requirements, to widen the opportunities provided through apprenticeships to a range of people. In the case of digital apprenticeships, this has allowed employers to recruit apprentices with non-typical A level subjects such as French and dance rather than maths, physics or IT. This means they are all arriving at University with different levels of experience and records of academic achievement.

The Journey

The University recognised that for these programmes to be successful they needed to be developed and delivered with significant employer input, so they established employer advisory boards to input into the curriculum and ongoing development.

They successfully established an internal strategic-opportunities fund (initiated by the Dean of Faculty of Business and Law) to stimulate cross-university interest before setting up a team to coordinate apprenticeships across the university, now 16 staff strong. This includes specialist knowledge in administration, business development, funding, marketing, apprenticeship leadership, student recruitment, admissions, student services, finance and legal. Manchester Met has since made two important operational decisions: firstly, to focus exclusively on delivering degree apprenticeships at level 6 and level 7 and to insist on high-standards from their employer partners, which includes a commitment to equal opportunities and to pay a minimum salary of £12,000 per year, although many pay much more.

The Solution

As a result of adopting a more flexible admissions policy, Manchester Met has altered its teaching methods and delivery modes to better reflect the wide range of abilities and adapt to its new cohort of learners on apprenticeships. This has included additional support for some learners and stretch and challenge activities for others, particularly with previous computer science experience.

Manchester Met is rightly proud of its innovative delivery models, designed to best fit the needs of its employer partners. Day release is still an approach preferred by some regionally based employers in the digital sector. This means apprentices are on campus one day a week for 24 weeks, preceded by a 5-day induction that provides a programming “boot camp” where the cohort of differing abilities is segmented between those with programming experience and those without.

Other apprenticeship provision, such as the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship, reflect a more blended learning delivery and integrates face-to-face, on-campus study with pedagogically sound online learning. At the heart of these programmes is a student-centered approach, utilising both synchronous and asynchronous learning, giving maximum flexibility to apprentices and employers.

Access to recorded sessions and comprehensive reading materials supplement online activities including forum discussions, live webinars, quizzes, and case studies - aiding application of knowledge into the workplace. Regular online tutor feedback is available to apprentices from one-to-one advice to detailed written assessment guidance. The use of the Virtual Learning Environment is also fully integrated with the institutional e-portfolio system, in which apprentices can record and evidence the skills and behaviours they have developed as a result of being on the programme.

Lessons Learned and Actions to Take

1. Through the degree apprenticeship model, the University has found that apprentices who may have ordinarily been denied entry, can achieve at a very high academic level. Apprentices on the Digital & Technology Solutions Degree Apprenticeship, have achieved extraordinary grades with the average student currently in the 1st-class range. Also, some who started with no programming experience have gone on to undertake advanced programming or chosen a software engineering pathway in year two.
2. Varying the subject entry requirements has also had a positive impact for increasing diversity and social mobility in STEM. Manchester Met's digital apprenticeship programmes have attracted many more female starts than on a traditional computer science degree course; 40% in 2015/16 compared to the norm of 12% or less. The Higher Apprenticeship in Laboratory Science had more female than male apprentices.
3. Introducing apprenticeship provision into a university like Manchester Met, even with its emphasis on widening participation and increasing access to HE, brings a different and innovative message into the institution, which is refreshing. Tutors and curriculum leads also benefit from apprentices bringing their experiences of working lives into the classroom and are actively learning from their own students.

Quotes:

"lecturers and tutors across the university...see degree apprenticeships as an exciting development, and an opportunity to teach highly motivated students who are in the workplace"

"our ambition to grow the number of apprentices is crucially dependent on the speed by which the Institute of Apprenticeship will approve Standards and allocate the appropriate funding bands"

"our apprentices are doing very well; as well as success in the workplace, they are doing well academically"

Rebecca Adams, Senior Impact and Partnership Development Manager

Jonathan Critchley, Impact and Partnership Development Manager

Theme: Delivery models: integrated / blended / distance / virtual

Background

The University of Exeter first started to consider apprenticeships in the summer of 2015. With an impetus from the College of Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Science it decided to offer the Digital Technology Solutions Professional Integrated Degree Apprenticeship. The University's vision is to be a global 100 research leader and creator of graduates of distinction. In this regard, the University harnessed its core values to enter the apprenticeship market: to relish challenge and reach for the previously unachievable and making the exceptional happen through disruptive thinking, and finding fresh ways of working and finding solutions with impact.

The Challenges

A collaborative team of academics, partnership managers and coordinators working within one College of the University acted as a team of trailblazers and "champions". However there have been a number of challenges along the way. It was apparent that delivering an apprenticeship was very different to delivering a typical undergraduate degree programme; not just because of the need to meet the requirements of the (then) Skills Funding Agency, but by virtue of the University's geography in relation to industry location. Looking beyond the initial engagement in apprenticeships with established or local employer partners such as IBM and Renishaw Plc it became important to consider the amount of flexibility that would be required in the way delivery would work to attract the level of employer interest that would make apprenticeships viable across the University of Exeter.

The Journey

Under the strong leadership of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education an Apprenticeship Steering Group was established to drive culture change across the University; attended by a selection of senior figures across the University's Colleges and Professional Services. The Group made an early decision to create a dedicated and substantive resource to support the management of the first cohort of 9 apprentices in year one, a cohort that has subsequently grown in year 2 to 43 apprentices across 14 employers. This included covering the expertise needed to not only "project manage" the processes across University functions but to support and direct education delivery too. This has included module and curriculum development, developed in partnership with employers through a series of workshops, and mapping apprenticeship requirements for achieving competencies across the knowledge, skills and behaviours.

The Solution

The University of Exeter have introduced a range of possible delivery models that depend crucially on the nature of the working relationship with the employer, be it a single employer with a more bespoke apprenticeship programme or with a small group of companies acting as a consortium. The early commitment to the first apprenticeship provision in Digital Technology Solutions / IT acted as a forerunning programme that allowed for much creativity including the introduction of a 4-day residential (where apprentices receive inductions around skills audits and assessments from

the academic study skills team to identify extra support and promoting the opportunities and resources available on campus) coupled with online learning and a strong focus on reflective practice.

Exams remain a key feature within Exeter's apprenticeship programmes but the University have looked to address how the method of assessment is delivered. Currently, apprentices in IT sit their exams in day blocks on campus in May as opposed to dates spread over a typical exam period. Whereas in engineering, apprentices will do their exams according to the same timetable as other undergraduate students but with the flexibility of a location that suits the apprentice and / or employer requirements. The University is constantly seeking to improve the experience for its apprentices' and is exploring ways of adapting assessment methods to ensure that they align with the requirements of the employers, apprentices and fit with the flexible delivery approach.

Lessons Learned and Actions to Take

1. The University has identified where its current curriculum can map to Apprenticeship standards in order to support the development, and ultimately delivery, of an Apprenticeship programme which is synergistic with the academic expertise already in the University.
2. Understanding the apprenticeship standard is critical. It should not be observed as simply a 2 or 3-page document; rather the standard and the end-point assessment plan should be understood meticulously and where any ambiguity exists, HE institutions are encouraged to approach the Trailblazer directly for clarification.
3. The governance structure overseeing the University's apprenticeship delivery and all related activity on a programme by programme basis is important. This includes a Partnership Board which acts as a formal liaison group to pull together the many aspects of the apprenticeship journey including issues of safeguarding, progression (challenge and stretch) and achievement.
4. Building a distinct experience for learners is a crucial element of any HE institution's offer and apprenticeships are no different. Ensuring that apprentices have access to academic support, learning resources as well as societies and social events are all an integral part of an end-to-end apprenticeship journey embedded within the Exeter experience.

Quotes:

"it is important for any university to have a programme lead that understands the value of apprenticeships"

"our South West geographic location is both a challenge and a motivator and means we have to be prepared to think outside the box around delivery models"

"even a small programme of apprenticeship delivery quickly needs dedicated support and resources"

"you need ownership and action from senior leaders to push change forward"

"the university will need everyone to understand how they are directly affected by the introduction of apprenticeships and will require every function to change how they work"

"Degree Apprenticeships are part of an evolution at the university to engage in different delivery models, whilst maintaining our internationally excellent quality, to meet the changing demands and expectations of students"

Dr Darryll Bravenboer, Director of Apprenticeships and Skills

Part 1

Theme: Validation and approval of curriculum: working with professional bodies

Background

Middlesex's Institute for Work-based Learning has demonstrated substantial leadership in ensuring work-based learning in higher education is responsive to societal needs and observed the field of work-based learning expand from a predominantly UK experience to a more internationally known phenomenon. The Institute was set up as an independent centre, not associated with a school or a faculty, that operated in a hub and spoke model and acted as a source of expertise on the whole area of practice based and work-based approaches across the university and beyond.

But recent changes led by the vice chancellor has introduced a new philosophy and, at a strategic level, a clarity of purpose. It means all faculties and schools within the university now have to adopt a practice-based and/or work-based approach to their curriculum developments and are benefiting from the disbursement of staff expertise from the Institute to ensure, as the University's numbers in apprenticeships grow, that there is a wider base of specialists who can ensure consistency of message, communication and engagement with employers on opportunities for delivery.

The development of higher and degree apprenticeships is very much part of this change. Change that has created a new Centre for Apprenticeships and Skills that has a responsibility to ensure the University realises its strategy in relation to apprenticeships and skills. Including for example, operational management, contract compliance and project management that crucially brings around changes in curriculum development and, the kind of educational innovation that's required to effectively address the requirements of employers and the needs of apprentices.

In addition, Middlesex is seeking to reinforce its identity as a provider of choice for apprenticeship and skills in London as "place" becomes as increasingly important as part of the University's strategy.

The Challenge

Middlesex has a long association of working with government policy in the reform to apprenticeships and from an early stage was involved in designing and delivering higher apprenticeship frameworks. So, it is also true, that it is not starting from a place of switching overnight from traditional HE delivery to apprenticeships. Like a large number of other higher education institutions, Middlesex built on its existing relationship with CMI to validate and approved a programme to deliver the chartered manager degree apprenticeship. A completely new HE programme that's been built upon practice-based and work-based approaches to meet specifically the requirements of the apprenticeship standard.

But an outstanding challenge from the early days of apprenticeship reform in England - that insisted the apprenticeship agenda should be only employer-involved as well as employer-led- has been to get employer-led groups to open the door to providers to support the development of

new degree apprenticeship standards to the professions at a level that is appropriately aligned with the expectations of higher-level education and training that universities can recognise.

The Journey

Middlesex took an active decision to be as directly involved with Trailblazers as the policy would allow, to position higher and degree apprenticeships as an important part of the university's provision. One example of involvement relates to the area of business-to-business sales that led to a collaboration with employers, the association of professional sales (a relatively new professional body) and two other universities to establish sales as a profession for the first time.

As *sales* had not previously been thought of as a profession and because of a recent association with poor ethics and practice, including misselling, the creation of an apprenticeship route was seen as an opportunity (and a challenge) to establish sales as a recognised profession and put professionalism and ethics at the heart of the occupation's competencies.

The Solution

Early involvement of universities as full members of the Trailblazer group helpfully informed the language used to describe the Business to Business Sales Professional Level 6 Integrated Degree Apprenticeship and ensured it appropriately aligned with the expectations of learning outcomes at Level 6 that universities would recognise. This process of collaborative working has been very straightforward with a lot of goodwill amongst employers, HE institutions and the professional body to establish a common understanding of work-place requirements including promoting skills for lifelong learning and development which will continue after the apprenticeship has been completed.

From Middlesex's perspective, another factor of success for the Business to Business Sales Professional Standard was the role played by the Association of Professional Sales as partner. Its professional standards framework informed the knowledge, skills, behaviours and values that are contained within the Integrated Degree Apprenticeship Standard and the Association has been involved in the development of the curriculum for the programme at Middlesex that will deliver the apprenticeship's knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Designing the programme newly with the Standard acting as the starting point informed a highly successful outcome that took the knowledge, skills and behaviours and turned them into the programme learning outcomes rather than involving some kind of mapping in relation to the Standard from existing curricula. In Middlesex's view, any HE institution can now utilise the knowledge, skills and behaviours descriptors from the Business to Business Sales Professional Standard and make them the HE programme outcomes and from them derive all of the learning outcomes for the various modules to construct the curriculum directly.

Middlesex adopted this approach with the programme it validated in 2017 and directly involved the professional body during the validation event. At validation, a representative from the Association of Professional Sales was present not only to contextualise the proposals of the programme but to articulate how the programme was designed to fit with its own professional standards frameworks and how it met the aspirations of the professional association to professionalise sales as an occupation. The Association engaged in scrutiny at the validation event, were an integral part of Middlesex's senior meeting stage of validation and proved to have a central role in achieving approval.

Lessons Learned and Actions to Take

1. Just because the government's policy for higher and degree apprenticeship is seemingly written in black and white, it does not mean the policy makes sense or that it is the best way of doing things. Seek an approach that interprets the policy in such a way that it does make sense for the employer, for the apprentice and for the HE provider that is consistent and coherent.
2. See higher and degree apprenticeships as an opportunity to collaborate and engage with the development of emerging policy rather than seeing it as something that you just have to respond to; be proactive in your relationship to policy.
3. Employers generally are not satisfied with the status quo in terms of graduate entry into the roles they are offering, and universities need to accept this position. Which means that just doing more of the same will not be to anyone's advantage. If the curriculum design and approach to pedagogy in HE is fit for purpose, universities wouldn't need employability initiatives to try and make graduates a good fit in the workplace. When developing apprenticeships, start from first principles; what is the provision trying to enable people to be able to know and do? Building in professional behaviours as outcomes from the outset is a good way to challenge traditional approaches to curriculum development. Apprenticeship development should not be hide bound to the notion of academic disciplines as this can operate as a barrier to focusing on the requirements of professional practice in the workplace.
4. Think more creatively about pedagogy (which doesn't mean to say there isn't a lot of good work already). Universities should challenge their preconceptions and principles and do it in an open way that recognises employers are experts in their own fields and that HE practice will be better informed and more employer-responsive by listening carefully to their needs and requirements.
5. The idea that the professions that have professional status at the moment are the only professions, and the only ones that there can and will be, needs to be challenged. Developments in creating new occupational pathways to the professions constitutes a dynamic space, where the interaction between people's lived experience of work and how companies organise themselves, is rapidly changing. Therefore, the way in which we prepare people to undertake professional roles and recognise professions needs to be responsive to this changing context.
6. There's a potential for establishing some core attributes that pertain to being a professional that might not be sector, industry or occupationally specific such as challenging own and other's practice as a means to innovate, enhance and improve professional standards and outcomes. In these and other ways, Apprenticeships have the potential to be transformative of the way we think about the relationship between work and learning towards a more integrated approach to our sense of being 'professional'.

Quotes:

"all faculties and schools within the university now adopt a, practice and work based approach to their curriculum developments"

"degree apprenticeships constitute a dynamic space where the interaction between people's lived experience of work, the way that companies organise themselves, and produce products and services, is rapidly changing...therefore the way in which we recognise professions and professional level skills needs to be responsive to that"

“much better if you design the apprenticeship programme from scratch, so the knowledge, skills and behaviours are not retrospectively mapped to but are constituted as the programme learning outcomes at the outset”

“be proactive in your relationship to policy”

Dr Darryll Bravenboer, Director of Apprenticeships and Skills

Part 2

Theme: Compliance: on and off-the-job solutions for teaching, learning and assessment

Background

Middlesex has a proud reputation as a university that develops vocational and work-based higher education provision in response to the needs of a wide range of employment sectors in diverse professional contexts. Indeed, the University has over 1,000 academic staff delivering professional learning opportunities to around 40,000 students. This expertise is based on its strong track record in delivering high quality education and training to employers through apprenticeships and work-based learning and CPD activity. This includes delivering the largest HEFCE funded workforce development project in the country, being recognised as a Centre of Excellence for Work Based Learning by the Higher Education Academy, winning the Queens Anniversary Prize for Work Based Learning and in its development and delivery of higher level apprenticeships since 2012. Indeed, in apprenticeships, the expertise of Middlesex staff is evidenced by being listed as a degree apprenticeship good practice case study on the HEFCE website and through its representation on the Quality Assurance Agency's Advisory Group developing the Higher and Degree Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement to ensure the consistency of quality of delivery.

The Challenge

A big challenge in the delivery of apprenticeships at the higher level is in negotiating clear expectations for delivery at the contracting stage with employers. This requires an understanding of employer aims, objectives and return on investment requirements; required levels of employer support; the professional development needs of apprentices; arrangements for employer, apprentice and tutor communication and most critically, how delivery will be organised. This ongoing three-way liaison during the delivery of apprenticeships provides a key means through which to ensure that the needs of employers and apprentices are being satisfied and compliance for apprenticeship funding is assured.

From an HE provider's perspective, whatever the history of the minimum 20% off-the-job is based on, it's clear the roles and responsibilities for how the off-the-job requirements are met are shared three-ways. The employer's responsibility is to make sure one-fifth of the hours that an apprentice is employed are associated with active learning and training; the provider's concern is to structure things in such a way that the focused time on learning is auditable and they have the evidence it has been undertaken; and the apprentice's responsibility is to recognise and record those relevant elements of learning in, through and from work.

One way of delivering to a work based learner is to bring the apprentice onto campus for a day or in a block and the provider constructs learning activities, records attendance and reflects on practice and the next day the apprentice is back in the workplace. However, HE providers, and it is true in the case of Middlesex, are finding that employers are requiring that their workforce is not out of the workplace on a one day a week basis because it is difficult to manage and does not allow for flexibility. So, the key becomes not where the individual apprentice attends for their teaching and training but what is the focus of their activity and can you provide auditable evidence

that they have been concentrating on learning? However, it is important that HE providers do not only focus on the 20%. The three-way engagement between employer, provider and apprentice is key to understanding that all parties have a responsibility to ensure that the whole apprenticeship (on and off-the job) constitutes a high-quality preparation for meeting apprenticeship standards.

The Journey

All apprenticeship delivery is specifically designed to enable apprentices to demonstrate the achievement of the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to perform relevant job roles.

The longstanding expertise of Middlesex in developing and delivering work-based programmes (including apprenticeships) to meet the needs of employers has resulted in a highly flexible curriculum model that is designed to recognise, support, promote and enhance learning derived from work. The track record of successful application of this approach means the University can ensure that apprenticeship delivery is highly relevant to the apprenticeship standards offered.

Middlesex have embraced and promoted the idea that one of the most effective sources of learning to develop the required knowledge, skills and behaviours is to constitute work activities as negotiated projects. The approach means that work-integrated projects are constructed as something that will provide evidence of apprentices meeting the learning outcomes of modules in the relevant apprenticeship programme. The benefits of this approach are that the work on the employer driven activity will and can contribute directly to the off-the-job requirements. In other words, off-the-job learning becomes productive for the employer. More than this, at Middlesex the requirement for work-integrated projects is that they must focus on practice enhancement, this could be work on the development of a new product or service, or perhaps the development of new and more effective systems and procedures. This enhancement focus can, and often does, have tangible business or service benefits for employers.

The Solution

One approach to solving the issue of providing auditable evidence of training to satisfy the requirements of apprenticeship funding can be by designing the online learning system to be accessed asynchronously in the workplace. For example, an apprentice might engage in learning through posts in their online blog or learning journal that focus on projects and work activities being undertaken and driven by the employer's needs and the apprentice's day job. However, the elements being posted are now being discussed in a forum that is focused on learning and facilitates engagement across and with peers and tutors. The benefit of this approach is manifold; analyzing or discussing the detail of any in-work project is focused on the learning gained and satisfies the HE programme requirements with the advantage that the apprentice is logged into the online system and activity is quantified and recorded thereby satisfying the evidence requirement for funding.

In Middlesex's view, the ideal approach to complying with the on and off-the-job requirement is a blended model that combines some face-to-face activity of work place learning, online learning and reflection from work-integrated projects. Because apprenticeships cannot be delivered wholly through distance learning Middlesex has also built in on-programme introductory sessions and in some cases, master class workshop sessions. Such sessions can be hosted at the University or held in the workplace and scheduled to ensure apprentices who attend are recorded. The aim with this approach is to kick start the learning journey in relation to a particular module or topic or in relation to the whole apprenticeship programme.

Lessons Learned and Actions to Take

1. The conversation with employers about the requirement for off-the-job can be couched in terms as, it doesn't have to be disruptive; indeed, it can be very complimentary. Employers are increasingly demanding a model in apprenticeship delivery that does not require the apprentice to be off site or out of the workplace on a regular weekly basis and are rejecting the familiar or more traditional approach.
2. The risk with any asynchronous approach to the active teaching and learning of apprenticeship is establishing a sense of identity for the apprentice. If individuals are only ever for the majority of time on the end of a computer, then that becomes an isolated learning experience. One way to manage or mitigate risk is to establish a clear sense of a cohort group or learning community identify from the outset with a good understanding that the way in which the learning community is sustained will be, significantly, through online engagement. In other words, if the apprentice doesn't engage, they won't feel part of the community, won't learn as much and will do less well. In Middlesex's experience when apprentices do come together physically, even sporadically, this is also valuable as they then affiliate well with the university's facilities and wider community.
3. Master classes can act as an impetus to learning and shake up individual's thinking about the curriculum, challenge preconceptions and make apprentices think differently about aspects of their industry and occupation.

Quotes:

"the history of the 20% based on a one day a week out of college model is now clearly anachronistic"

"the traditional model of on campus and out of the workplace is not what employers in our experience are after; rather they are very warm to a model that's flexible and asynchronous"

“Whether delivering to Asda or easyJet, things invariably change when running a work-integrated programme and you try and address those things through conversation and understanding which helps support the establishment and maintenance of sustainable business-university collaboration.

“As the university cranks up the numbers of apprenticeship starts in accordance with its strategy for apprenticeships and skills, it will need a wider base of expertise to make sure there’s consistency of messaging, communication and engagement with employers from all staff.”

UVAC and SDN would like to thank the contributors who gave their time and shared their experiences.

For further information please contact:

Mandy Crawford-Lee
Director of Policy and Operations
UVAC
M.CrawfordLee@bolton.ac.uk

Colin Bentwood
Managing Director
SDN
colin@strategicdevelopmentnetwork.co.uk