

UVAC: The Future of Degree Apprenticeships *When and how they should be developed and delivered*

1. When and where Degree Apprenticeships should be developed?

Issue – How should the IfATE ensure Degree Apprenticeships are only developed for degree level occupations?

As an employer led programme, employers should decide where Degree Apprenticeships are developed. HEIs will confirm if the learning outcomes based on proposed KSBs for a proposed Degree Apprenticeship are at level 6 and 7. As currently, where a degree is specified as a requirement to practice by a PSRB a Degree Apprenticeship must be developed. Even where a profession is not regulated or there is no licence to practice a professional body and/or trade association will have an informed view on whether an occupation is degree level and the value of specifying a mandatory degree in an Apprenticeship.

In some sectors new 'professional' occupations will have been created, while in other occupations required skills and knowledge levels will have moved up in level(s). While degree level knowledge and skills may not have been required in the past, employers collectively may want to professionalise practice through inclusion of a degree e.g. as demonstrated by the B2B Sales Professional Degree Apprenticeship. Reference tools are available that prospective Trailblazers working with HEIs may wish to use to determine if an occupation is degree level. As a reference point, universities working through SEEC have developed credit level descriptors. With an integrated Degree Apprenticeship, based on accrediting the KSBs in the Apprenticeship standard, learning outcomes will be at level 6 (bachelors) or level 7 (masters) in line with degree requirements. The prospective Trailblazer should provide confirmation from at least 3 HEIs that they believe the Apprenticeship KSBs/learning outcomes will be at the appropriate degree level, based on the QAA Quality Code and qualification level descriptors. Prospective trailblazers need to justify their position on the basis of evidence.

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Issue – When considering whether to approve a Degree Apprenticeship how should IfATE ensure that the majority of employers that would potentially use the Apprenticeship want to specify a mandatory degree in the Apprenticeship?

Trailblazers should be representative of sector employers – large businesses and SMEs and of different types of employers who the prospective Trailblazer believes will use the Apprenticeship standard. When proposing a Degree Apprenticeship prospective Trailblazers should outline evidence of support from employers (large organisations and SMEs) and from professional bodies and trade associations. Survey evidence should be encouraged. Employer evidence as to how the inclusion of a mandatory degree would widen recruitment and help address skills gaps and shortages should be requested and considered objectively by the IfATE. The current ‘hard sift’ criterion where IfATE looks for the Trailblazer to demonstrate that the degree is a pre-requisite for employment has been interpreted very strictly. This rule needs to be replaced and employers should be empowered to focus on optimum future practice and what is in the best interests of the sector and learners. The IfATE may wish to publish the expression of interest from the prospective Trailblazer to specify a mandatory degree and invite comment from sector employers.

Issue – How should IfATE ensure specifying a mandatory degree is in the interests of individual learners from all backgrounds?

Issue – How should the IfATE ensure the specification of a mandatory degree supports the Government’s productivity and levelling up/social mobility agendas?

The economic benefits of degrees are well recognised, with the DfE’s 2020 research on Undergraduate Degrees: Lifetime Labour Market Returns estimating a benefit to the economy of £240K per male graduate and £130K per female graduate, with subjects associated with popular Degree Apprenticeships (engineering, computing and business) all being in the top 10 areas for economic return. These figures are adjusted to account for the cost to the economy of factors such as the cost of student loans and the decrease in economic activity while studying. Degree Apprentices do not take out student loans and much of their learning is work-based which means the benefit from a Degree Apprenticeship should actually be higher.

Degrees have significant value to individuals as a transferable qualification in the employment market, both domestically and internationally. This is particularly the case for Degree Apprenticeships based on delivering the KSBs specified in an Apprenticeship standard. Degree Apprenticeships as a ‘debt free’ route through higher education where the state/an employer pays the cost of the degree/apprenticeship, an individual has a salary from day one and has a very high probability of securing a graduate job at the end of the Apprenticeship should be particularly appealing to individuals from deprived backgrounds.

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Degree Apprenticeships should also provide a progression route from Advanced and Higher Apprenticeship and individuals following Applied Generals, new T level qualifications and Higher Technical Qualifications. IfATE should place more emphasis on the development of career pathways involving technical education programmes and Apprenticeships. The ideal should be for Advanced Apprenticeship to not just develop and accredit the KSBs for the occupation, but to provide a basis for entry to the next occupational level and related learning programme. Similar comments could be made for Higher Apprenticeship at level 4 and 5 and Degree Apprenticeship.

The development of Degree Apprenticeship as an aspirational programme is a good thing. Apprenticeships should be an option for individuals from all backgrounds – they must not be the good option for other people’s children. The increasing interest in and use of Degree Apprenticeship by individuals from less deprived backgrounds should be welcomed. It is, however, essential that Degree Apprenticeship is available to individuals from all backgrounds. Significant action is needed to widen access to Degree Apprenticeship to individuals from all backgrounds.

UVAC has undertaken extensive research in this area and will shortly publish a report on how Degree Apprenticeships can best be used to support the social mobility and levelling up agendas.

2. How should IfATE ensure integrated Degree Apprenticeships are appropriately developed and delivered?

Issue – What processes need to be in place to ensure integrated Degree Apprenticeships are developed and delivered that meet IfATE requirements and that are in the best interests of employers and individual learners?

Expectations of HEIs developing and all providers delivering integrated Degree Apprenticeships need to be clearly outlined. Institutional validation and approval processes must include employers and professional bodies (where appropriate) and involve the full integration of Apprenticeship KSBs into learning outcomes. On some occasions an industry/professional regulator may want to hold its own approval events, as has been the case with the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship. For the digital standards the Trailblazer had a role (through the Tech Partnership) in accrediting Apprenticeships that, in general, is seen to work well.

*The expectation would be that all degrees within an Apprenticeship would be developed and specifically validated to meet the requirements of the Apprenticeship Standard (in addition to all other HEI/HE requirements). Requirements could be specified in a QAA document, if QAA agreed to extend its existing *Characteristics Statement*. Alternatively, UVAC, working with HEIs and other appropriate HE representative bodies could develop an appropriate expectations statement and seek the endorsement of the IfATE and QAA.*

3. What should be the Expected Duration of a Degree Apprenticeship?

Issue – We suspect that the IfATE wants to provide more guidance on the duration of a Degree Apprenticeship

Flexibility is needed to reflect sector and indeed different individual and employer circumstances. Pauses in the programme to reflect changing individual circumstances should be accommodated. Specifying a precise duration would be difficult and not appropriate. As the IfATE moves towards a focus on the integrated Degree Apprenticeships we would, however, expect level 6 integrated Degree Apprenticeships to be typically completed in four to five years. For level 7 integrated Degree Apprenticeships the expectation would be for the Apprenticeship to be completed in two years. The Apprenticeship KSBs will be delivered through a blended programme of on and off the job learning with both contributing to the credit requirements of the degree. It is critical that the new IfATE funding model and ESFA funding rules need to reflect and support the integrated Degree Apprenticeship model. To design a programme that was intended to take more than five years would, however, in many circumstances be a challenge for SMEs. Some occupations may have different needs and the IfATE should respond to and accommodate such needs as and where the evidence presented by the Trailblazer and HEIs delivering programmes is compelling.

4. How should Integrated Degree Apprenticeships be Quality Assured?

Issue – How can IfATE ensure appropriate Degree Apprenticeships that integrate specified KSBs in delivery and EPA are developed and delivered?

With an integrated Degree Apprenticeship, the degree will deliver the KSBs specified in the Apprenticeship standard. Similarly, the End Point Assessment for the Apprenticeship will be delivered through the degree. This necessitates regulation and quality assurance through the higher education regulator OfS and QAA. We are aware that the school's inspectorate Ofsted has been lobbying to inspect the training component of Degree Apprenticeships while OfS regulates the degree. Such a proposal shows a lack of understanding of integrated Degree Apprenticeships where 'on' and 'off' the job learning are combined in the degree through a blended approach and perhaps of even more fundamental concern how professional occupational competence is developed and accredited through a blended approach to 'on' and 'off' the job learning.

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Ofsted has also called for the prioritisation of Apprenticeships for young people leaving school without 5 'good' GCSEs at the expense of Degree Apprenticeships. Such a position contradicts the Government's policy outlined in its 2015 paper [English Apprenticeships: Our 2020 Vision](#) for Apprenticeship to be an all age all level programme. It also fits very uneasily with the Secretary of State's desire for universities to deliver more Apprenticeships. Such lobbying by Ofsted makes its position as an organisation that could inspect Apprenticeship provision at all levels at best questionable. Ofsted's inspection approach has also been developed on the basis of inspection of Apprenticeship provision at level 2 and 3. In contrast, OfS working with QAA have a track record of regulating HE programmes that develop and accredit occupational competence for professional level occupations. IfATE has rightly concluded, following consultation, that external quality assurance (EQA) for the end point assessment (EPA) for Degree Apprenticeships should rest with OfS. Quality assurance for the delivery of the Degree Apprenticeship should similarly rest with the Office for Students supported by QAA.