



UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL

Growing Degree Apprenticeship – A Response to Michelle Donelan MP, Minister for Higher and Further Education

In her recent evidence to the Education Select Committee, Minister Donelan was clear that the Government wants more Degree Apprenticeships. The Minister even went so far as to say she was looking at financial incentives to encourage universities to offer Degree Apprenticeships. As the university representative organisation championing Degree Apprenticeships UVAC whole-heartedly supports the Minister's call to grow the number of Degree Apprenticeships. Financial incentives could have a useful role, but there are five actions the Minister could easily take, without getting the chequebook out, that would increase the number of Degree Apprenticeship places and the number of universities engaged in delivering provision.

1. **The ESFA Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers** – Minister Donelan is clear that she wants every university to offer Degree Apprenticeship. Staggeringly, the ESFA has in recent years, severely restricted the ability of universities to apply to the RoATP, an essential prerequisite to the delivery of Degree Apprenticeship. The RoATP was only reopened to new applicants, including universities, in August. Even now universities who are not on the RoATP may only apply if they fulfil a training need (a gap in provision) or have been named as a preferred provider in an employer business case. The ESFA should be instructed by Ministers to open up applications to the RoATP for ALL HEIs and make clear that any successful university applicant can deliver ALL approved Degree Apprenticeships and remove current restrictions. The reapplication process to RoATP for universities should also be further simplified and streamlined.
2. **Commitment to the Degree Apprenticeship Programme** – Unfortunately in recent years there has been a very public debate on financial measures that should be introduced to restrict the growth of Degree Apprenticeship. Further Education representative organisations and various think tanks have proposed the introduction of age restrictions, reducing the proportion of levy funds that can be used to fund Degree Apprenticeship and proposed reducing opportunities for employers to use Degree Apprenticeship for existing staff or individuals who already have a degree. The latter proposal would mean a 25-year-old with an English degree was prevented from using a Degree Apprenticeship to train as a police officer or registered nurse. One Skills Minister floated the introduction of a starting salary eligibility cap for Apprenticeship funding. Indeed, under a former Secretary of State, the mandatory degree was removed from the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship. It is now no

longer a Degree Apprenticeship. Such speculation and action has reduced confidence in the long-term future of Degree Apprenticeship which in some cases may have had a negative impact on the investment needed to grow provision. If they wish to grow the Degree Apprenticeship offer, Ministers must make a long-term financial commitment to their future and encourage employers and universities to invest in their long-term development.

3. **Recognising the Success of Degree Apprenticeship** – UVAC, like Minister Donelan believes that there should be more Degree Apprenticeships. I am, however, concerned over the apparent focus on 18/19 year-old awareness of Degree Apprenticeship. In many cases Degree Apprenticeships are most appropriate for older learners. The Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship is a case in point. The programme used mostly by older learners is supporting the professionalisation of police recruitment and training and has been used extremely successfully to recruit more women and individuals identifying as BAME. The Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship arguably could have the most impact on supporting individuals already working as nursing associates and assistant health practitioners to train as registered nurses. Level 7 Degree Apprenticeships (Master's degree level), that are available in around 25 occupations, are typically more appropriate for older learners. Some universities are making a dramatic success of Degree Apprenticeship. Ministers should certainly challenge universities, but they should also celebrate the success of their Degree Apprenticeship policy. Promoting examples of success will raise the profile of and interest in Degree Apprenticeship.
4. **Promoting the Degree Apprenticeship Brand and Overcoming Barriers to the Growth of Degree Apprenticeship** – The IfATE's review of Degree Apprenticeship policy provides an excellent framework to grow and ensure the long-term success of the programme. There are, however, some gaps in the review. There is little information on how the Office for Students will deliver its External Quality Assurance role for Degree Apprenticeship End Point Assessment and what universities should expect. The approach to End point Assessment and compliance with the ESFA Funding Rules also raises issues. In future, all new and revised Degree Apprenticeships will require the use of the integrated Degree Apprenticeship model. This means the Apprenticeship End Point Assessment will be delivered by the degree. This is a very sound approach. Unfortunately, the ESFA has still not explicitly outlined how the use of credit in the degree, involving guided learning, to deliver the End Point Assessment complies with their Funding Rules. Such uncertainty acts as a break on investment by universities and therefore the growth of Degree Apprenticeship. Ministers should make clear that the IfATE leads the Apprenticeship agenda and instruct OfS and ESFA to ensure their systems applying to Apprenticeship support and do not impede Degree Apprenticeship growth.
5. **Developing a Degree Apprenticeship Growth Plan** – IfATE working with Trailblazers and the HE sector through UVAC should develop a Degree Apprenticeship Growth Plan. Such a Growth Plan, focused on skills needs and the Net Zero and Levelling Up agendas, would identify where there was the most need and potential to deliver Degree Apprenticeship. The IfATE could then work with employers and universities to bust barriers that were restricting the growth of Degree Apprenticeships.

Finally, we believe that a study on the potential impact of financial incentives for Degree Apprenticeships, particularly in areas where there are skills gaps and shortages, should

certainly be undertaken. This should also be conducted in the context of the Net Zero and Levelling Up agendas and be part of a Degree Apprenticeship Growth Plan. It may, however, be the case that development funding to grow provision would £ for £ have a greater impact on growing Degree Apprenticeship numbers. Degree Apprenticeships, particularly integrated Degree Apprenticeships, require upfront investment in developing programmes and end point assessment systems, recruiting and training new staff and promoting programmes to employers and learners. Ministers could find that an investment in developing university capacity, on the basis of skills needs and employer and individual demand for Degree Apprenticeships, paid dividends.

UVAC looks forward to supporting Minister Donelan to realise her ambitions to substantially grow Degree Apprenticeship provider participation and apprentice numbers.

November 2021