



Creating Institutional Conditions for Sustainable Degree Apprenticeships

Professor Darryll Bravenboer, Director of Apprenticeships, Middlesex University

Centre for Education Research and Scholarship

Centre for Apprenticeships and Skills



Institutional conditions for sustainable degree apprenticeships



- **Context**

- Degree apprenticeships creatively disrupt our understanding of the relationship between higher education and work
- Degree apprenticeships have the potential to transform our cultural understanding of the role of Higher Education Providers and employers, placing learning at the center of our working lives, aligning the learning worlds of work and higher education.
- Assumptions about the presumed differences between academic and professional standards, knowledge, skills and behaviours, on-and off-the-job learning, are all challenged by the introduction of degree apprenticeships.
- Operating as an an apprenticeship provider has comprehensive and significant strategic and operational impacts on all aspects of higher education



Institutional conditions for sustainable degree apprenticeships



- **Project aims**
 - To support the sustainability of the provision of degree apprenticeships and explore changes needed in the systemic structure of Higher Education Providers
 - To advocate a whole institutional approach to work-integrated and practice-based learning to facilitate a reconstituted notion of higher education.
 - To help Higher Education Providers and employers to be able to develop and deliver degree apprenticeships that enhance productivity and social mobility.



Project outcomes and methods



- **Report**
 - Literature review
 - Semi-structure interviews – employers, providers, apprentices in three key sectors: Digital, Engineering, Nursing
 - Survey – employers, providers, apprentices
 - Findings and recommendations
- **Online Centre for Degree Apprenticeships**
- **Dissemination events** – UVAC (November 2019) and UUK (February 2020) conferences, CDA Knowledge Network events (eg University of Derby March 2020)
- **Evaluation**

Literature review



Apprenticeships, the professions and higher education in England



- Apprenticeships evolved during the 20th century into a **'parallel' model with day-release for off-the-job training**; until mid-century this was also a common model for professional training.
- There was a **severe reduction in apprenticeship training after 1960**, partly precipitated by industrial decline.
- **Professions moved increasingly to a 'sequential' model** of full-time higher education followed by work-based training.
- The **apprenticeship revival after 1980** responded to concerns about youth unemployment and was limited to qualification levels 2 and 3.
- Professional entry routes have become more varied, flexible, and outcomes-oriented, though **in most professions the sequential model is still the norm**.
- **Professional registration or licensing remains an important factor in many occupations**, with an ongoing trend towards degree-level or postgraduate entry.

The development of higher and degree apprenticeships



- Apprenticeships at levels 4 and 5 were introduced after the **Leitch Review of 2006**, focusing on higher technical skills and industry needs.
- **Revised specifications in 2013 included levels 6 and 7**, and were aligned to higher education qualifications and professional body recognition.
- The **Richard Review of 2012** led to further changes to specification, including the introduction of **‘standards-based’ apprenticeships leading to an end-point assessment**.
- The Richard Review also called for apprenticeships to become **an effective route into professional and senior-level work roles**, heralding the **introduction of Degree Apprenticeships in 2015**.
- Apprenticeship standards, including Degree Apprenticeships, are developed by **employer-led ‘trailblazer’ groups** overseen by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.
- **Types of Apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7**: an end-point assessment only, usually with professional recognition; a degree and a separate end-point assessment; or an integrated degree and end-point assessment.



Degree apprenticeships: successes and issues



- Successes
 - Supports **public-sector recruitment**; **raising skill levels** in economically critical areas (eg digital industries, engineering and management); **widening access to professional careers** and early evidence of **potential to improve social mobility**.
- Issues
 - Needs for **better promotion of degree apprenticeships** to: **reach underrepresented groups**; and **improve progression** from further education and lower-level apprenticeships.
 - Concerns that **apprenticeship standards need to be broadened**; **degrees need to be easier to incorporate** where there is employer demand; need for **greater flexibility** and **'step on and off'** programmes.
 - Ongoing **problems with standards approval**; need for greater **expertise in higher education and professions** in approving standards.
 - **Duplication and gaps in quality assurance** for higher-level apprenticeships, as well as a separate regime for monitoring EPA
 - **The levy is under pressure**: some degree apprenticeships facing issues of **sustainability**; access for **non-levy employers**; using the **levy to pay for 16-18-year-olds** previously funded from the education budget.

Requirements for sustainable implementation



- **Leadership, organisation and staffing**
 - Strong institutional leadership is essential, including clarity that degree apprenticeships are 'core business'
- **Engagement with employers** - Better, more effective, sustained and systematic collaboration with employers
- **Recruitment, admission and progression** – Collaborative and effective systems and practices for degree apprenticeships
- **Workplace learning and assessment**
 - Degree apprenticeships developed 'from the ground up' as apprenticeship programmes
 - An effective and supportive learning culture in the workplace. The workplace as the source of learning not just a site for its application
 - Effective and comprehensive integration of on and off-the-job learning – work-integrated 'signature pedagogies'
 - Authentic assessment that reflects working practices and work-integrated pedagogies
- **Quality assurance and standards** approaches that maintain professional and academic standards but also accommodate the contribution of multiple stakeholders including employers and professional bodies

Interviews and survey



A rationale for selecting industry sectors



- Drawing on the **expertise and experience of university partners** in developing and delivering degree apprenticeships in specific sectors
- Selecting industry sectors that span both **public and private sectors**
 - Digital Degree Apprenticeships are relevant to all sectors including the public and private sector organisations
 - Engineering Degree Apprenticeships are relevant to many private sector organisations but also to the public sector through public sector infrastructure projects
 - Nursing Degree Apprenticeships are perhaps the most significant for the public sector given the size and scale of the NHS as an employer
- Selecting industry sectors that encompass significant **representative differences** with regards to:
 - The profile of employer organisations and workplace environment for apprentices
 - The relationship with professional bodies and routes to professional recognition
 - Expectations and practices regarding on and off-the-job learning/training

Digital Industries



- The digital sector **lacks a widely-recognised** qualified status or authoritative **professional body**, with a relevant degree sometimes serving as a de facto professional qualification.
- The **Digital and Technology Solutions Professional (integrated) Degree Apprenticeship** has been taken up enthusiastically by employers across a wide variety of sectors, accounting for over **20% of level 6 Degree Apprenticeship starts** to date.
- It **provides much-needed skills** in this rapidly expanding sector, as well as giving entrants a measure of **professional credibility**.
- A **level 7** Digital and Technology Solutions Specialist Degree Apprenticeship was introduced in 2018 **provides clear career progression**.



Engineering



- The various Degree Apprenticeships in engineering are aligned with the **Engineering Council's standards for Incorporated and Chartered Engineer**, enabling straightforward progression to professionally qualified status.
- CEng has traditionally been entered after taking an MEng degree, but it is open to bachelor's graduates following further, not necessarily accredited, study.
- As well as new entrants, the Degree Apprenticeship is **attracting staff on technician grades**, or who have entered through **lower-level apprenticeships**, to progress to **becoming qualified engineers**.



Nursing



- The nursing Degree Apprenticeships, introduced in 2017, are part of a set of linked apprenticeships that provide a route from **the lowest to the highest nursing grades**, both in the NHS and the private sector.
- In principle, progression is possible from level 2 (healthcare support worker) to level 7 (advanced nurse practitioner).
- An increasingly well-used pathway is from healthcare assistant (HCA, level 3) via the recently-established Nursing Associate grade (a level 5 Higher Apprenticeship, including a **Nursing and Midwifery Council accredited** foundation degree) to Registered Nurse (a level 6 Degree Apprenticeship).
- NHS and university staff see this route as being **vital to address staff shortages and retention** particularly now that bursaries for student nurses have been withdrawn.
- The **two-year Nursing Associate HA is an essential stepping-stone** for many HCAs who might not want to commit immediately to the four-year **Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship**; it can be followed by a shortened Degree Apprenticeship to achieve a degree and registration as a nurse.

Interviews

- Each partner identified a suitable sample of interview participants (employers, apprentices, provider staff) across three sectors (Digital industries, Nursing and Engineering)
- The interviews were intended to provide in-depth qualitative data regarding the perceptions and experiences of employers, apprentices and providers
- Semi-structured interviews included sector specific questions, a focus on social mobility and productivity as well as drawing on themes identified in the literature review
- Twenty-nine individual interviews and one group discussion took place between May and September 2019

Interviews	Employers	Apprentices	Provider staff	Other	Total
Participants	7	8	17	1	33

Survey



- The survey was distributed by partner universities, UVAC and a range of other HE and sector related organisations to employers, apprentices and provider staff.
- The survey was intended to provide broader quantitative and qualitative data regarding the perceptions and experiences of employers, apprentices and providers across a wider range of sectors (but including Digital industries, Nursing and Engineering).
- The survey included sector specific questions, a focus on social mobility and productivity as well as drawing on themes identified in the literature review
- Responses were gathered during December 2019 and January 2020

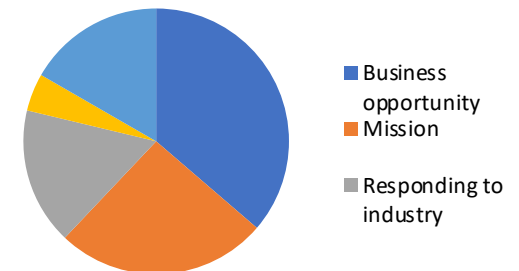
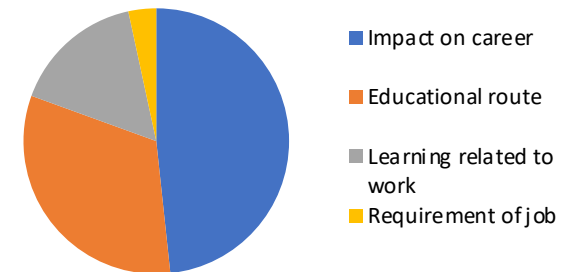
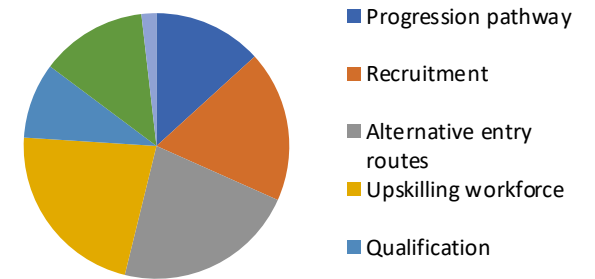
Survey	Employers*	Apprentices	Provider staff*	Other	Total
Participants	69	46	89	16	165

**some respondents identified as both employers and provider staff*

Why are degree apprenticeships important?



- **Employers** see Degree Apprenticeships as providing progression-routes for the existing workforce, aiding recruitment, establishing, or maintaining alternative entry-routes, and providing a means of learning and up-skilling while working.
- **Apprentices** see Degree Apprenticeships from a career enhancement perspective, providing an educational route and often as a way to qualify in a profession.
- **Providers** see Degree Apprenticeships as creating alternative entry-routes, widening access, fitting industry needs and as a business opportunity.

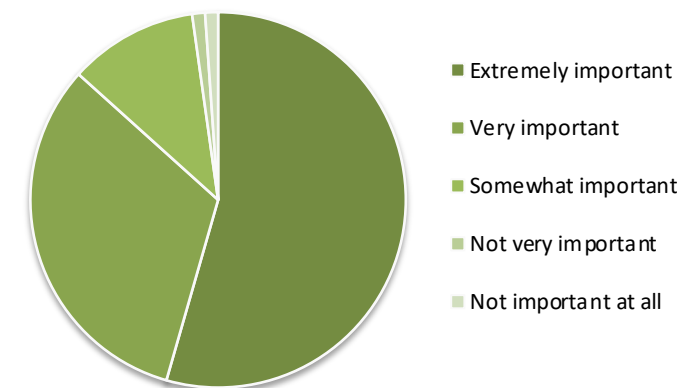


Social mobility

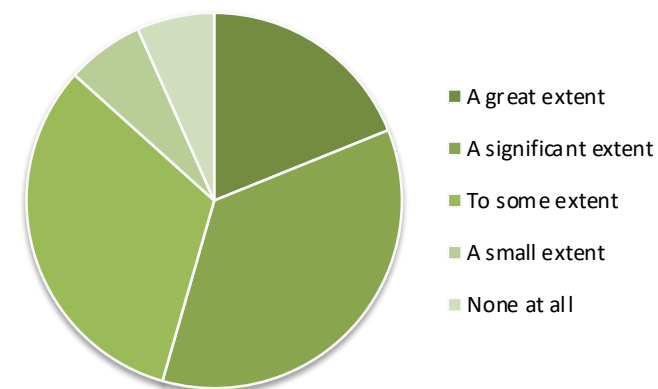
Widening access to professional careers for under-represented groups



- 86.7% of respondents say that social mobility is very or extremely important as an aim for Degree Apprenticeships



- 55% of respondents say that Degree Apprenticeships have already contributed greatly or significantly to social mobility.



Degree apprenticeships and social mobility



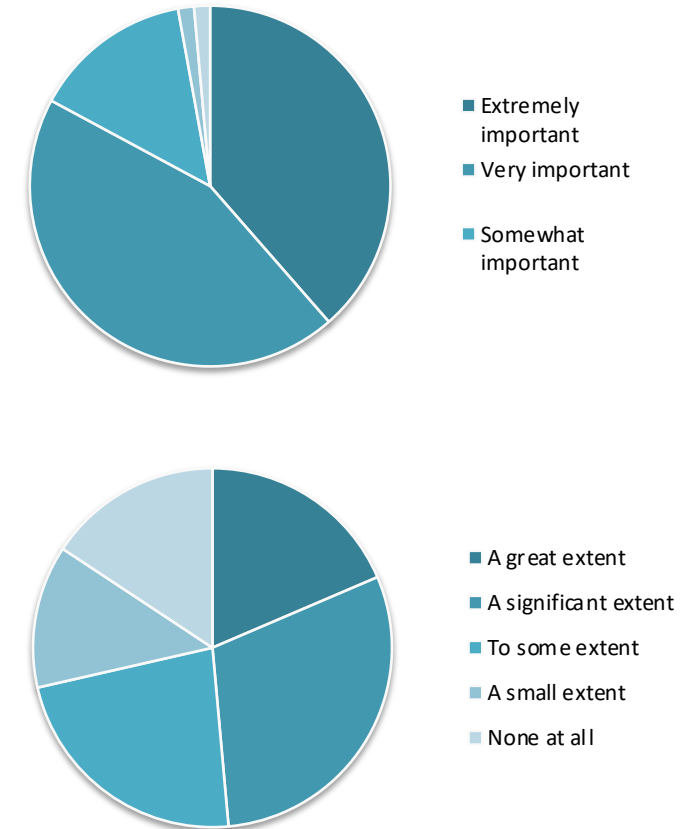
- **Examples of social mobility benefits** - providing opportunities for people who would not otherwise have entered higher education and progression from relatively low qualified roles to professional and managerial positions.
- **The contribution of Degree Apprenticeships** - effective promotion and outreach; accessible entry-routes; programme design that caters for 'non-standard' entrants; effective learner support; the ability to earn while learning and avoid running up debt; increasing the diversity of the workforce, a KPI for public sector employers (eg Police Service)
- **Barriers and limiting factors for Degree Apprenticeships** - a lack of awareness and misconceptions about Degree Apprenticeship among potential apprentices, parents, schools and colleges; lack of availability of suitable programmes; inflexible entry requirements; and concerns about salaries, debt or the ability to succeed in higher education.
- **Improving the contribution of Degree Apprenticeships** – address the barriers and limiting factors (above); better learner support including integrating functional skills support; clearer progression routes between apprenticeships at different levels; and ensuring apprentices are paid a fair wage.

Productivity

Enhancing service / product efficiency and quality



- 82.9% of respondents say that that increasing productivity is a very or extremely important aim for Degree Apprenticeships
- 49% of respondents say that Degree Apprenticeships have already contributed greatly or significantly to productivity.



Degree apprenticeships and productivity



- **Examples of productivity benefits** - business or service benefits such as performance improvement, improved quality, innovation, and direct gains from apprentices' projects; bringing in new knowledge, skills development, and personal development and progression.
- **The contribution of Degree Apprenticeships** - workplaces that support learning and link to strategic goals; good-quality, relevant, work-integrated programmes; effective partnership working at a practical level; effective evaluation strategies; and well-designed apprenticeship standards.
- **Barriers and limiting factors for Degree Apprenticeships** - workplaces where there is insufficient support, excessive pressure of work, or an environment not conducive to learning; lack of recognition of the supernumerary requirements of some professions; poor integration between on and off-the-job training; poor quality partnerships; and a lack of availability of relevant programmes or apprenticeship standards.
- **Improving the Contribution of Degree Apprenticeships** - better employer engagement, organisation and support in some workplaces; improved partnership working; and more practical, flexible programmes to improve industry relevance.

What works well for degree apprenticeships?



- **Work-integrated, flexible, supported, online learning delivery** methods
- **A central apprenticeships unit or hub** to help drive consistent, appropriate and innovative approaches to delivery and support for apprentices at institutional level
- **Future orientated curricula** informed by current practice and collaboratively developed with employers and professional bodies
- Integrated and formal **support for functional skills** development and achievement
- **Frequent meetings with workplace mentors**, eg monthly forum for apprentices and mentors
- **Involving apprentices in employer activities or projects from the outset** as an integrated aspect of the programme. Accommodating job rotation and short placements in unfamiliar workplace areas
- **Employer contribution to delivery** through work-based projects and workplace mentoring/coaching
- Highly effective, regular and **systematic engagement between employers and University** at strategic, management and operational levels

What does not work well for degree apprenticeships?



- **Reluctance of employers** to facilitate/support/value off-the-job learning in relation to other work priorities
- Where **off-the-job learning is not effectively integrated** within workplace projects/activities/duties
- **Lack of development of appropriate online learning** specifically designed for apprenticeship programmes
- Over-reliance on more **‘traditional’ or ‘standard’ models of higher education** delivery and assessment
- **Day-release models** of delivery as they tend to:
 - Limit the effective integration of on and off-the-job learning
 - Limiting opportunities for 1:1 support for apprentices
 - Limiting opportunities for employer engagement
 - Limits the scope for customisation to meet employer needs
- **Lack of flexibility** regarding: start dates; delivery schedules; assessment schedules
- **Inconsistent and unsystematic engagement** / liaison / communications with employers

Challenges for universities



- **Institutional prioritisation of apprenticeships** in relation to other provision in the context of uncertainty
- **Leadership** regarding the **cultural, strategic and operational changes** required to deliver high-quality apprenticeships
- Developing **workable, cost-effective, work-integrated degree apprenticeship model** that meets academic and professional requirements and employer needs
- **Realising a work-integrated and practice-based approaches** for all degree apprenticeships including the on-the-job aspects of apprenticeship delivery
- **Planning resources** in the context of uncertainty regarding apprentice numbers and/or income
- **Providing staff with the appropriate expertise** in work-integrated learning – recruitment, development and integration
- **Scheduling/planning** – multiple start dates; assessment boards; accommodation; staff work programmes
- **Systematised support for apprentices** at institutional level
- **Systematised collaboration and partnership working with employers** encompassing all aspects of apprenticeship provision – including design, development, delivery, governance, monitoring and evaluation
- Building in **access to high-quality and flexible online learning** for all degree apprenticeships

External threats to sustainability



- **Non-integrated degree apprenticeships** that separate EPA from the completion of the degree and from professional registration
 - High risk of non-completion with consequent loss of funding
 - Devaluing the integrated benefits of the degree apprenticeship
 - Risks not recognising the primacy of professional body registration for practitioners
- **Uncertain policy environment**
 - Lack of clarity regarding Government long-term commitment to degree apprenticeships at policy level
 - Ambivalent public communications regarding the specific value of degree apprenticeships
 - The burden of duplicating quality assurance regimes (OfS/QAA and Ofsted)
 - IfATE mandatory qualification rules as a significant barrier to degree apprenticeship development in the face of clear employer demand
 - Potential reductions in funding for degree apprenticeships as a strategic challenge that may inhibit future investment by HE providers

Draft recommendations



1. Promotion and outreach

- Promote Degree Apprenticeships as a distinctive, high-quality 'brand' (not an 'alternative' to higher education)
- Focus on areas where Degree Apprenticeships are likely to create the most impact: key skill shortage areas, eg public sector; industrial strategy priorities, eg leadership and management, digital.
- Raise awareness of opportunities to achieve professional status for: under-represented groups; existing workforce; lower-level apprentices.

2. Resourcing and partnerships

- Providers should resource a central hub to support the consistent co-ordination of the development and delivery of Degree Apprenticeships
- Ensure that sufficient staff involved in delivering Degree Apprenticeships have current expertise in industrial/professional practice and work-integrated learning
- Develop effective and active provider-employer partnerships involving: overall programme design; integration of learning goals with business or service needs; and monitoring and supporting apprentices.



Draft recommendations



3. Programme design and delivery

- Specifically design programmes ‘from the ground up’ as degree apprenticeships, that integrate on and off-the-job learning and adopt a ‘digital first’ approach, to build in the flexibility that employers and apprentices need.
- Design specific and flexible support mechanisms for workplace learning and non-traditional entrants including support for functional and higher education study skills.
- Specifically design on-programme assessments that develop knowledge, skills and behaviours, are work-integrated and prepare apprentices for End-point Assessment and professional recognition requirements.

4. The workplace and organisational environment

- Work closely with employers to support a strategic approach to workforce development that recognises the value of learning, aligned with clear organisational goals and return on investment, from Degree Apprenticeships.
- Maximise workplace learning potential through strategies such as work-integrated projects, placements and role rotation.
- Ensure that all employer staff involved in supporting apprentices understand the learning requirements of the role, to effectively manage expectations including potentially conflicting work priorities and pressures.

Draft recommendations



5. Apprenticeship policy

- Reconfirm the twin purposes of Degree Apprenticeships as: increasing productivity, clearly aligned with the industrial strategy; and enhancing social mobility recognised as access to professional status for under-represented groups.
- Provide policy stability for Degree Apprenticeships to enable their purpose to be fully realised, to celebrate their success and the value of the degree for employers and apprentices.
- Revise the mandatory qualification rule to allow Trailblazer Groups to specify the inclusion of a degree where there is evidence that it will increase productivity and/or enhance social mobility.
- Simplify the quality assurance responsibilities for apprenticeships so that OfS/QAA have responsibility for all level 4-8 apprenticeships provided by OfS registered organisations and Ofsted have responsibility for all other apprenticeships.

6. Access to Degree Apprenticeships

- Promote apprenticeship progression 'through routes' and build in 'step-on' and 'step-off' points through all levels, aligned with industry need and professional recognition, through high-quality provider and employer partnerships.
- Ensure that the Degree Apprenticeships that employers (including SMEs) need are available across all English regions.

