

Case study

The importance of the *degree* in Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeships (SLDA)



**Harper Adams
University**

Provider:
Harper Adams University

Date:
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Theme: Productivity/Business Benefits and Gains

Sector: Agri-Food

Employers: Avara Foods, Knighton Foods, ABP Group, Bakkavor

Background

As a leading provider of management education of agri-food businesses, Harper Adams are offering the opportunity of a Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship in MSc Food Industry Management commencing in the academic year 2020/21. Aimed at Heads of Department up to more senior executives Harper Adams aims to support individuals to take the next step in their careers and strategise new business models within the sector.

The University is engaged with studying the development and management of sustainable agri-food businesses, with a focus on process, product-innovation, and effective delivery to the consumer through a field to fork approach. The apprenticeship has eight taught modules, each of which are delivered in a one-week block. This is a mode of delivery which will prove valuable to those undertaking their leadership training in work and on-the-job. Taking between 24 and 30 months to deliver, the apprenticeship covers strategic shaping of vision, culture and values, organisational structures, governance and accountability in the business environment, as well as innovation, change and new ways of working in the 'big data' environment.

The Challenge

The relationship between agriculture and food production is ever evolving, with growth and sustainability central talking points for the industry. The food chain sector is undoubtedly growing; whether you live to eat or eat to live the indisputable fact is that we all need to be regular consumers of food and drink. Data show £121 billion of Gross Value Added in 2018 came from the agri-food sector, with productivity rising by 1.5% (pre-Covid) and 4.1m people employed. People continue to invest in farming and with it, a focus around data to drive results in quality, usability, and public health. People are increasingly interested in the effect of what they're eating - on themselves and the global community. As a result, Harper Adams is interested in a wide range of research and work-based projects about how farming can be sustainable and is working hard to challenge preconceptions with empirical research.

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The Journey

The apprenticeship programme for senior leaders is intended to be a specialist route for existing employer partners and industry contacts, offering an effective way to engage with a variety of voices throughout the food industry and ultimately provide a well evidenced route to information and initiatives that keep consumers healthy in a sustainable way. The food industry offers more than careers based solely on farms or in retail food outlets: it is vigorous and dynamic, with the adoption of new technology and the provision of new products satisfying ever-changing consumer demands.

With this in mind and as careers in the agri-food sector now span the many levels within the supply chain to make sustainable food production achievable, and as a consequence of rapid business and employment growth, Harper Adams working with their trusted employers recognise there is a need for pioneering leaders to maintain competitive positions in an increasingly global marketplace.

Lessons Learned

In developing the apprenticeship and co-creating the curriculum within the master's degree, the University's employer group recognises that the workplace is the site and source of academically valid learning and not simply the place for gaining experience and applying knowledge already learned. The group also recognises the master's degree qualification, by its delivery, mitigates the risk that the apprenticeship produces an uncritical kind of learner where reflection operates within constricted boundaries that can often lead to a type of self-censoring in order to comply with a specific company or business-focussed agenda and ethos. As a result, the curriculum brings together varied and challenging content, driven by professional and wider sector requirements, with the demands of the individual apprentices' workplace. In this respect the following practical and theoretical learning elements are integrated into the master's degree precisely because, when combined, they provide a rapid progression to a competent and proficient level of practice:

- a strong food context and relevance – the agri-food industry is different to other sectors
- financial and commercial awareness – a good understanding of accounts, ROI, borrowing, profit and loss and shareholder roles
- HACCP/BRC/food safety/allergens – specialist legislation and food safety standards
- growing/agronomy/food production cycles – understanding the supply chain
- HR – legislation, the law, morals and ethics
- food policy and ethics, sustainability and environmental elements
- business strategy – how to make it happen (change management)
- project management structures, approaches, milestones, cross functional delivery and time management
- worked based learning projects – to demonstrate application
- Innovation and future trends in food – learning from other industries (innovation and change)
- understanding the consumer and marketing – (linked to innovation)
- understanding food processing and production operations
- managing supply chains and partnerships
- technical awareness
- globalisation as a business

Quotes

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"The [Apprenticeship] will take between 24 and 30 months and cover strategic shaping of vision, culture and values; organisational structures, governance and accountability in the business environment, as well as innovation, change and new ways of working in the Big Data environment." – **Dr Jane Eastham, Associate Head of Department for Food Technology and Innovation, Harper Adams University**

"An important part of the sector's success relies on an integrated approach and the close links which have been forged between growers, wholesalers, food processors and retailers. To be successful in today's fast-moving food industry [apprentices] are provided with a combination of modules focusing on core subjects relevant to the food industry, as well as key priorities facing today's food industry. Once apprentices have completed the taught modules, they commence their research project, which gives the opportunity to pursue their own interests and provides a valuable addition to their skills set." – **Harper Adams University, [course overview](#)**

"The Apprenticeship aims to produce and develop well-trained [leaders and] managers who are working in, or wish to follow, careers in the food industry. It promotes analytical and management skills by focusing on questions raised in relation to public policy issues, the commercial environment and the supply of foods which meet supply chain customer and consumer requirements." – **Harper Adams University, [course overview](#)**

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This case study is commissioned by:

