

Case study

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



University of Brighton

Provider:
University of Brighton

Date:
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Theme: Social Mobility and Progression

Sectors: Various including charity and non-profit

Background

Designed by employers and delivered by industry experts, this apprenticeship is an opportunity for experienced professionals and those aspiring to senior management in any sector or profession to take the next big step on their career path and achieve the University of Brighton's Leadership MBA with professional accreditation by Chartered Management Institute (CMI), the only chartered body in the field of management and leadership, and Institute of Directors (IoD). The apprenticeship happily builds on the standard executive Leadership MBA by enhancing the focus on the apprentice's role and workplace as the site of learning. With its clear focus on practice wisdom, Brighton leverages the skills of both academics and practitioners to teach a useful mix of theory and practice so that both long-term and short-term gains can be realised by each apprentice, many of whom are non-degree holders but now think the time is right in their career where a degree will be of great value. Indeed, 23% of the first cohorts do not hold a first-degree qualification; 62% work for public sector organisations; 25% work for a regional NHS Trust with other employed in local county councils, the fire service, schools, the Arts Council and charitable organisations.

Experience of Provision

From day one, apprentices gain an enhanced sense of perspective through looking at their organisation and role afresh through the lens of each subject area and bring tangible solutions to existing issues using the skills and behaviours they study at university. By applying, reflecting, critiquing and evaluating their workplace environment via self-study, taught materials and the programme learning on and off-the-job, apprentices an enhanced learning experience. Peer learning is an important feature of the University's delivery and is considered invaluable by apprentices who recognise there is a wealth of knowledge and opportunity to be gained through networking.

Portfolio creation also aims to enhance the learning experience. The different skills and behaviours which need to be evidenced enable apprentices to apply the programme learning topics, such as organisational theory, finance and accounting management practice and strategic marketing and communication, to their workplace environment.

Lessons Learned

For the University, the programme is designed to ensure integration between the practical and the theoretical, with the apprenticeship tailoring learning to individual contexts, providing effective learner support, and co-ordinating quality assurance and assessment. For their employers, the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeships has a clear rationale and position within the workplace, both from the perspective of integrating learning with work activity and in the way that they support workforce development and business or service goals. For some, their workforce is now gaining the skills and knowledge to improve their practices and processes and realising access to areas of higher study and higher-level skills that many of their staff were not previously able to reach. Far from being “city fat cats earning high incomes” apprentices on the SLDA at the University of Brighton are from a wide range of roles and sectors, from SMEs, the charitable sector and from within the NHS.

SLDA modules are proving to have a direct impact in the workplace. The finance module is allowing apprentices to explore the financial strategy of their organisation and provide recommendations which have a tangible effect on the way an organisation funds, for example, its capital expenditure programme. For the information systems module, ‘value stream mapping’ is being applied to streamline service pathways, reduce waste and improve patient experience in the NHS. In terms of career development, the MBA is proving critical to progression. For some apprentices, just being on the course (even before finishing it) is perceived as opening up opportunities previously unavailable. Employers equally are observing the benefits assisting in clear thinking and sharp, strategic prioritising in approaches both to the MBA assignments, as well as to the day to day demands of the workplace.

Quotes

“I currently work as a member of the leadership team within an NHS mental health service which serves the population of East Sussex. I am a competent leader with 13 years of management experience across public and private sectors however I do not hold any higher education qualifications. I know that doing this course would enable me to ground my existing experience within a comprehensive professional qualification and enhance my future career aspirations. I am fortunate enough to currently work for an employer who wishes to invest in me and is offering to fund me in attaining a degree. This is a fantastic opportunity which I intend to grasp.... Whilst I feel I have a broad range of practical experience in a wide range of fields, this MBA will dramatically enhance my knowledge and skills. My hope is this this course will cement and enhance knowledge I have acquired in work over the years and provide a strong theoretical grounding to my skill set. I am excited about the prospect of learning within the structure of Higher Education setting and gaining a professional qualification to demonstrate my learning.” – Service Lead and Marketing Lead, Local Primary Care Trust (non-degree holder)

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“I am not ashamed to say I started my career later in life after having my only child at the age of twenty years old. Now my child is an adult I am driven to succeed in my career. I am naturally a curious and ambitious person and have clear values and goals. There shall be natural movement within the higher levels of the management team over the next few years and I would like to give myself the best opportunity to apply for those roles knowing I have the education and knowledge behind me to achieve and succeed. The Master’s...with its accreditation makes the offer a lot more attractive as it’s recognised outside my organisation of the NHS, and I believe gives me a more credible qualification, and I’m grateful for that chance.” –**Team Lead Healthy Child Programme, Local Primary Care Trust (degree holder in nursing, 2012)**

“I am aware that the apprenticeship MBA is a contested debate, but I actually believe it to be essential for small businesses, particular charities to continue to access its resource to further sustain start up companies, and the many small/medium sized organisations that form a part of our economy. I was only yesterday talking to another voluntary sector colleague about how helpful it has been and that it would be a shame if the government decide to change/remove it. Particular for small organisations like ours who would never otherwise be able to get staff on a programme like it.” – **Chief Executive, Charity (degree holder in photography, 2008)**

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