



UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL

## **The Value of the Degree in Management and Leadership Apprenticeships Literature Review**

**Mandy Crawford-Lee**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the literature review is to contextualise the need for and growth and success of apprenticeships in management and senior leadership roles in England. As such, the review focuses particularly on the Senior Leader Apprenticeship – first approved for delivery as a degree apprenticeship in February 2018 and which followed the introduction of the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA), one of the first degree apprenticeships created – and summarises the benefits and tensions arising from policies and practices at a national level. In the context of the development of degree apprenticeships more generally it draws on literature including Government documents, research reports, journal papers, media articles and thought leadership pieces relating specifically to both Chartered Manager and Senior Leader, as well as other relevant literature on work-based and work-integrated learning and other professional entry-programmes.

The aim, along with a series of case studies, is to present evidence that makes the case for full support of the ‘degree’ in degree apprenticeships in leadership and management, challenge the myths surrounding their use and showcase the benefits to both employer and apprentice. This is because the mandatory degree qualification element is under threat as apprenticeship standards’ content comes up for review, with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) applying its mandatory qualifications rule. Under the mandatory qualifications rule, a qualification can only be included if it is a requirement of a professional body, regulator or used in hard sifting for job interviews. Employers and apprentices have been clear however; that the degree is a crucial part of the standard and without it they would not attract the talent they need, thus affecting the very purpose of the apprenticeship. Indeed, a degree apprenticeship provides a degree with its status, transferability and wider learning objectives as well as the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be competent in the occupation.

### **Background**

Degree apprenticeships have been a small but fast-growing feature of the higher and professional education landscape in England since their launch in 2015 by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, who said:

*“Equipping people with the skills they need to get on in life and backing businesses to create jobs are key parts of our long-term economic plan. Degree Apprenticeships will give people a great head start, combining a full degree with the real practical skills gained in work and the financial security of a regular pay packet. They will bring*

*the world of business and the world of education closer together and let us build the high-level technical skills needed for the jobs of the future. I want to see many more businesses and universities begin to offer them.” (BIS, 2015a).*

Degree Apprenticeships were intended from the outset to bring the worlds of work and higher education together under a dual policy objective: to generate a new cohort of skilled individuals to support economic growth as well as improve levels of social mobility. They can also be considered as an innovative type of programme that adopts a work-integrated approach to development, which when implemented properly contrasts with both the (typically) day-release pattern familiar in further education, and the sequential or full-time higher education followed by workplace training model that has dominated graduate and professional entry for decades. Indeed, degree apprenticeships are helping challenge the whole notion of the ‘academic-vocational divide’ and represent perhaps the greatest effort to close the gap in British education and training since the major reforms in 1992 saw the conversion of most polytechnics into universities (Dadze-Arthur et al, 2020), by giving equal status to the academic and the practical. Indeed, having Apprenticeships at level 4 to 7 has helped demonstrate that apprenticeships are an aspirational programme available at all educational and skill levels: from level 2 to level 7 and can be said to represent the best of both worlds; a degree and a job that is neither solely an academic nor solely a vocational programme, but both (Anderson, 2020).

As a flagship programme that responds dually to matters of productivity and social mobility and has widespread support from employers and higher education which means the skills system in England has those ranked among the foremost universities in the world now engaged in its delivery, the degree apprenticeship model carries high expectations. The Office for Students, the main regulator of HE in England, comments:

*“Degree apprenticeships carry the weight of expectations of multiple stakeholders. They are expected, for instance, to meet economic needs and those of employers; to increase social mobility and diversity in higher education; to bridge the gap between different levels of qualifications; to create a new gateway to the professions; and to imbue a vocational route to education with the prestige accorded to more conventional routes.” (OfS 2019).*

For five years degree apprenticeships have offered an attractive proposition. For employers, primarily large private sector and public sector organisations including local authorities, degree apprenticeships help attract new talent, tackle gender stereotyping, encourage inclusion and widen participation and demonstrate an apprenticeship can be equal in esteem to more traditional academic routes for both new and existing employees.

To date, there are around 90 approved degree apprenticeship standards at bachelor and master’s level in all but two of the 15 occupational routeways (catering and hospitality and hair and beauty) defined by the Sainsbury Review (Sainsbury, 2016). Representing around 20% of the apprenticeship portfolio they range from Architect to Arts Therapist, from Civil Engineer to Ecologist, from Data Scientist to Registered Nurse and from Police Constable and Chartered Manager to Senior Leader. Higher education providers and employers have invested significantly in their development and delivery doubling the number of starts

between the 2017/18 academic year and 2018/19 (House of Commons, 2019). In this sense, and by this measure, the policy has been an obvious success (UVAC, 2020).

For apprentices, a degree apprenticeship represents a debt free route through higher education and a steppingstone in a career or future learning opportunity (Crawford-Lee and Wall, 2018). For them, the main value comes from the degree and/or professional qualification, the ability to work, earn and learn at the same time, and the career opportunities provided whether connected to entering the labour market or progressing to a more senior or professional level. This is consistent with findings from Engeli & Turner (2019) that found learners on degree apprenticeships – from a sample on level 6 and 7 provision including new entrants and existing staff, young and older apprentices – valued both the ability to work towards a degree while employed, along with the combination of theoretical and practical learning. These apprentices saw the degree in their apprenticeship as being highly portable within their sectors rather than simply ‘training for a job’, and as being more beneficial to their careers than a full-time degree would have been. There is also evidence that degree apprenticeships can produce huge learning gains; from lacking necessary higher education entry qualifications to achieving first-class honours degrees (UVAC/SDN 2017).

For higher education providers, degree apprenticeships offer a significant way to engage with employers to meet their skill needs particularly in the context of a new, if not unprecedented, economic reality given the global pandemic of Covid-19. Furthermore, in the renewal and recovery period post Coronavirus, it is expected that higher education providers will have a key role in determining what role higher and degree apprenticeships, and higher technical qualifications will play in determining skills priorities. However, apprenticeships have not historically related to the skills needs of the economy, with level 2 apprenticeships having dominated delivery. Level 2 programmes still equate for around 43% of all apprenticeship starts but under the apprenticeship reforms employers are choosing to increasingly focus on higher level and high cost apprenticeships (DfE, 2019). This has led to a noticeable imbalance between the traditional supply base of independent training providers and some colleges delivering apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 and the demand for higher level skills needed by employers. This has led to a polarisation of opinion which typically pitches providers of lower level Apprenticeships against universities and higher education institutions.

What is the debate?

The rationale for introducing the apprenticeship levy in 2017 was to overcome the lack of investment by employers in the training and development of new and existing employees and its adverse impact on UK productivity. Ministers ‘*put employers in the driving seat*’ (BIS, 2015) in apprenticeship development and were clear that employers were best placed to determine where they invested in apprenticeships. Social mobility is now seen as an equally important apprenticeship policy objective. Notably, since then, employers have chosen to recruit fewer apprentices to level 2 job roles. As a result, degree apprenticeships have been fiercely contested by some apprenticeship ‘purists’ on the grounds that such programmes aren’t proper apprenticeships; that they are expensive and divert funding from young

people who need lower-level programmes, they provide 'free' access to 'rebadged' graduate schemes, they can be misused by employers who re-designate existing staff as apprentices (e.g. Dawe 2019, Gravatt 2019, Augar 2019), including for management development, in spite of a lack of leadership and management skills being identified as a key barrier to productivity in the Industrial Strategy (HM Government 2017), and in one recent report that they are not proper apprenticeships at all, but 'fake apprenticeships' (Richmond, 2020).

Some arguments have developed a veneer of sophistication and attracted considerable media attention. The Learning and Work Institute (2020), for example, claimed that by restricting the ability of employers to spend on levels 4 to 7 by requiring employers to make a 50% contribution to the cost of an apprenticeship when used by those aged 25+ for level 4 and 5 Higher Apprenticeships and 75% for level 6 and 7, would save £318m a year. Nevertheless, LWI failed to explain how, by restricting the public sector in using their levy so such funds could be transferred to provide 95% subsidies for small private businesses to train hairdressers or hospitality team members, this represents a good use of public funding.

Moreover, it would now seem that these public criticisms have begun to influence policy, particularly on funding and issues of affordability.

Prior to the impact of Covid-19 it was forecast that by 2022 the apprenticeship levy fund would be overspent by £1.5bn. Treasury officials had already indicated in early 2020 (the year in which the Government's 5-year vision for apprenticeship reform is to be realised) a planned review of its operation to assess the return on investment of the apprenticeship programme and its contribution to productivity. But additionally, the Secretary of State for Education asked the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), an employer led crown Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB) that oversees the development, approval and publication of apprenticeship standards and assessment plans as well as the occupational maps for T Levels and apprenticeships, to bring forward a review of the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship *"to safeguard the integrity of the apprenticeship brand"* and *"ensure that the standard meets the current policy intent and rules, including the mandatory qualifications policy, and provides value for money"* and set 1 June 2020 as a deadline for determining whether the level 7 senior leader standard will continue to include its master's degree qualification.

The letter came less than a month after IfATE's Chief Executive stated that public funding for management apprenticeships is *"perfectly legitimate"* amidst a growing hostility in the wider apprenticeship system and further education sector press to the use and growth of apprenticeships in leadership and management; particularly the senior leader standard. Many, including the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), Association of Colleges (AoC), Learning and Work Institute (LWI) and Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), argue that apprenticeship levy funds in England should be focused on young people, the 'have-nots' and be prioritised at lower levels of skill and job roles. While Ofsted's Chief Inspector had declared previously *"we see levy funding subsidising re-packaged graduate schemes and MBAs that just don't need it"*.

What are the issues?

These vocal positions deny degree apprenticeships the recognition for helping transform the image and perception of apprenticeships from the good choice of “other people’s children” or the choice for those who could not go to university. They also ignore how the degree ‘professionalises’ a job role, helps attract a different talent supply and raises performance standards for the occupation. Fundamentally there is a lack of recognition that occupational ‘competence’ can be incorporated into university qualifications with degree apprenticeships leading to greater integration between academic qualifications and professional recognition, often allowing the two to be awarded together (as in the case of the CMDA). Ask any apprentice of any age why they decided to pursue a degree apprenticeship and the ability to gain a degree will be one of the key reasons. The introduction of degree apprenticeships and the power of the degree brand in England have helped sell the benefits of the wider family of apprenticeships – including those at lower levels – with the opportunities for progression in education and a career now seen as integral to each other (Crawford-Lee and Moorwood, 2019).

Bravenboer (2019) also argues the introduction of degree apprenticeships creatively disrupts our understanding of the relationship between higher education and the workplace; and in a positive way. The potential to radically change our understanding of the role of higher education providers with employers in delivering the Government’s flagship skills programme by making the workplace the site of learning (rather than only a site for its application) and learning central to working lives, must not be underestimated. Additionally, degree apprenticeships challenges assumptions about the assumed differences between academic and professional standards, knowledge, skills and behaviours, on-the-job and off-the-job learning. New thinking has also emerged about the roles and responsibilities of universities and employers in co-developing, delivering and deploying degree apprenticeships (Bravenboer, 2016). But without recognition or understanding of the value of *all* degree apprenticeships by policy and public opinion makers there is high risk of policy failure. Undermining the apprenticeship reforms by seeking to prioritise apprenticeships provision at level 2 and 3 and by default against apprenticeship programmes at professional level of skills at level 6 and 7 represents perhaps the biggest threat to the quality and ongoing success of apprenticeships.

Indeed, apprenticeships are far more than just a low-level training programme for young people. Apprenticeships in England are supposed to be an employer-led productivity programme (BIS, 2015). Employers with a payroll exceeding £3m pay their apprenticeship levy and can then spend their levy on the apprenticeships *they need*. The use of such apprenticeships raises business performance and increases UK productivity; our *number one* national economic challenge (BEIS, 2017). We can see through the Trailblazer process of creating and specifying apprenticeship standards, and in their use of the apprenticeship levy, employers are increasingly focusing on higher-level provision often for existing employees and far less on those large volume apprenticeships, such as customer service and business administration, traditionally associated with the system outside of craft, trade and technical roles. The reason for this change is not hard to understand. Employers are investing in the apprenticeships their businesses demand (Anderson, 2019). Fewer and

fewer entry level job roles are at level 2 and therefore the apprenticeship system has lost its focus of providing a work-based learning pathway for young people not staying on at school and to tackle the structural problem of the NEET (not in education, employment or training) problem. Just look at the skills gaps and shortages in the economy. In the public sector think nurses, police constables and social workers; in the private sector, digital and engineering occupations. Certainly, there are some skills gaps and shortages at level 2 in the national economy, but the most prominent skills gap is undoubtedly in leadership and management at level 6 and 7.

### **Management apprenticeships: productivity and social mobility**

Despite the evidence, the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship (SLDA) has seemingly become, in the past 12 months, the most controversial apprenticeship of all. It is caricatured as an MBA programme used by investment bankers and city executives earning £100K or more. While some higher education providers have appeared to cynically ramp up their recruitment of senior leader apprentices amid the government's review of the programme by promoting a 95% subsidy for non-levy paying employers in reality the situation is very different. The deficit in management skills undoubtedly represents the biggest skills gap in the UK (The Industrial Strategy Council, 2019).

This was reflected in a 2019 Lloyds Bank survey of large manufacturers. Commenting on the survey in *The Times* (2019), Lloyds Bank's head of manufacturing stated that: *'Large manufacturers are being brutally honest about the skills shortage affecting their sector and are highlighting that the problem is most pronounced at management levels.'* He went on to say *'Most experts agree good management is key to improving productivity. It is clear the sector needs to invest in up-skilling the next generation of managers now.'*

As required by an apprenticeship standard, a chartered manager or senior leader is an articulated role with defined knowledge, skills and behaviours. If apprenticeships in England are a productivity-focused programme and about widening progression opportunities to key occupations, then management and leadership apprenticeships have a fundamental role to play particularly when some of the biggest users of the senior leader apprenticeship are our key public services (UVAC, 2020).

In 2018-19 there were approximately 3,000 senior leader degree apprentices and 5,800 chartered managers. (DfE, 2019). This figure represented less than 1% of all apprenticeship starts. By comparison there have been, in the past, more than 15,500 apprenticeship starts in hairdressing and barbering and almost 50% more again following classroom based programmes; this oversupply compares to Germany's 10,500 hairdressers in 2017 for a population of 82.8m compared to our 55.6m (DfE, 2019) and sits alongside a shortage of UK technicians. Given the importance of management skills to the UK economy, the number of individuals on either a level 6 chartered manager or level 7 senior leader degree apprenticeship programme seems low rather than unduly or disproportionately high.

### **Management apprenticeships: national Government response**

So, the Government's Industrial Strategy (BEIS, 2017), together with a host of other reports, highlight the effects of bad management in the workplace and the detrimental impact poor management skills are having on UK productivity. From the Institute's 'review' of the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship it was hoped that the Secretary of State would want to know whether pound for pound it represents a good rate of return on investment compared with other apprenticeships at different levels. Similarly, it was hoped the Treasury and BEIS would want to know what impact the spend on SLDA is/will have on management practices and productivity and the spread of value creation, and perhaps most importantly it was hoped the Institute would be expected to estimate the detrimental impact the removal of the master's degree from the apprenticeships standard will have on the long-term investment of employers in the training and development of senior leaders and managers.

What is being reviewed?

However, it seems that the Institute has already decided the fate of the degree in the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeships given that it has published for consultation a revised *Senior Leader Apprenticeship* standard as part of its 'revisions and adjustments' process (IfATE, 2020) which does not include a reference to achieving a "master's degree in management (either MA, MSc or MBA)" as part of the apprenticeship. This is because the Institute has advised the Trailblazer that requiring the inclusion of such a qualification in the apprenticeship would not meet the intent of its policy on mandated qualifications which was extended to cover Level 6 and Level 7 standards in 2018 and argues:

...as a Senior Leader, there is no regulatory requirement to hold such a qualification, there is no requirement to be a member of a professional body and an individual would not be significantly disadvantaged in the Senior Leader job market without such a qualification. (IfATE, 2020)

This raises a number of concerns. The consultation does not include a focus on the biggest change - the removal of the qualification i.e. MA, MSc or MBA as part of the standard. Also, as the literature confirms, apprenticeships are billed as 'employer-led'. The decision on the value and appropriateness of including a qualification should rest with employers, not a NDPB. Instructing a Trailblazer, as the Institute has done, to remove a qualification of such significance prior to consultation will undermine trust in what is supposed to be an employer-owned apprenticeship system. The Institute has, until now, adopted an agnostic position on the apprenticeship provision delivered on the basis that employers are best placed to determine the apprenticeship specification their organisations need. Instructing a Trailblazer to remove a qualification from an apprenticeship undermines this claim. Employers, with professional bodies, through Trailblazers are in the best position to determine if the inclusion of a degree will maximise the benefits of the apprenticeship in terms of its contribution to productivity and social mobility. Indeed, it makes the best political sense for employers to be given the explicit means to determine the 'standards' that they require as they are expected to pay for the expansion of apprentice starts (Bravenboer, 2016).

Senior Leader Apprenticeships are needed to increase the diversity of senior leaders, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is frequently a false assumption that social mobility is just about supporting individuals into low level, and often low paid, jobs. Apprenticeships have just as an important, if not more important, role in developing new progression routes to the professions and higher-level occupations for under-represented cohorts including those in-work. In anticipation of a carefully considered review it was expected that the Institute would be considering the reality of this apprenticeship in opening up senior roles to individuals from more disadvantaged groups and in addressing the gaps in outstanding leadership and management across all sectors and in particular the public sector before removing the degree. This is no longer the case.

Rather, what is the case is a growing number of structural and policy moves that are having an inhibiting effect on the success and sustainability of degree apprenticeships more generally. In the policy environment the explicit political commitment to an all level apprenticeship programme does not extend to ensuring it is appropriately funded. There is the possibility of apprenticeship funding for some standards in light of the current consultation by the Institute on the process for recommending funding bands being reduced well below the cost of delivery and, in implementation terms, real concerns that the Institute is creating barriers to the approval and reapproval of degree apprenticeships. The latter is discussed in several reports (e.g. WECD, 2019 and UVAC/SDN 2017) where the degree is in many respects a forward-looking requirement geared to professionalisation and attracting suitable talent, rather than a response to easily documented professional/regulatory body or employer demands that are key to satisfying policy and approval criteria.

It is worth reiterating that when the apprenticeship levy was introduced, Government 'promised' that apprenticeships would be an employer led system. Employers through the Trailblazer process developed the apprenticeship standards their sectors needed and then could choose to use their levy payments on the apprenticeships their businesses needed to raise productivity and performance. As an employer-led body the Institute needs to determine if the removal of the degree in an apprenticeship standard such as the SLDA undermines the concept of an employer-led system and would therefore, in itself, undermine the integrity of the apprenticeship brand. Moreover, the Institute should be empowering employers to specify a mandatory qualification including a degree if they can demonstrate a qualification would support the occupational area or sector, raise productivity or enhance opportunities for social mobility.

As part of any review we would also expect the Secretary of State to want the Institute to examine which employers are using the Senior Leader. The University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC), a national not-for-profit organisation that provides an independent voice for its higher education provider members on matters relating to technical and professional higher-level learning, including higher and degree apprenticeships, believes that among the biggest users are the Police and NHS. Given the Government's Manifesto commitments to the Police and NHS the Institute will want to be clear whether preventing public sector employers from investing *their* levy payments in training their senior managers is appropriate. Would stopping police forces (Home Office budget) and NHS Hospital Trusts (Health budget) from using their levy payments to improve the skills of their leaders and



managers so such funds can be used to train lower level apprentices in small private businesses be 'good value for money' and an appropriate use of levy funds paid by the public sector?

### **In defence of the Degree in Senior Leader**

The Bank of England's chief economist suggests that "a [lack of] management quality" was a plausible explanation for the nation's long tail of under-productive companies and data do suggest that many UK businesses "could benefit from improving simple management practices – or just adopting them in the first place" (Financial Times, 2018). The term 'accidental managers' first used by the UK's Chartered Management Institute (CMI) to describe how workers are often promoted to managerial roles with little or no preparation says too frequently people are asked to step-up only because they are good at their existing job – with some 2.4m of 3.4m UK managers falling into this category. The CMI's chief executive has previously claimed that "a lot of [British] management training is theoretical and irrelevant" as opposed to the American and German education systems where exposure to the working world is "hard-wired". The creation and approval of the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeships addressed this point directly. Along with other degree apprenticeships, the master's degree allows for a single qualification, integrated into the workplace, that assesses both 'knowledge' and 'competence'.

In the face of such economic constraints there is no doubt that the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship helps tackle the UK's accidental managers. The programme is designed specifically as an apprenticeship in order to ensure integration between the practical and the theoretical learning, with the best provision tailoring learning to individual contexts, providing effective learner support, and co-ordinating quality assurance and assessment. Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeships can have 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. Paragon Skills (2020) in its report takes its results from a YouGov survey of 500 HR decision makers and find that half of all employers think employees put most value on professionally recognised management qualifications. Yes, CMDA and SLDA are mitigating skills gaps in management and leadership in big, levy-contributing organisations for existing staff, many of whom (but not exclusively) will have worked there for a while but they are creating new routes into higher-level work, and acting as a vehicle for upskilling (UUK, 2019) – just as the policy intended and as the OfS describes.

Who benefits?

CMI (2020) seeks to clarify who benefits from the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship and 'Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship'. In their view it is regional businesses and organisations who are now gaining the skills and knowledge to improve their practices and processes and realising access to areas of higher study that many of their employees were not previously able to reach. Its recent analysis of available data shows that these organisations are widening participation, levelling-up regional skills, and boosting productivity. Of those Senior Leader apprentices where the sector can be identified, 52% work in the public sector and only 7% are employed in FTSE 350 companies. 70% of CMI apprentices are in regions with lower than average UK productivity levels, whilst

40% are located in the 4 regions of England ONS identify as having the lowest levels of productivity. 48% are female. Far from being “city fat cats earning high incomes” apprentices are from a wide range of roles and sectors, from SMEs and from within the NHS.

The current Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship is used extensively by public sector employees. Many public sector employees, it can be assumed, do not have the opportunity (given income and savings) to undertake a training/study programme incorporating a master’s degree. Public sector employers also do not tend to have the resources to fund their employees to undertake such programmes. Removal of the qualification prevents an organisation such as the NHS from spending its apprenticeship levy on a training programme where the international benchmark for management is an MA, MSc or MBA. The result could be the creation of a two-tiered market, where MBAs with international recognition and status are only available to a minority, but a lower specification, status and presumably lower cost senior leader apprenticeship, provided by a limited number of providers, is available to public sector employees and those who individually can’t afford the fees of a master’s degree in business. This could well lead to a position where private sector employers can use the MBA to attract and retain talented individuals, while public sector employer are only allowed to use their levy on a lower cost and less prestigious senior leader apprenticeship.

From a public sector employer perspective there is a diversity of employees the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship has attracted. In the NHS these include clinical consultants, senior nurses, operational managers, finance managers, research managers and scientists resulting in positive impacts on patient care and the development of services. A NHS Trust concludes:

*“The NHS is under increasing pressure to deliver more services with limited funding, and with an accelerating demand for those services the transformational skills that the Senior Leader Master’s Degree Programme gives our senior managers enables them to drive a change which supports better patient care.”*

In police forces the programme is used for present, mid-career & future senior police executives in crime prevention & harm reduction. The apprenticeship is based on learning objectives agreed with the employing forces to reflect modern policing which is more complex as it responds to a range of global issues from terrorism to technology use. Indeed, policing is on the cusp of becoming a science-based profession with a greater emphasis on higher level learning for officers, with senior leaders, increasingly, requiring a master’s degree.

What is the value?

The value of the master's qualification speaks directly to this Government's levelling up agenda. The SLDA has an important role to play in diversifying the leadership pipeline and a critical role in boosting regional development, which has a knock-on effect on job creation (CMI, 2020). The Government's own productivity review highlights the vital importance of investing in leadership and management skills to tackle flatlining productivity. In this context the proposal made by many organisations and a number of politicians to restrict the ability of employers (including public sector employers) to spend on degree apprenticeships, especially in senior management roles, is questionable given it would hamper the country's efforts to address clear skills shortages in this area and reduce the quality of provision.

### **General conclusions**

Consistent with the literature there is a high level of support for degree apprenticeships, among those who are involved in them, whether as educators, employers or apprentices. Though the House of Commons Education Select Committee has called for the growth of Degree Apprenticeships to be a strategic priority (HoCEC 2018) political backing for degree apprenticeships has become more muted within the DfE and there is concern among some employers and higher education providers that the Institute is favouring non-degree higher apprenticeships over degree apprenticeships (UUK 2019). This is despite their value being illustrated for aiding public-sector recruitment, creating progression routes and supporting social mobility within the existing workforce, and contributing to recruitment and productivity in public services and economically critical industries. The degree itself is also driving a series of cultural shifts in the HE sector, in designing curricula and assessing students based on the strengths and skills required for their employment rather than university mandated learning outcomes, resulting in more progressive relationships with employers (Saville et al, 2019).

The integrity of the apprenticeship brand is not being damaged as some claim. Instead, apprenticeships are increasingly being seen as an aspirational programme in no small part *because* of degree apprenticeships. Apprenticeships have moved from being an intermediary and provider led programme with little focus on skills gaps and shortages to a high-quality employer led programme where apprenticeships are focused on the real skills needs of employers and the UK economy. More so, from their early adoption, degree apprenticeships were considered highly appropriate and strategically well aligned in business and management subject areas. In the year after their first introduction Rowe, Perrin and Wall (2016) argue that they hold promise in offering an additional opportunity for people to engage in a form of higher education which explicitly develops professional competence. More specifically, they argue that linking degree apprenticeships to professional bodies and embedding it in the national business tax system positions them as a serious business cost and investment. This success, as it has continued and matured, should be celebrated as for the first-time apprenticeships are gaining parity with academic qualifications.

What are the risks?

The determination to remove the degree from the senior leader apprenticeship risks reinforcing the academic vocational divide with the MBA being the internationally recognised standard and the apprenticeship developing as potentially a lower cost and lower status alternative. While some early degree apprenticeship programmes may have done little more than replicate a parallel training model, with the institution providing a part-time degree on a day- or block-release basis and the employer responsible for a not necessarily very well-considered work-based element, this is not the practice that now represents the very best of delivery. Effectively designed as complete packages from the ground up (Edge, 2017) the degree apprenticeship brings together and interrelates theoretical and practical learning (Lillis 2018, Bravenboer 2019). It means the degree is the crucial part of the apprenticeship standard by effectively adopting methods that are distinct from those of either classroom teaching or vocational training, and which are more informal, independent, practice-or project-oriented and collaborative (Lester et al 2016, Lillis 2018). In the context of both the Chartered Manager and Senior Leader, this work-integrated learning approach is designed to be transformative: developing experienced workers practice and creating change in the workplace. The latter emphasises aspects of learning such as reflection, analysis, critique and thinking and working 'outside the box' (Rowe, 2018) and may include the use of pedagogies such as action learning and practice-as-research (Lester et al, 2016). Without the degree, employers may not attract the talent they need or give what the learners want plus it removes their own reasons for engaging with degree apprenticeships which, though vary, include enabling staff to gain higher education qualifications, raise motivation, meet professional requirements, and enhance the reputation or credibility of the employer (Lester et al 2016, UVAC/SDN 2017).

What should be valued?

Policy makers need to value the degree and recognise that degrees are an inclusive feature of our national skills system and have a role to play in addressing skills priorities. While further education plays a fundamental role in skills provision so does higher education. Recent research that considers how far England lags behind leading nations in the design and delivery of technical education, and what reforms would be necessary in order to match their technical education offer (e.g. Policy Institute, 2020) fails to credit degree apprenticeships as having done something exceptional by creating work-integrated progression routes and providing labour market currency that are unique by global comparison. Fundamentally it fails to see the value of degree apprenticeships in raising the profile and perception of apprenticeships.

Degree apprenticeships in England now provide the potential for progression in work from craft, trade and technical job roles by developing new pathways to the professions, management and higher-level occupations. It is possible to pursue a career, reach a senior level of practice while gaining professional recognition in an apprenticeship. Prior to 2015, this was not the case in England. The Government's apprenticeship reforms and levy represent a very rare example of an English vocational educational policy success story. Government must be aware that the decisions it makes on the future of the apprenticeship

system could have significant consequences economically, for public services and socially. Levy paying employers increasingly see their levy payments as part of their training and development budget. Restrict the ability of employers to spend their levy on the occupations their organisations need, and Government could reduce employer investment on workforce development. This is the very opposite of the policy intent of the apprenticeship reforms and levy. Restrict the ability of the public sector to spend on higher-level programmes, including in leadership and management roles, and the potential of apprenticeships in England to train new nurses, police officers, social workers and managers is fundamentally undermined (UVAC, 2020).

The Chartered Manager and Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeships in the context of a policy initiative that is, by design, intended to bring economic and societal benefits are vitally important apprenticeships. In this story of success, they are likely to become more so during a time of economic recovery and renewal post-Brexit and post-Covid-19.

**UVAC, May 2020**

## References

- Anderson, A. 2019. Directing apprenticeship funding to raise organisational productivity, pp20-21 in Lemin, M. & Wright, J. (eds), *Future proofing apprenticeship funding in England for the 2020s*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: NCFE/Campaign for Learning.
- Anderson, A. 2020. The Purpose of Apprenticeships, the Rationale for the Apprenticeship Levy and the Role of Universities in Skills Provision. FE News, 23 January 2020.  
<https://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/40797-the-purpose-of-apprenticeships-the-rationale-for-the-apprenticeship-levy-and-the-role-of-universities-in-skills-provision/>, downloaded April 2020.
- Anderson, A. (2017), "To boost social mobility we need more degree apprenticeships", available at: <https://feweek.co.uk/2017/07/20/to-boost-social-mobility-we-need-more-degree-apprenticeships/>, accessed April 2020.
- Anderson, A. (2018), "Degree apprenticeships - Doesn't the IfA realise apprenticeship needs its flagship programme?", available at: <https://www.fenews.co.uk/featured-article/17437-degree-apprenticeships-doesn-t-ifateched-realise-apprenticeship-needs-its-flagship-programme>, accessed March 2020.
- APPGA (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Apprenticeships). 2019. *2018-2019 Report*. London: APPGA.
- Augar, P. (chair). 2019. *Review of Post-18 Education and Funding*. London: HMSO. CPP 117.
- BEIS. 2017. Industrial Strategy: building a Britain fit for the future  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf), downloaded March 2020.
- BIS. 2015. *The Future of Apprenticeships*. London: The Stationery Office.
- BIS. 2015a. *Government rolls-out flagship Degree Apprenticeships*,  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-rolls-out-flagship-degree-apprenticeships>, downloaded March 2020.
- Bravenboer D. 2016. Why co-design and delivery is a 'no-brainer' for higher and degree apprenticeship policy. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 6 (4) 384-400.
- Bravenboer, D. 2019. The creative disruption of degree apprenticeships in the UK, pp57-83 in Talbot, J. (ed.), *Global Perspectives on Work-based Learning Initiatives*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Bravenboer, D. and Lester, S. 2016. Towards an Integrated Approach to the Recognition of Professional Competence and Academic Learning. *Education + Training* 58 (4), 409-421.

Bravenboer, D. and Workman, B. 2016. Developing a Transdisciplinary Work-Based Learning Curriculum: A Model for Recognising Learning from Work, in Keppell, M., Reushle, S., and Antonio, A. (eds.). 2016. *Open Learning and Formal Credentialing in Higher Education: Curriculum Models and Institutional Policies*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Burke, J. 2018. In pursuit of parity: degree apprenticeships expand into the Russell Group. FE Week, 23 April. <https://feweek.co.uk/2018/09/28/in-pursuit-of-parity-degree-apprenticeships-expand-into-the-russell-group/>, accessed April 2020.

Chartered Management Institute (CMI). 2020. CMI Statement on FE Week Article. <https://www.managers.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/cmi-press-releases/cmi-statement-on-fe-week-article>, downloaded April 2020.

CMI. (2020). Management Apprenticeships Boost Productivity. <https://www.managers.org.uk/~media/Files/PDF/policies/management-apprenticeships-boost-productivity.pdf>, downloaded April 2020.

Crawford-Lee, M. & Wall, T. 2018. Sustainability 2030: a policy perspective from the university vocational awards council. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning* 8 (3), 233-242.

Crawford-Lee, M. & Moorwood, S. 2019. Degree apprenticeships: delivering quality and social mobility. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning* (2), 134-140.

Dadze-Arthur, A., Mörth, A., & Cendon, E. 2020. International Trailblazers: Work-Based Higher Education in Selected Higher Education Institutions in the US, England and Denmark - Results of an International Case Study Research Project. Bonn: Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

Dawe, M. 2019. Apprenticeship funding: hard choices, even harder decisions, pp22-23 in Lemin, M. & Wright, J. (eds), *Future proofing apprenticeship funding in England for the 2020s*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: NCFE/Campaign for Learning.

DfE (Department for Education). 2018. *International comparison of courses in hairdressing and barbering*. London: House of Commons Library

DfE/National Statistics (2019) *Further Education and Skills, England: 2018/19 academic year*. National Statistics.

Engeli, A. & Turner, D. 2019. *Degree Apprenticeships motivations research*. Cardiff: Wavehill Social & Economic Research.

Evans, S. & Dromey, J. 2019. Bridging the gap: next steps for the apprenticeship levy. Leicester: Learning and Work Institute

Financial Times (FT). 2018. The UK's productivity problem: the curse of the 'accidental' manager. <https://www.ft.com/content/b96ce8f2-5dd9-11e8-ad91-e01af256df68>, accessed April 2020.

Gravatt, J. 2019. Apprenticeship funding in England: a busted programme budget, pp9-10 in Lemin, M. & Wright, J. (eds), *Future proofing apprenticeship funding in England for the 2020s*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: NCFE/Campaign for Learning.

HoCEC (House of Commons Education Committee). 2018. *The apprenticeships ladder of opportunity: quality not quantity*. London: House of Commons. HC344.

Hughes, C. & Saieva, G. (2019). Degree apprenticeships: an opportunity for all? *Higher Education, Skills and Work Based Learning*. 9 (2), 225-236.

IfATE. (2020). Consultation on L7 Senior Leader Occupational Standard. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/reviews-and-consultations/consultations/consultation-on-l7-senior-leader-occupational-standard/>, accessed April 2020.

Industrial Strategy Council, (2019) *UK Skills Mismatch in 2030*. <https://industrialstrategycouncil.org/sites/default/files/UK%20Skills%20Mismatch%202030%20-%20Research%20Paper.pdf>, downloaded April 2020.

Learning and Work Institute. (2020).

Lester, S., Bravenboer, D. & Webb, N. 2016. *Work-integrated degrees: context, engagement, practice and quality*. Gloucester: QAA.

Lillis, F. 2018. *Best practice in work-integrated learning for degree apprenticeships*. London: Middlesex University.

Linford, N. 2020. 'Coupland: Public funding for management apprenticeships is perfectly legitimate'. FE Week, 31 January 2020. <https://feweek.co.uk/2020/01/31/coupland-public-funding-for-management-apprenticeships-is-perfectly-legitimate/>, downloaded April 2020.

OfS (Office for Students). 2019. *Degree Apprenticeships: a viable alternative?* Bristol: OfS.

Paragon Skills. 2020. Taking No Chances. Why employers think targeted training is the answer to accidental management. <https://paragonskills.co.uk/media/3430/taking-no-chances-pr-report-2020-re.pdf>, downloaded April 2020.

Robinson, D., & Dominguez-Reig, G. 2020. An international comparison of technical education funding systems. What can England learn from successful countries? London: Education Policy Institute [https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EPI-Tech\\_ed\\_funding\\_2020.pdf](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EPI-Tech_ed_funding_2020.pdf), downloaded April 2020.

Richard, D. 2012. *The Richard Review of Apprenticeships*. London: School for Startups.



Richmond, T. 2020. *Runaway training: why the apprenticeship levy is broken and how to fix it*. London: EDSK.

Roberts, A., Storm, M. & Flynn, S. 2019. Workplace mentoring of degree apprentices: developing principles for practice. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning* 9 (2), 211-224.

Rowe, L., Perrin, D. & Wall, T. 2016. "The Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship: trials and tribulations". *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning* 6 (4), 357-369.

Rowe, L. 2018. Managing degree apprenticeships through a work-based learning framework: opportunities and challenges, pp51-69 in Morley, D. (ed) *Enhancing employability in higher education through work-based learning*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sainsbury, D. (chair). 2016. *Report of the independent panel on technical education*. London: The National Archives.

Saville, K-M., Birdi, G., Hayes, S., Higson, S. & Eperjesi, F. (2019) Using strengths-based approaches to fulfil academic potential in degree apprenticeships. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning* DOI 10.1108/HESWBL-02-2019-0024.

The Edge Foundation. 2017. *Our plan for Higher Education*. London: The Edge Foundation.

The Higher Education Commission. 2019. *Degree Apprenticeships: Up to Standard?* London: Policy Connect.

The Times. 2019. *British Productivity Held Back by Managers*. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/british-productivity-held-back-by-managers-lloyds-bank-survey-shows-lcbsd2bqb>, downloaded April 2020

UUK (Universities UK). 2019. *The future of degree apprenticeships*. London: UUK.

UVAC/SDN (University Vocational Awards Council/Strategic Development Network). 2017. *Reflections and lessons from the apprenticeship journey: case-studies from HE apprenticeship delivery*. Bolton: UVAC.

UVAC (University Vocational Awards Council). 2020. *Let's Take off the Blinkers and Celebrate the Success of the Apprenticeship Levy and Reforms...* Bolton: UVAC

UVAC. 2020. *Blueprint for a Financially Sustainable Apprenticeship and Skills System – UVAC Opinion*. <https://uvac.ac.uk/blueprint-for-a-financially-sustainable-apprenticeship-and-skills-system-uvac-opinion/>, accessed April 2020

WECD (Warwick Economics and Development). 2019. *Evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund: report to the Office of Students*. Birmingham: WECD.

## Further Reading

- Emsi/UVAC. 2018. The Drivers, Opportunities and Benefits of Degree Apprenticeships. [https://uvac.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UVAC20Report\\_vWEB.pdf](https://uvac.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UVAC20Report_vWEB.pdf), downloaded April 2020
- Felce, A. 2019. Managing the quality of HE in apprenticeships. *Higher Education, Skills and Work Based Learning* 9 (2), 141-148.
- HoCEC (House of Commons Education Committee). 2018. *The apprenticeships ladder of opportunity: quality not quantity*. London: House of Commons. HC344.
- Kuczera, M. & Field, S. 2018. *Apprenticeships in England*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Major, D., Meakin, D. and Perrin, D. 2011. "Building the Capacity of Higher Education to Deliver Programmes of Work-Based Learning". *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning* 1 (2), 118-127.
- Minton, A. & Lowe, J. 2019. How are universities supporting employers to facilitate effective 'on the job' learning for apprentices? *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning* 9 (2), 200-210.
- McKnight, S. and Birks, F. 2016. "Growing Your Own Graduates Through Degree Apprenticeships: A Case Study of Collaboration between the University of Winchester and CGI", pp. 77-93 in Way, D. (ed.) *A Race to the Top: Achieving Three Million More Apprenticeships by 2020*. Winchester: Winchester University Press.
- NCUB (National Centre for Universities and Business). 2018. *Degree Apprenticeships: impacts, challenges and future opportunities*. London: NCUB.
- Policy Connect/HEC (The Higher Education Commission). 2019. *Degree Apprenticeships: up to standard?* London: Policy Connect.
- QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education). 2019a. *Characteristics Statement: higher education in apprenticeships*. Gloucester: QAA.
- QAA. 2019b. *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Advice and guidance – work-based learning*. Gloucester: QAA.
- Rowe, L. 2018. Managing degree apprenticeships through a work-based learning framework: opportunities and challenges, pp51-69 in Morley, D. (ed) *Enhancing employability in higher education through work-based learning*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saraswat, A. 2016. Higher apprenticeships and the new apprenticeship standards: perceived potential and limitations. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 6 (4), 401-416.
- UUK (Universities UK). 2016. *The future growth of degree apprenticeships*. London: UUK.