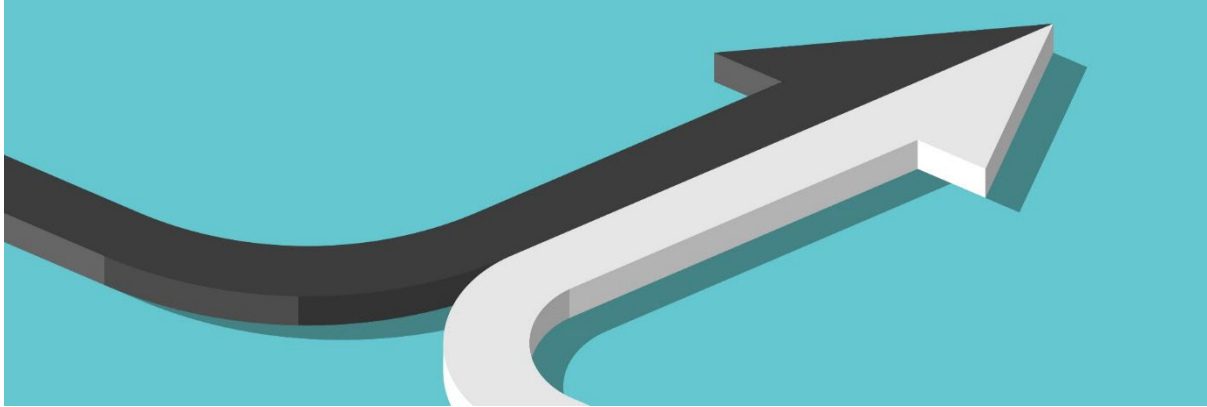


Incorporating Apprenticeships into Higher Technical Classroom-Based Provision through HE and FE Partnership

3-minute read



Key contact

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Overview

In this case study, Brendan Coulson reflects on how working in partnership with a local FE College, has enabled Nottingham Trent University (NTU) to enrich one of their existing higher technical courses by teaching fee-paying students alongside apprentices. This pilot project has resulted in a rich and diverse learning community where students from different backgrounds and with a range of experiences and skills have opportunities to learn with and from one another.

One learning community – with benefits for everyone.

For the last two years NTU has piloted the creation of one teaching cohort from students registered on NTU's suite of Higher National Certificates and Diplomas in Engineering (which will be offered as HTQs from 2024/25) and apprentices studying Level 4 Engineering Manufacturing with a partner college. Around fifty percent of the cohort are fee-paying full and part-time students, with the other half registered as apprentices.

While this partnership was enabled by the fact that Higher National qualifications in Engineering are a mandatory part of the apprenticeship, the two cohorts could easily have been taught separately at their respective institutions. But as a partnership both institutions could see the benefit of creating an integrated learning community comprising of both classroom-based students and apprentices. This not only has educational benefits for teachers and learners, but additionally offered a cost-effective approach to building a knowledge-rich technical education offer. Given the generally low uptake of Level 4 and 5 qualifications at present, without the additional apprentice numbers, NTU could easily have been left with financially unviable courses.

[NTU and West Nottinghamshire College agreed to form a partnership to improve the post 16 educational outcomes in Mansfield and Ashfield.](#) It was through this that both institutions agreed to collaborate not compete: NTU would run the HNC/D suite of engineering qualifications and the College would offer the apprenticeship in Engineering Manufacturing. This has created a strong and aligned local offer, which offers students and local employers a range of learning options.

Making it happen – with added value

Step one involved NTU agreeing to become a sub-contractor to the College. This subverted the practices and arrangements that NTU were used to working with; there is a tendency to assume that the University will be the lead contractor in any HE and FE partnership activity. To ensure this progressed smoothly, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two educational establishments was agreed which set out the arrangement that NTU would lead and offer the classroom-based provision, and the College would lead and offer the apprenticeship provision.

While discussing and agreeing this MoU the institutions took the opportunity to add further value for the region, students and employers. This included:

- work to set out and increase progression opportunities from the College to the University;
- an agreement that NTU will support the enhancement of teaching and learning at Level 3 within the college
- a commitment to work together on employer engagement in education within the region to ensure that clear pathways of learning can be linked with employer skill gaps.

In taking these steps, the institutions have created a one-stop shop for engineering companies to access education and training in the city region.

Outcomes and next steps

It's early days, but so far, the data looks promising with more than 90% retention and achievement for both the College's apprenticeship and the University's HN Engineering courses to-date. NTU and the College have also seen a substantial increase in both student satisfaction and 'rate my apprenticeship' results. This partnership has actively closed some of the perceived and real divides between vocational and academic courses and has increased employer engagement across the partnership. And when the finance director comes to call, NTU and the College can show a financial return on investment for both courses.

NTU are continuing to work with the College and other FE providers to create similar partnerships and provision. NTU's general starting point is to remove competition with local FE providers - not by taking over as might have been the case in the past - but through genuine multi-beneficial partnerships that have positive outcomes for prospective and current students and for local employers.