

This document forms our written submission to the Apprenticeships Inquiry of the Commons Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy. An annex containing University Alliance case studies is included.

Summary of key points

- The 'skills gap' can only be addressed through a blend of provision, which includes high-quality apprenticeships at all levels, alongside improvements to the support structures for part-time and mature degree provision
- The apprenticeship levy illustrates that employers, as beneficiaries of the skills supply, should also contribute towards the costs and is likely to stimulate engagement.
- It is important that funding and regulation for apprenticeships is simplified. Many universities find it cumbersome to engage with both HEFCE and the Skills Funding Agency simultaneously.
- Universities and colleges have experience of turning standards into curricula and designing assessment models that employers typically do not have. This expertise needs to be exploited at an early stage.
- Moves to ensure information, advice and guidance in schools promotes vocational options alongside traditional A-levels are welcome.
- Many degree apprenticeships are competitive and require high tariff points. This means some individuals who might be attracted to a degree apprenticeship will also be looking at non-degree apprenticeships. It would be helpful if the application process allowed for "back up" options.
- The current system is not providing clear progression opportunities from lower- to higher-level apprentices. Clear roadmaps and progression frameworks need to be developed.
- If apprenticeships are to become an alternative route to higher qualifications and skills then parity of esteem must be established through the expansion of high-quality, well-respected provision. Universities have a key part to play in this.

The target of three million apprentices by 2020, how the Government proposes to achieve this and how this may affect the 'skills gap'

1. University Alliance welcomes the push to increase the number of apprentices and we are keen to contribute to achieving this target. Our universities have a long tradition of combining vocational and academic learning to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills required to be successful throughout their lifetime.
2. We believe that the 'skills gap' can only be addressed through a blend of provision, which includes high-quality apprenticeships at all levels, alongside improvements to the support structures for part-time and mature degree provision.

3. As business-facing universities we already work closely with large, international businesses and SMEs in our cities and regions. Over 43 per cent of all sandwich courses are delivered by Alliance universities¹ and 37 per cent of our courses are accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.²
4. With these connections and relationships Alliance universities are well-placed to respond to new opportunities and to take the lead in developing new types of curricula and practice-embedded courses. We have already taken an active lead in developing higher apprenticeships, particularly in areas where industries are reporting skills gaps. For example, University of Greenwich works with Ford on a higher apprenticeship designed to meet specific skills gaps in mechanical/electrical engineering practices or IT.
5. A number of our universities, including Greenwich and Coventry, were the first providers to be selected to take part in the government's Trailblazer programme and they are delivering high quality degree apprenticeships in subject areas closely linked to the needs of the economy. For example, Manchester Metropolitan University is one of just five universities which have started the first degree apprenticeship in Digital & Technology Solutions, a sector that is estimated to require 750,000 skilled digital workers by 2017.³

The proposal for an apprenticeships levy and how this may be implemented

6. We believe that the apprenticeship levy is likely to achieve its goal of stimulating engagement from employers. It helps to illustrate that employers, as large beneficiaries of the skills supply, should also contribute towards the costs.
7. However, it is important that funding and regulation for degree and higher apprenticeships is simplified. Many universities find it cumbersome to engage with both HEFCE and the Skills Funding Agency simultaneously. It is worth ensuring as well that the increased emphasis on the apprenticeship model is not at the expense of other technical and vocational provision within universities and colleges. Government should also think about how it can incentivise employers to engage more with these institutions.

The institutional architecture of current provision and how this may be affected by the proposed Institute for Apprenticeships

8. Although we agree that the apprenticeships programme should be led by employers, it is important that the institutional architecture includes providers as well as employers. Universities and colleges have experience of turning

¹ HESA, Student Numbers, 2013/14

² Key Information Statistics, 2013/2014

³ NCUB, Mind the Skills Gap, 2015

standards into curricula and of designing assessment models that employers typically do not have. The programme is likely to be developed and implemented more successfully if this expertise is exploited at early stages.

Take-up of apprenticeships amongst 16–19 year olds and steps that can be taken to make more young people aware of available opportunities

9. Reports have suggested that current arrangements for career guidance for young people are inadequate. Research by Ofsted in 2013 found that 75 per cent of schools were not providing effective and impartial careers advice and that vocational training opportunities and apprenticeships were rarely promoted.⁴ This has since been reiterated, with 77 per cent of UK businesses reporting that the quality of careers advice is not sufficient to help school leavers make informed decisions.⁵
10. University Alliance welcomes the government's moves to ensure schools promote vocational options alongside traditional A-levels. We hope this will ensure that information, advice and guidance (IAG) in schools clearly signposts and promotes understanding of the full range of options available including work-based opportunities. We would also welcome moves to introduce targeted IAG, aimed at the workplace, for those already in employment. This should include government conducting more work with employers to help them value the full-range of graduates – to recognise that people who have studied through non-traditional, or on work-based courses and part-time routes bring particular, often unique skills.

The process of applying for apprenticeships

11. Some students will be choosing between a traditional degree and a degree apprenticeship. However, many degree apprenticeships are extremely competitive and require high tariff points so some individuals who might be attracted to a degree apprenticeship will also be looking at non-degree apprenticeships. It would be helpful if the process for applying for higher and degree apprenticeships recognised and allowed for “back up” options.

Routes for progression to higher qualifications for current apprentices

12. Providing opportunities for current workers to upskill and gain higher qualifications is vital in order to meet this demand and enable businesses to increase productivity, exploit new technologies and innovation and remain competitive in the global economy.⁶

⁴ Ofsted, Careers guidance in schools: Going in the right direction?, 2013

⁵ CBI and Pearson, Education and Skills Survey, 2015

⁶ UKCES, Climbing the ladder: Skills for sustainable recovery, 2014

13. The current system is not providing clear progression opportunities from lower- to higher-level apprentices, preventing apprentices from advancing up the ladder and gaining higher qualifications and skills.⁷ Developing clear roadmaps and progression frameworks for these students, and ensuring these routes are well understood and signposted, will be important to help close the 'skills gap' and enable apprentices to advance in their careers.
14. Clear progression routes require strong partnerships between employers and further and higher education institutions. Although many institutions have developed these relationships, local and national government could help to incentivise partnerships by encouraging more employers to work with their local university. This could be through acting as coordinators and bringing together the right partners to meet region's needs or by providing seed funding to incentivise partners to work together and improve educational provision. Universities must also work to make it easy for employers to engage through clear signposting for enquiries.
15. Another approach to help current workers to upskill and gain higher qualifications is to support growth in part-time higher and partnerships with different parts of the education sector. This could be encouraged through:
 - Assisting and incentivising greater joined up working between different parts of the education sector and looking at issues around confusing and contrasting funding streams (for example, the split of SFA/HEFCE funding) which might contribute to providers failing to offer part-time study that is sufficiently attractive to students
 - Looking at widening the number of equivalent and lower qualifications that are eligible for funding to include, for example, management and the arts, in order to ensure study options continue to be relevant to changing economic opportunities.
 - Stimulating employer support for part time study, to enable employers to easily and confidently invest in skills for staff.

The quality of, and minimum standards for, apprenticeships, and how standards can be enforced

16. We must ensure that the drive to create more apprenticeships is not at the expense of quality. Recent reports have found worryingly high numbers of weak, low quality training which does not develop new skills.⁸
17. If apprenticeships are to be developed as an alternative route into higher qualifications and skills then parity of esteem must be established through the expansion of high quality, well-respected provision. They must deliver

⁷ BIS, Progression of Apprentices to Higher Education, 2013

⁸ Ofsted, Apprenticeships: developing skills for future prosperity, 2015

transferable skills at an equal level to other qualifications – for example critical thinking, team working, resilience, communication and time management.

18. Universities must play a key part in ensuring the quality of apprenticeships. In particular, they have the expertise and the resources to design assessment that ensure training is robust. Universities should be more actively engaged in the development of apprenticeships policy.
19. Examples of good practice should be highlighted and advertised in order to encourage new and similarly high quality provision to develop.

Annex: Case Studies

1. Apprenticeships

Manchester Metropolitan University

Through the Higher Level Apprenticeship model, MMU has offered a long-distance work-based learning route for chemical scientists since 2012. Trainee scientists gain a foundation degree at the end of three years while developing specialist and generic skills for employment in chemical industries. Among MMU's industrial partners is pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline. Students undertake work based learning and complete their academic education online with a residential week at MMU in each of the three years of study. The scheme is characterised by a strong working relationship with staff in industry and has the support of Cogent, the Sector Skills Council for the chemical, pharmaceutical, nuclear, life science, petroleum and polymer industries.

University of Greenwich

Greenwich has offered workplace-based learning with degree apprenticeship-like characteristics for many years. It currently has 300 part time students studying on day release courses fully funded by their employers. The university has a commitment to CPD and embedding degree studies into practical study and industry. For example, it has developed a suite of programmes for the Royal School of Military Engineering including a Foundation Degree to sit alongside intensive work based training.

The curriculum was designed in a way that it would mesh seamlessly with the work students were undertaking in the army. Greenwich is also working with Ford on the delivery of a degree apprenticeship. This is designed to meet specific skills gaps identified at Ford and aimed at candidates who are interested in mechanical / electrical engineering practices or IT. The degree elements of the programme will be delivered at the University of Greenwich one day per week and supplementary learning and work-based projects will be undertaken as part of students' training placements, with learning a full time blend of on- and off-site provisions.

University of Salford

Salford's employer-led, full degree level apprenticeship programme combines academic knowledge and theory with work-based learning and skills. The Broadcast Engineering degree was developed in collaboration with the University of Salford and the BBC to address the shortage of modern multi-skilled broadcast engineers identified during the London 2012 Olympics. The industry employers involved in the scheme today include the BBC, ITV, BT, Arqiva, Red Bee Media, C4 and IABM. The work-based learning that is undertaken by the BBC has led to successful accreditation by the Institute of Electrical Technicians (IET). This further enhances the students' employability credentials and facilitates career progression throughout the industry.

Sheffield Hallam University

Higher and Degree apprenticeships offered at SHU include engineering, business and management, facilities management and construction, with programmes starting in September 2015. One example is the Nestlé Academy Fast Start programme.

Apprentices study for three years to gain a BA (Hons) degree in Professional Business Practice at SHU with placements in a number of business functions. Nestlé pays course fees, as well as costs for accommodation, meals and travel while apprentices are studying in Sheffield. Apprentices are also on a £16K-£17K salary.

2. *Other work-based learning*

Coventry University

Supported in part by HEFCE catalyst funding, Coventry University has developed a 'faculty on the factory floor' model in partnership with the Unipart Group, a leading provider of manufacturing, logistics and consultancy services. The model develops manufacturing engineers at degree, postgraduate and doctoral level. Students spend three days a week in a bespoke building on the Unipart site. Unipart has jointly developed the curriculum and believes the model extends the Unipart supply chain as well as the company itself. The Engineering Institutions accredit the awards.

Liverpool John Moores University

LJMU has a rapidly developing partnership with Barclays UK's Strategic Centre of Excellence based in nearby Cheshire. This relationship has led to the development of a new Barclays Graduate Training Programme and a new Pre-Placement Programme for work placement students at Barclays UK. LJMU also collaborates with Barclays on school outreach activities and is looking to develop the relationship further through apprenticeship routes and research collaborations.

Oxford Brookes University

Oxford Brookes University in partnership with BMW offers foundation degrees in Electronic Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. With significant input from the car manufacturer, the university has developed a practice-embedded curriculum as part of BMW's apprenticeship scheme. Aspects of the course are delivered through local college partners and it is accredited by the Institute of Mechanical Engineers and the Institute of Engineering and Technology. Oxford Brookes University also supports a University Technical College (UTC) in Swindon, which has over 90 local and national business partners. The UTC's curriculum is being shaped by the needs of these businesses, with involvement from the Institute of Engineering and Technology and the region's Local Enterprise Partnership. Oxford Brookes is launching a mechanical Engineering Foundation Degree and Top degree at Swindon College to create a clear progression route from the UTC.

Sheffield Hallam University

The AMRC Training Centre based at the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) at the University of Sheffield provides advanced apprenticeship and degree-level training for companies in the advanced manufacturing sectors. It provides opportunities for school-leavers to complete an employed-status advanced manufacturing apprenticeship. It has links with both the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University, providing apprentices with a clear progression pathway to study for higher-level qualifications up to doctorate and MBA level in Engineering and Mechanical Engineering.

In 2014-15 the Centre trained 410 first and second year apprentices, aged 16 and above, and at full capacity it will train 750 apprentices per year. Apprentices split their time between the AMRC Training Centre and employers in the Sheffield city region, including Tata Steel, Rolls-Royce, Sheffield Forgemasters, AESSEAL, MTL Group and Newburgh Engineering and the AMRC Group. From 2015, a programme (supported by the merchant bankers Close Brothers and the Manufacturing Technologies Association (MTA)) will co-fund the wages of 20 apprentices a year employed at SMEs who will then be trained by the AMRC Training Centre. The AMRC also offers CPD programmes, including an apprentice mentoring programme to help companies that are new to taking on apprentices or who wish to refresh their mentoring skills

University of South Wales

Experts from the university's School of Law, Accounting and Finance are currently delivering a Financial Services Graduate programme for a consortium of five of Wales' biggest Financial Services companies: Atradius, Admiral, Composite Legal, GMAC Financial Services and Principality. The project is the first of its kind for the financial services sector in Wales and arose directly from the University's ambition to deliver financial services at undergraduate, postgraduate and professional level - both to produce industry-ready graduates and to up-skill the existing industry workforce.

The strategy was developed in response to the Welsh government's aims of increasing employment in the Welsh financial services industry, retaining talented graduates and attracting new financial services firms to Wales. Every student undertakes four six-month long placements in a selection of the companies alongside completing the MSc in Financial Services Management. The programme sees employers taking a more cohesive approach to training and recruiting potential employees and is an excellent example of collaboration between the private, public and higher education sector.

University of the West of England (UWE)

The FdSc Healthcare Science degree is part of the university's extensive Healthcare and Biomedical science provision and is designed to provide the principal training route for Healthcare Science Associates. Responding to employer demand the course is delivered through a unique collaboration between the University of the West of England, Cogent, the Skills Council for science based industry, and local NHS providers within the south-west region.

Students on the programme are employed as trainee Healthcare Science Associates in pathology laboratories, clinical physiology departments or community health centres and undertake the foundation degree as part of their training.

The degree programme enables students to develop the knowledge and skills required of a healthcare scientist whilst also completing the extensive work-based training that forms an integral and significant proportion of the course, and to demonstrate specified standards of practice.

UWE also has a number of apprenticeship developments in the pipeline. This includes discussions with local colleges to set up provision in engineering, electronics and computing, working with the TechPartnership to develop an IT/Computing

Apprenticeship for 2016 and working with the Chartered Institute of Builders and the trailblazer development group on apprenticeship standards for construction skills, among others.