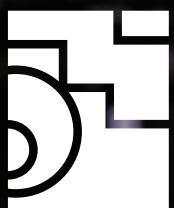


THE FUTURE OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

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Universities UK

VISION

Our vision for a successful degree apprenticeship system is one that:

- strongly underpins and complements the Industrial Strategy
- is employer-led
- delivers on the need for more higher level skills and apprenticeships
- makes the most of opportunities to widen participation and support lifelong learning
- builds upon, enhances and celebrates effective university– employer collaboration
- embeds degree apprenticeships as mainstream higher education provision of equal status and standing as existing higher education provision
- ensures sustainable funding levels for high-quality apprenticeships
- adopts a rigorous approach to reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and costs

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FOREWORD

Since the introduction of degree apprenticeships in England in 2015, universities and employers have enthusiastically embraced this new and exciting opportunity to both supercharge skills development and transform partnerships and collaboration.

The vast majority of universities in England are now registered to provide apprenticeships, and there is a strong pipeline of higher level standards in development to add to those that have already been approved.

Universities and employers have invested considerable time, energy and resources to ensure the success of degree apprenticeships and we are seeing the first degree apprentices graduate with impressive results. The apprentices combine developing their workplace and occupational skills with studying for their degree, which has been designed with employers to complement their role. This makes degree apprentices very employable. Universities have very quickly embedded degree apprenticeships into their provision, but have also had their approaches to employer engagement and flexible, innovative delivery enhanced by the experience.

Degree apprenticeships provide an opportunity for employers to work closely with universities to develop high-quality programmes that meet key skills needs, fill occupations that are experiencing shortages and deliver them in an innovative and flexible way. They provide opportunities for employers to recruit talented staff with potential, and to develop and upskill existing staff. Degree apprenticeships are also an ideal opportunity for employers and universities to consider how they can recruit a more diverse workforce and extend employment opportunities.

Universities UK (UUK) is an enthusiastic supporter of degree apprenticeships and has sought the views of trailblazers, employers, universities, and prospective apprentices and their parents to both highlight the positive impact and potential of degree apprenticeships and to consider where more needs to be done to make them an even bigger success. There is clear support for an employer-led system with strong partnerships with universities, but more needs to be done to make this a reality.

THE REPORT'S FOUR MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- Government should lead a campaign to promote the benefits of degree apprenticeships to employers and the public, including better careers information and guidance at an earlier age in schools, and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) should make the application system for degree apprenticeships as straightforward as it is for undergraduate degrees.
- Government should invest in initiatives to support social mobility, lifelong learning, and growth in degree apprenticeships among underrepresented groups.
- The system should develop to meet current and future demand for higher level skills in areas such as digital technology, management, and public services, to boost regional economies.
- Make it easier for employers to include a degree within their apprenticeships where they see it adding value to their business and to their apprentices, and streamline processes and reduce unnecessary costs in the system.

If we are to meet the significant demand for high-level skills in the economy, then government, its agencies, employers and universities cannot sit still. This report sets out how these actors can collectively ensure the success of degree apprenticeships.

We look forward to working in partnership to deliver these changes. My thanks go to all of the trailblazers, employers and universities that contributed evidence, National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) for the excellent research it conducted, the members of the Sounding Board for their advice and UUK for supporting this work. I invite you to support our vision and recommendations for the future success of degree apprenticeships.

PROFESSOR QUINTIN MCKELLAR CBE,

Chair, Sounding Board;

Vice-Chancellor, University of Hertfordshire

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Degree apprenticeships are a growing success story. The number of people starting a degree apprenticeship is rapidly increasing, the range of standards is broadening and the first degree apprentices have recently graduated.

Universities, working with employers, are successfully contributing to the government's strategic aim of increasing the number of degree apprenticeships.

The apprenticeship levy is a UK-wide policy and apprenticeships are developing in different ways in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are new graduate apprenticeships in Scotland and higher and degree apprenticeships in Wales. This report focuses on the development of degree apprenticeships in England.

THERE ARE MANY BENEFITS THAT DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS DELIVER.

- Apprentices are positive about the opportunities that degree apprenticeships provide for gaining a degree, and often a professional qualification as well, while they are learning and earning in the workplace.
- Employers are positive about the contribution apprentices make to their organisations and the opportunity it gives them to address key skills shortages, enhance opportunities for their own employees, and to widen the talent pool of their recruits.
- Universities are positive about the stronger relationships that they have been able to build with employers, the enhanced opportunities for success and progression they can provide for their apprentices, and the innovation they have promoted in teaching and learning.

The development of degree apprenticeships has attracted controversy. The employer-driven shift in the balance of apprentices to higher levels could impact upon resources available for other provision. As degree apprenticeships are longer than most apprenticeships and employers expect a certain level of quality, they are often in higher funding bands. Questions have been raised about the value of leadership and management apprenticeships, the inclusion of the degree, the offer of opportunities to existing employees, and the quality of degree apprenticeship provision.

We see a bright future for degree apprentices, but we need to listen to and consider these and other questions. As part of a consideration of the value and future of degree apprenticeships, we decided to seek the views of employers, the people and organisations that are in the driving seat of the apprenticeship system. We also sought the views of potential apprentices and their parents. Finally, we sought the views of universities that have invested so much in the development of degree apprenticeships. The key themes in the report start with strong support for an employer-led system.

An employer-led system

Employers have signalled their enthusiasm and demand for higher level apprenticeships through the increasing proportion of standards either approved or in the pipeline at this level. UUK fully supports an employer-led system. Employers are best placed to know what skills they need, at what level and the quality of provision required.

Addressing skills shortages and enhancing productivity

The Industrial Strategy, and the developing local industrial strategies and sector deals, clearly identify the need to address the UK productivity gap, the increasing demand for higher level skills, the need to support key sectors for future growth, and the challenge of upskilling and reskilling the workforce. Driven by employer demand, the key skills needs that are addressed by degree apprenticeships include:

- leadership and management, vital to enhancing productivity
- digital skills, which are in huge demand
- engineering, which experiences significant skills shortages
- public sector employment, such as nursing, social work and policing, which are all areas of skills shortages and occupations essential to the nation's safety and well-being

The link between apprenticeship policy and the Industrial Strategy needs to be strengthened to ensure this provision in key sectors can flourish. Encouraging more development of level 4 and level 5 apprenticeships and progression pathways could offer employers and apprentices more flexibility. We also need to make sure that all employers can benefit from degree apprenticeships (especially smaller non-levy-paying employers) and address the 'cold spots' of provision caused by the funding of these employers.

Value of the degree

Our evidence shows that employers greatly value degree apprenticeships, especially the significant benefits gained from incorporating a degree. For employers, the degree:

- gives apprentices equal status in the labour market alongside graduates
- gives apprentices an internationally recognised qualification
- helps attract apprentices
- helps employers recognise the value of hiring the apprentice
- reassures employers about the quality of the provision through having university involvement,
- helps provide parity of esteem
- provides apprentices with important knowledge and skills, including transferable skills

The process for including a Degree in an apprenticeship needs to be more responsive to the needs of employers.

Increasing opportunities, diversifying the workforce

Degree apprenticeships provide significant opportunities for employers to diversify their workforce, increasing the opportunities available to young people and the workforce and widening employers' talent pools. The report includes some excellent examples of how, when employers are committed, degree apprenticeships can significantly increase opportunities and grow a more diverse talent pool.

The strength of employer commitment in the response to our project is testament to this potential. As a priority going forward, the government, employers and universities need to find concrete ways of translating this potential into reality, such as the pre-apprenticeship programme developed by the Co-op. This should be the next transformative impact of degree apprenticeships supported by targeted government funding.

Better information, advice and guidance

Our research with prospective apprentices and their parents demonstrated the significant lack of information and understanding about degree apprenticeships and the fact that there is still work to do to ensure that they are seen as an equal and valuable alternative alongside a mainstream university course. This reinforces the value of having the degree as part of the apprenticeship.

Once degree apprenticeships are explained, the interest and enthusiasm of both students and parents grow significantly. Concerns remain, however, about whether apprenticeships involve too narrow a career choice too early on, and whether they lack the support and wider experiences and opportunities that going to university full time entails. Students clearly wanted more information and advised us on how they want that information: through social media using current apprentices. There is a clear need for all parties to work together to improve information, advice and guidance.

Streamlining systems

Given the commitment from the government, the investment and enthusiasm of employers and universities, and the considerable interest from students and parents, it is a priority to ensure effective, efficient and supportive systems to underpin the development and provision of degree apprenticeships.

Employers and universities have overwhelmingly signalled to us that improvements could be made to the:

- standards development process
- processes and decisions around funding bands
- processes and decisions around mandatory qualifications
- range and breadth of additional processes and requirements

Alongside these processes, universities have needed to step up to enhance their communication with employers, the innovation in their curriculum and their teaching and learning methods: and they could be doing more. A combined effort is needed between government, its agencies, employers and universities to simplify and streamline processes, reduce costs to all and seek improvements.

Quality

The degree enhances the apprenticeship brand because the UK's universities have a longstanding and internationally recognised reputation for the quality of the education that they provide. This has been recognised by the government in both the Industrial Strategy and in the move to a more risk-based approach by the Office for Students (OfS).

University quality monitoring procedures and processes are extensive. Universities have longstanding partnerships with professional bodies, which adds significant additional assurance. The OfS has a range of interventions and sanctions available to it, and degree apprenticeships are being embedded in all of these systems. In our view, the OfS has the authority and appropriate mechanisms to become the lead body responsible for the inspection of the quality of apprenticeship provision by providers registered with the OfS.

Time to shout about the value of degree apprenticeships

The employers we spoke to, despite numerous challenges, were passionate about the value of degree apprenticeships and the opportunities that they offer. Often they, and universities, wanted us to shout about this burgeoning success story. More employers, students and employees should be made aware of these benefits through a serious and significant campaign from the government and its agencies in partnership with employers and universities. The benefits to individuals, employers, the economy and society as a whole are too great to keep the benefits of degree apprenticeships a secret.

METHODOLOGY

UUK has for many years supported university engagement with, and development of, degree apprenticeships. This has included the publication of two previous reports: *The future growth of degree apprenticeships (UUK, 2016)* and *Degree apprenticeships: realising opportunities (UUK, 2017)*.

This report has emerged from desk-based research and extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including:

13 trailblazer leads	49 employers	60+ universities
11 schools	747 students	93 parents

An expert Sounding Board

chaired by Professor Quintin Mckellar, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hertfordshire, and a range of employer and university leaders, employer bodies and partner organisations.

Most of the quotations that we gathered through our research have been anonymised.

Further information about the stakeholders that we engaged with through this research can be found in the **Annexe 1**.

¹ A total of 49 employers responded to two surveys that we ran to gather their views about degree apprenticeships. One survey was aimed at employers who are currently involved in trailblazer groups, and this received 13 employer responses. Another survey was aimed at employers that are currently offering degree apprenticeships, and this received 36 responses, of which 5 responses came from different sections of the same large multinational corporation. The majority of employer respondents pay the apprenticeship levy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An effective degree apprenticeships system:

... strongly underpins and complements the Industrial Strategy

- 1** There should be a more strategic, forward-thinking focus on developing degree apprenticeship provision in key sectors and to meet crucial skills shortages, including in leadership and management, digital technology and the public sector. Degree apprenticeships should be embedded in local industrial strategies, local skills initiatives and sector deals. (p. 14)
- 2** The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) should promote and support the flexible delivery of degree apprenticeships, the development of more level 4 and level 5 apprenticeships, and the use of more stop-on and stop-off points. (p. 23)
- 3** The Department for Education (DfE) should work in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Home Office and other relevant government departments to plan a robust, high-quality and cost-effective degree apprenticeship strategy that supports public sector workforce development and training. (p. 26)
- 4** The DfE should allow public sector employers to use the apprenticeship levy flexibly to backfill wages. (p. 26)
- 5** The DfE should place greater emphasis on supporting the collection and analysis of data to demonstrate and understand the success of degree apprenticeships, especially in relation to productivity and social mobility outcomes. (p. 40)

... is employer-led

- 6** Employers should engage, and be invited to engage, more proactively in outreach and information and guidance for students at the local level and in primary and secondary schools. (p. 37)
- 7** The IfATE should allow employers, through the trailblazer process, to specify a mandatory degree in an apprenticeship where they can demonstrate that its inclusion is in the interests of employers and apprentices in the sector. This supports a recommendation by the Universities Vocational Awards Council (UVAC). (p. 58)

... makes the most of opportunities to support widening participation and lifelong learning

- 8 The DfE should commission further research to understand the barriers currently preventing or inhibiting employers from using degree apprenticeships to support widening participation. (p. 21).
- 9 The DfE should provide additional investment, through for example establishing a dedicated fund, to incentivise employers, universities, further education providers, schools, and local actors to work together to use degree apprenticeships to support social mobility and lifelong learning. (p. 21)
- 10 The IfATE should promote and support opportunities to build progression into the development of standards and occupations at the trailblazer stage. (p. 23)
- 11 Universities should partner with other learning providers and employers to create flexible, integrated pathways for apprentices to progress to higher level skills and degree apprenticeships. (p. 38)
- 12 As part of its commitment to improve the evidence-base on degree apprenticeships and to promote degree apprenticeship opportunities on a new website for learners, the OfS should use these new platforms and mechanisms to understand and highlight the achievements of outstanding degree apprentices, as well as the best practices of employers and universities that are using degree apprenticeships to support widening participation objectives. This could include introducing a degree apprenticeship award scheme for apprentices, employers and universities. (p. 37)
- 13 We also support the OfS's objective to include degree apprenticeships in access and participation targets. (p. 37)

RECOMMENDATIONS

An effective degree apprenticeships system:

... builds upon, enhances and celebrates effective employer-university collaboration

- 14** Universities should continue to develop flexible and innovative modes of teaching, assessment and apprentice support to meet employer needs, and share and learn from effective, innovative practice. (p. 37)
- 15** Trailblazers should involve higher education institution expertise in the development of apprenticeship standards from an early stage in the process. (p. 54)
- 16** The DfE and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) should support universities to work more closely with non-levy-paying small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through:
 - raising awareness about degree apprenticeships among SMEs
 - allowing all approved higher education institutions to deliver apprenticeships to SMEs
 - enabling higher education institutions to transfer their levy funds to SMEs to undertake apprenticeships at the transferring institution. (p. 62)

... embeds degree apprenticeships as mainstream higher education provision of equal status and standing as existing higher education provision

- 17** The DfE should invest in and reform an information and guidance system that is fit for purpose. The system should embed vocational opportunities in early careers guidance in schools, encourage teachers to promote apprenticeships as an equal route for student success, and support universities and employers to engage with schools. (p. 47)
- 18** There should be a national, government-led, collaborative campaign to raise awareness about degree apprenticeships among schools, employers and employees (p. 50)
- 19** The OfS and DfE should learn from what works in local brokerage services for apprenticeships and seek to scale up successful, innovative practice. (p. 50)
- 20** UCAS should pursue its plans to offer degree apprenticeships alongside other higher education routes (p. 50)

... ensures sustainable funding levels for high-quality apprenticeships

- 21** IfATE, the ESFA and the DfE should work with UUK and employers to better understand the total costs employers and providers are carrying, especially when they consider setting low funding bands or expecting employers or providers to pick up additional costs. (p. 56)
- 22** All providers registered with the OfS should have all their apprenticeship provision regulated by the OfS rather than Ofsted. (p. 60)
- 23** Universities should be as efficient and transparent as possible in providing costing information as part of the development and approval of standards, facilitated by a joint UUK/UVAC working group that works with ESFA and IfATE to share advice and good practice. (p. 57)

... adopts a rigorous approach to reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and costs

- 24** The IfATE should improve the transparency, efficiency and consistency of its communication and support in relation to the approval of apprenticeship standards. (p. 54)

INTRODUCTION

Degree apprenticeships were introduced in 2015 as a flagship policy and form part of the apprenticeship reform programme. This includes the move from frameworks to new standards and the introduction of the apprenticeship levy.

The aim of degree apprenticeships was to bring together the very best of higher and vocational education to meet key skills needs, enhance productivity, strengthen university and employer partnerships, and offer a new route into work.

The apprenticeship levy is a UK-wide policy and apprenticeships are developing in different ways in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are new graduate apprenticeships in Scotland and higher and degree apprenticeships in Wales. This report focuses on the specific development of degree apprenticeships in England.

The DfE is accountable for the apprenticeship programme in England. The ESFA is responsible for apprenticeship policy and funding, and for overseeing delivery of the programme. The IfATE, which was set up in April 2017, is responsible for ensuring the quality, consistency and credibility of apprenticeships, including helping employers to develop apprenticeship standards and approving the standards.

The apprenticeship system in England is intended to be ‘employer-led’, with employers establishing trailblazers to develop apprenticeship standards that are co-designed with providers and focus on their occupational and skills needs. Employers are also engaged in the structures of IfATE by participating in the ‘route panels’ that advise on standards approval processes. We strongly support an employer-led system that embeds strong partnerships with universities; however, there are many different employers, sectors and occupations. Care should always be taken that the employers advising on standards have the appropriate background, understanding and expertise. A special effort should be made to engage and support SMEs.

As a part of the government apprenticeship strategy, there is a commitment to drive up the supply of degree apprenticeships and there is a specific objective to increase the number of degree apprenticeships in the government’s Apprenticeship Reform Programme Benefits Realisation Strategy (DfE, 2017). Recently, the Education Select Committee has recommended that the government and IfATE should make the growth in degree apprenticeships a strategic priority to address skills deficits and provide a ladder of opportunity for apprentices and maximise the potential for widening participation. Its report also recognised the enhanced status and reputation the degree element brings. This enthusiasm for the value of higher level apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships, is shared by employers, with a clear shift towards an increasing number of higher level apprenticeships, both in those standards being approved and those standards still in the pipeline.

This is no surprise, as there are clear indications that the economy is shifting towards highly skilled roles. The need for apprenticeships to join this shift was highlighted in the Richard Review, the foundation for the current apprenticeship reforms:

“ *I believe that apprenticeships can and should offer an effective pathway for highly skilled work, including professional and senior job roles.*

DBIS, 2012: 35

The UUK report, *Solving Future Skills Challenges* (UUK, 2018a) considered the impact of the fourth industrial revolution, the war for talent, the drivers of future economic growth and the need to grow talent and provide opportunities in a post-Brexit UK. It is clear that in order for the UK to thrive in the future, we need:

- universities and education providers to get closer to employers
- learners who think more like employees and employees who think more like learners
- a stronger focus on training and retraining those in work alongside training those for work
- to dramatically increase productivity
- more higher level skills
- more leaders and managers
- to improve leadership and management
- to increase opportunities – both ways in and ladders up
- to meet talent shortages in our public services and to continually develop skills to improve those services

Degree apprenticeships contribute to addressing all of these needs but could do much more with more standards and increasing numbers.

It is worth highlighting the importance of higher level skills, which is being clearly signalled by employers in the shift to more higher level apprenticeship standards. The UK Industrial Strategy has a vision for a ‘knowledge-led economy’ (DBEIS, 2016:76) where ‘knowledge-intensive, high growth’ (ibid:69) companies are supported to drive economic growth. Higher skilled professional jobs are considered both drivers of economic growth and drivers of personal opportunity, reward and success. The focus on higher level skills is based on considerable evidence. Of the 2.61 million net increase in employment in the UK between 2009 and 2018, 90% of this been in professional, higher skilled roles. Higher level skilled roles are the biggest anticipated area of growth, with 79% of employers expecting an increase in the next three to five years. There are key employment sectors that are seeing the need to raise the level of skills across their entire workforce, such as in financial services and construction, as well as public sector employers such as the police.

The Industrial Strategy expected the IfATE to prioritise standards development in the key sectors identified by the strategy, including creative and digital skills. Digital skills are a key driver of economic growth and an area of skill shortages. According to CBI/Tata research (2019), demand already outstrips supply and is set to skyrocket, with 95% of businesses expecting their digital skills needs to grow. Data from the Office for National Statistics quoted in Warrington’s article in *City A.M* (2019) shows that jobs in the tech sector are growing at an astounding rate, by 60% since 2010 in London, 83% in Wales and 65% in the North West. The Digital Technology Solutions Degree Apprenticeship is helping to meet a key employer demand.

The Industrial Strategy also highlighted the challenge of addressing the UK's productivity gap and the crucial role that increased leadership and management skills play in addressing this. It reports that the average UK manager is less proficient than many overseas competitors, and the lack of these skills could account for a quarter of the productivity gap between the UK and the US. The Chartered Management Institute estimates that poor management costs the UK economy £84 billion a year. The Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship is helping to address these needs and tackle the UK productivity gap. The DfE's skills index, a proxy measure for the impact of apprenticeships on productivity, increased in both 2016–17 and 2017–18 'as a result of more people achieving higher-level apprenticeships' (Public Accounts Committee, 2019:5).

As well as digital and leadership and management skills, the initial degree apprenticeship standards included a considerable number of engineering standards, another key area of skills shortage. We are just now beginning to see the success of degree apprenticeship standards for the public sector such as in nursing, policing, social work and teaching – all areas experiencing skills shortages.

Meeting employers' skills needs and supporting economic growth go hand in hand with increasing opportunities for young people and those in work. There are some impressive examples of the impact of degree apprenticeships on creating a more diverse workforce and providing a new route through to professional success in the police, in management and in other companies and sectors. We are finding more employers who are making diversification of their workforce a strategic objective. The employer response to our survey was considerable enthusiasm to use degree apprenticeships in this way. This enthusiasm needs to be harnessed and encouraged.

The rapidly changing needs of the economy and the accelerating pace of change (especially the impact of new technology) will require jobs and careers to radically change. The regular reskilling and upskilling of the workforce will be essential for future success, and apprenticeships can continue to support these developments. The significant and growing demand for digital skills and the challenging shortage of nurses are two examples of the need for workers in different careers and with different qualifications to reskill to meet demand. The recent Augar Review (DfE, 2019a) recognises this need in relation to higher education qualifications at level 4 and level 5 by suggesting a relaxation of equivalent and lower level qualification (ELQ) rules. To introduce stricter ELQ rules for degree apprenticeships would not only be inconsistent, but would also undermine the ability of degree apprenticeships to meet employers' skills needs.

Degree apprenticeships are starting to make a significant impact on key sectors for economic growth and public services, helping to address the UK's productivity challenge and increasing opportunities. This success and future growth should be supported. It is within this context that we undertook our research to understand how we can maximise the benefits and opportunities of degree apprenticeships.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- There should be a more strategic, forward-thinking focus on developing degree apprenticeship provision in key sectors and to meet crucial skills shortages, including in leadership and management, digital technology and the public sector. Degree apprenticeships should be embedded in local industrial strategies, local skills initiatives and sector deals.

1: THE VALUE OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

“Our apprentices challenge the norm and bring vibrancy to our company. They add massive value to our clients, so much so that one of our clients introduced their own degree apprenticeship!”

HEAD OF GRADUATE AND APPRENTICE RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT,
CONSULTING AND DIGITAL EMPLOYER

The current apprenticeship system has been designed to be employer-led, and this principle must be protected: supply of apprenticeships should strive to meet employer demand.

Our research revealed that employers value degree apprenticeships highly: in a relatively short space of time, this form of learning provision has acquired a strong and respected brand as part of the wider apprenticeship system, with evidence already emerging that degree apprenticeships produce multiple benefits for the employers that choose to offer them, as well as the apprentices themselves. Crucially, degree apprenticeships are seen as having parity of esteem with traditional degrees, thus helping to raise the appeal of vocational education opportunities more broadly.

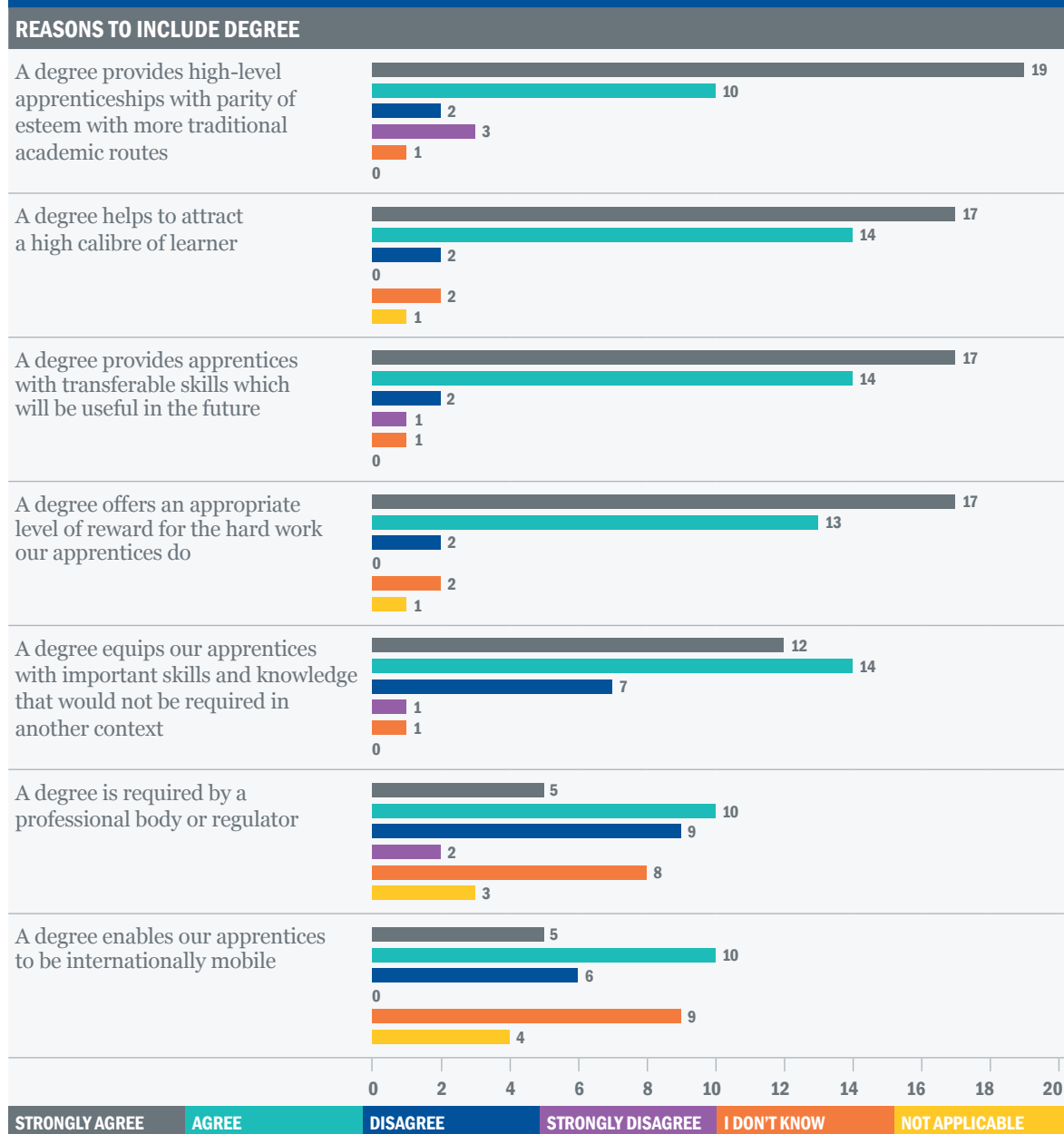
This chapter largely focusses on outlining the value of degree apprenticeships from an employer perspective, looking in particular at why employers value the degree qualification as part of level 6 and 7 apprenticeship standards; ways in which businesses benefit from the use of degree apprenticeships to support social mobility and the progression of existing staff; the need for further work to ensure that degree apprenticeships address a widening participation agenda; and finally, how degree apprenticeships can be mobilised to address many of the challenges currently facing the UK's public sector workforce.

The value of the degree qualification: what the employers say

The IfATE has specified that, in order for a new apprenticeship standard to include a degree qualification, it must meet at least one of three criteria: (i) it must be a regulatory requirement; ii) it is the requirement of a professional body; or iii) it is required by employers in the labour market on such a widespread basis that the apprentice would be significantly disadvantaged without it (this is known as the ‘hard sift’ criterion).

This means that not all higher level degree apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7 can include a degree, and yet our research found that, among employers, there is a strong demand for the degree qualification as part of apprenticeship standards (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1: EMPLOYER SURVEY: WHY IS THE DEGREE COMPONENT OF HIGHER-LEVEL APPRENTICESHIPS IMPORTANT? (N=36)



The following emerged as the top reasons for why employers delivering degree apprenticeships value the degree qualification.

Degree apprenticeships have parity of esteem with traditional degrees, and have the potential to increase the appeal of vocational educational options more widely

A majority (83%) of employers either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the statement that degrees provide higher apprenticeships with parity of esteem with more traditional academic routes. A successful and thriving apprenticeship system in which schools, students and other stakeholders see more vocational post-school routes as a viable and attractive alternative to traditional university degrees depends in part on building the brand and perception of apprenticeships more widely. While our research found that awareness and knowledge of degree apprenticeships among school-age students and their families are low ([see Chapter 3](#)), we also found that they hold high appeal for students once they are informed about what a degree apprenticeship involves. By bridging academic and vocational settings, degree apprenticeships have the potential to change perceptions of vocational learning as a ‘second-class option’, and to promote effective collaboration between learning providers and employers.

“*The apprenticeship model is well suited to cyber-security because it provides an excellent blend of theory and practice. The degree is an essential element, because it ensures that our apprentices are not disadvantaged against our more traditional graduate entry in terms of their career prospects, and because the degree-level qualification represents the level of knowledge we seek.*

EMPLOYER, BRITISH SECURITY AND DEFENCE CONTRACTOR

Degree apprenticeships help employers to attract a high calibre of apprentice

A majority (89%) of employers either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that degree apprenticeships help them to attract a high calibre of learner. This is a high priority for employers as they seek to attract and develop a talented, competitive and productive workforce.

Degrees make apprentices future ready, equipping them with transferable knowledge and ‘soft skills’ vital for success in a rapidly transforming economy

A majority (89%) of employers ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that degrees make apprentices future ready. While most employers think that apprentices can develop important job - and sector-specific skills through their apprenticeship, many expressed the belief that a degree would equip apprentices with the broad knowledge and ‘soft skills’ necessary to remain agile, adaptable and competitive in a changing world of work.

“*The university component gives our apprentices more exposure to ideas and people outside of our company. This is key as they develop a sense of self and professional values.*

EMPLOYER, GLOBAL CONSULTANCY IN TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

“Apprenticeships are clearly going to be a key plank of staff training for the future. We want to make sure that particularly degree apprenticeships reflect our needs as a broad engineering consultancy, and don’t just take our staff down specialised rabbit holes they are then tied into.

EMPLOYER, ENGINEERING AND MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Degree apprenticeships give apprentices an internationally portable qualification

Just under half (42%) of employers either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the degree qualification is important because it allows degree apprentices to be more competitive in global markets. While not relevant to some sectors and industries, an internationally portable qualification is crucial in areas such as engineering and manufacturing, and for large global firms that rely on their employees having a qualification that is recognised and understood worldwide.

Degree apprenticeships help to ‘professionalise’ some occupational routes

Employers representing digital and cyber-security firms, in particular, were keen to emphasise the important role that the Digital Solutions Technology Standard is playing in helping to professionalise careers in the digital and cyber industries. Degree apprenticeships can help to increase the visibility and appeal of jobs that meet current and emerging skills needs, such as the Data Science and Data Analyst apprenticeship standards.

Degree apprenticeships are helping to bring about better collaboration between universities and professional bodies

Requirement of a degree by a professional body or regulator ranked relatively low on the list of reasons as to why employers are offering degree apprenticeships, with several employers stating that this was not applicable or relevant to the standards they were developing. Nonetheless, our research revealed that representatives of professional bodies found the process of developing apprenticeship standards in collaboration with universities highly valuable, since it brought about improved communication and rigour in the development of standards that comply with professional body accreditation.

“As a professional body lead on the accounting and taxation trailblazer, having employers, universities and professional bodies at the same table was invaluable. Employers wanted to retain the professional body qualification and universities also wanted to ensure they complied with professional body accreditation. Together, the standards could be produced in a way which ensured regulatory compliance was developed into the standards for all parties.

FORMER DIRECTOR OF LEARNING, ACCA GLOBAL

Degree apprenticeships are driving high levels of employee retention and engagement, and enabling employers to upskill their existing workforce

Employers also reported that degree apprenticeships are helping to drive higher levels of employee retention and engagement and boosting productivity levels through enabling them to upskill their existing workforce: 86% of employers either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that the opportunity to offer their apprentices a degree qualification is a fitting reward for the hard work that they do. Many employers are using degree apprenticeships to offer progression routes through their organisation, which is in several cases supporting a social mobility agenda.

“Degree apprenticeships are primarily used for existing employees. However, many attracted to apprenticeship study, particularly degree-level options, would most likely be coming from a lower socio-demographic background and are delighted that this is now a viable – i.e. affordable and supported – option for them.

EMPLOYER, RETAIL

Widening participation and diversity

Research has uncovered a mixed picture in relation to the success of degree apprenticeships in supporting a widening participation agenda and attracting a diverse workforce.

A key finding of the 2016 Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission report was that apprenticeships are not doing enough to support social mobility, with apprenticeship uptake by young people rising sluggishly, and too many apprenticeship starts being at low levels and in sectors associated with poor pay and progression prospects. To address these issues, one of the key recommendations of the Commission was that there should be a focus on growing the number of young people undertaking higher apprenticeships (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2016:6). We believe that this important proposal must be joined with wholesale efforts to ensure that higher and degree apprenticeships can attract and support students from a wide range of backgrounds.

The OfS recently reported that, in 2016–17, 87% of degree apprentices were white, while 7% were Asian and 2% were Black, although this lack of diversity was not limited to degree apprenticeships but reflected across all apprenticeship levels. Only 13% of young people in degree-level apprenticeships were from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, while 28% of young people in these qualifications were from the most advantaged areas. In comparative terms, however, the data tells a more positive story: 30% of degree apprentices came from areas under-represented in higher education in 2016–17, slightly higher than the 26% entering similar full-time higher education courses (OfS, 2019).

The employer perspective

A clear and positive finding that emerged from our research was that there is strong interest from employers to use degree apprenticeships to support more diverse recruitment and widening participation. All the employers that we surveyed that are involved in developing new apprenticeship standards as trailblazers either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that degree apprenticeships could improve the equality, diversity and inclusivity of their workforce. Many employers see an opportunity to use degree apprenticeships to open up sectors and industries to women, members of the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community, and older learners, expressing the belief that increased diversity will ultimately boost the productivity of their business and help them to attract new talent, as well as enabling them to meet corporate responsibility objectives. Large corporations such as Nestlé and Fujitsu reported that they aim to use degree apprenticeships to develop a workforce that is more representative of their consumer base and the society within which they operate. Universities also see the potential of degree apprenticeships to reverse the recent decline in mature student numbers, as more businesses and organisations use degree apprenticeships to upskill and reskill their workforces.

Employers that are currently offering degree apprenticeships are already reporting a range of benefits produced through recruiting a more diverse talent base. A representative from a large global corporation noted that, while its graduate programme tends to attract applications from a relatively narrow socio-economic and demographic group, their degree apprentices come from more diverse backgrounds, and 'offer a different type of thinking, are well known for their energy, passion and creativity, and stay longer in the business'.

Case study Nottinghamshire Police

BOOSTING THE DIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE POLICE'S WORKFORCE

Nottinghamshire Police provides an example of the potential impact of degree apprenticeships on widening participation. The Metropolitan Police has recently estimated that it could take several years for its workforce to better reflect the society that it polices. In Nottinghamshire, working with the University of Derby to recruit the first cohort of degree apprentices, the police service has managed to increase recruitment from BAME groups from 7–10% in previous recruitment campaigns to 19%, and female recruits from 30% – 50%. Over 50% of recruits on the degree apprenticeship programme were the first in their family to enter higher education.

19%

recruitment from BAME groups

50%

female recruits

Next steps

It is clear from the demographics of students who are currently undertaking degree apprenticeships that more work needs to be done to ensure that degree apprenticeships fulfil their potential to support widening participation.

Apprentices are employees, largely recruited by employers. The success of degree apprenticeships in helping to boost social mobility therefore depends upon employers being able, motivated and committed to using degree apprenticeships to widen and diversify their talent pool.

Further research needs to be undertaken to understand some of the barriers currently preventing employers from using degree apprenticeships to fulfil a social mobility agenda, while best practice needs to be shared and promoted. It will also be necessary to develop policies, initiatives and funding mechanisms that incentivise and support employers, learning providers and other providers to work together to support more diverse cohorts of learners to undertake degree apprenticeships. For example, a dedicated investment or fund could set clear targets around widening participation and make funding available for innovative strategies developed to support mature learners or disadvantaged students. This might, for example, involve putting extra support or mentoring in place, or running foundation skills programmes such as the one developed by the Co-op ([see case study, p. 22](#)). Employers might also use this investment to engage in more outreach work with schools.

We explore some of the effective partnership working that has already been under way to promote widening access, participation and school outreach in [Chapter 2](#).

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The DfE should commission further research to understand the barriers currently preventing or inhibiting employers from using degree apprenticeships to support widening participation.
- The DfE should provide additional investment, through for example establishing a dedicated fund, to incentivise employers, universities, further education providers, schools and other local actors to work together to ensure that degree apprenticeships support social mobility and lifelong learning.

Progression and flexibility

Providing support for progression

While many employers are using cross-organisational talent and apprenticeship strategies to develop their existing workforce, a concern that employers have relates to progression: they worry that some of their apprentices may struggle with the transition from level 3 to level 6 education, and want reassurance that universities will be prepared to put extra support in place for these learners.

Some employers – such as the retail co-operative Co-op – are already working proactively with learning providers to address this challenge. As the case study describes in further detail, the Co-op is currently investing in providing its employees with foundational support and pre-apprenticeship skills to ensure that they can complete their degree apprenticeships in a successful, timely manner.

This is the kind of best practice that can be celebrated and scaled up through a strong, targeted and collaborative effort between government, employers and learning providers.

Case study **Co-Operative Group**

SUPPORTING WIDENING PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE PRE-APPRENTICESHIP SKILLS PROGRAMME AT THE CO-OP

The Co-operative Group is a British consumer co-operative with a diverse family of retail businesses including food retail, insurance and funeral care. It has a well-developed apprenticeship programme, offering apprenticeships at levels 2, 3 and 4, as well as a Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) at level 6. Co-op currently has over 900 apprentices enrolled on its programmes and hopes that it will reach its target of 1,000 apprentices before the end of 2019. Approximately 75% of its apprentices come from within the business; 25% are new recruits. The oldest apprentice is 49 and the average apprentice age is 31.

Co-op sees its apprenticeship strategy as an important means to retain, reward and develop its workforce. The apprenticeship programme is inclusive and seeks to ensure that the demographics of participants reflects the customer base. In line with these principles, the CMDA is open to all staff. As Co-op's Apprenticeship Manager Tracey Lancaster notes, "It's really helpful to us if we have leaders who have worked their way through the organisation. Our apprenticeship strategy is about developing talent, supporting and growing our local workforces and building strong links with our communities."

Co-op offers apprentices additional time for study, pays them a fair wage, and ensures that they are on permanent contracts. Extra help is also provided to support a wide range of staff to undertake the CMDA through a pre-apprenticeship skills programme delivered in partnership with further education colleges. The programme provides foundational skills in subjects such as English and maths and is part funded by Co-op, with some additional investment from the government's adult learning budget.

Pending successful completion of the pre-apprenticeship course, the first cohort of apprentices currently undertaking the pre-apprenticeship skills course will begin their CMDA in September 2019, after a two-day taster course delivered by Anglia Ruskin University (ARU). ARU has partnered with Co-op for many years in the delivery of apprenticeships, and Tracey describes the relationship as 'excellent', particularly citing ARU's bespoke and flexible approach to learning delivery. This includes developing specific modules on Co-op's values and business objectives, and designing the course timetable to accommodate busy times of the year.

The positive impact of Co-op's apprenticeship strategy is being felt throughout the organisation: many CMDA graduates have secured a promotion and gone on to thrive in other parts and levels of the organisation, while the retention rates for Co-op's apprentices are 20% higher than for other Co-op employees.

75%

of its apprentices come from within the business

900

apprentices currently enrolled on its programmes

Strategic development of level 4 and level 5 higher level apprenticeships

The Augar Review (DfE, 2019a) states that there is currently a mismatch between apprenticeship strategies across the UK and Industrial Strategy requirements. The report observes that, despite the urgent need for more learners at levels 4 and 5, numbers of enrolments in these levels have in fact been falling over the past few years (DfE, 2019a:33). A shortage of workers skilled at levels 4 and 5 suggests a need and an opportunity to develop more apprenticeships at these levels.

In an employer-led system, the establishment of more higher level apprenticeships needs to be driven by employer demand, to meet specific occupational needs. There also needs to be greater consideration of alignment between different levels of apprenticeship standards, and flexibility built into the system, to support progression. However, the current system for developing apprenticeship standards has not generally been designed with progression in mind.

The apprenticeship system would benefit from a strategic approach from the IfATE to enhance and support progression opportunities, and to encourage trailblazers to consider this when designing standards. The IfATE could help identify where there are any skills gaps, and the route reviews provide an ideal opportunity to consider facilitating progression in standards and occupations. Progression into and out of higher level apprenticeships might also be facilitated through technical routes, or undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- The IfATE should promote and support opportunities to build progression into the development of standards and occupations at the trailblazer stage.

More stop-on and stop-off points

A greater emphasis on offering higher level and degree apprenticeships on a flexible basis also stands to benefit potential learners, particularly mature learners and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Degree apprenticeships, as with conventional degrees, are a big commitment, and particularly where adult learners are concerned, changes in work, family and personal circumstances might easily disrupt an apprentice's ability to complete their programme. We support the Higher Education Commission's recent recommendation that there should be greater use of stop-on and stop-off points to support a widening participation agenda (Higher Education Commission, 2019).

While there is some flexibility already built into the apprenticeship system, the IfATE should provide clear guidance on the flexible options, raise the profile of these with trailblazers and providers, and encourage greater adoption. An emphasis on flexibility and the creation of intermediate level 4 and level 5 standards, where these align with the occupation, will also bring degree apprenticeships in line with the Augar Review's recommendation that there is a need to embed more lifelong learning opportunities within the education system (DfE, 2019a:10).

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- The IfATE should promote and support the flexible delivery of degree apprenticeships, the development of more level 4 and level 5 apprenticeships, and the use of more stop-on and stop-off points.

Supporting the development of an effective and thriving public sector workforce

Skill and staff shortages across the public sector are well documented: in UK nursing there is a recruitment crisis, with an estimated 36,000 NHS nursing vacancies in England at present, a problem which has been exacerbated by the removal of maintenance grants. Many of these vacant posts are filled with bank and agency staff, which is costly and inefficient. The Health Select Committee's 2018 report on the Nursing Workforce found that 'the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, and the subsequent creation of apprenticeships standards for graduate nursing, has been welcomed as an alternative new route into nursing which is employer-led, enabling NHS and social care services to grow their own workforce.' The report also found that mature workers are more likely to remain in the workforce, and bring valuable life experience, while there are higher attrition rates amongst younger trainee nurses who are new to the profession. This further adds to the case that degree apprenticeships will be a highly valuable means of upskilling and retaining committed mature learners as part of a critical workforce and retention agenda.

Case study NHS collaborations



DEVELOPING NURSES THROUGH INVESTMENT IN DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

On one nursing degree apprenticeship programme, delivered in a collaboration between the University of Sunderland and four NHS trusts, all 64 of the degree apprentices are currently healthcare assistants working within the trusts.

Following a traditional route to university or achieving a nursing degree would not have been an option for most of these apprentices. Reasons for this include personal circumstances, an inability to study full time, or even a lack of confidence.

Sunderland University's flexible degree apprenticeship enables apprentices to learn 'on the job' at a pace that suits them. As a result, the apprentices receive training and support to achieve a higher level qualification while in paid employment. The university and the trusts work hard to support these individuals on their learning journey.

Ranging in age between 30 and mid-50, many of the apprentices have been committed NHS staff for a long time, and so have plenty of experience of working in hospitals and with patients. The current cohort is studying for one of three degree apprenticeship qualifications: Mental Health Nursing, Adult Nursing and Learning Disability Nursing. The programme, which began in January 2019, is enabling the NHS trusts involved to upskill their workforce and meet nursing staff shortages, without the need to backfill. Meanwhile, the apprentices appreciate the opportunity to upskill and become graduate nurses.

“Our employer-led model is upskilling those with years of experience of caring for patients to become registrants, in a timescale that is manageable for the apprentices and does not require hospitals to backfill their workforce. It’s the first time we have seen the integration of professional practice and work-based learning and I’m very pleased that the model has been so well received by our health partners.

PROFESSOR MICHAEL YOUNG, DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND

“This new programme typifies the kind of innovative, problem-solving approach we encourage at this university. Our pioneering nursing degree apprenticeship was co-created with our NHS partners, in response to their need for an affordable, sustainable way to develop high-level skills within their workforce.

PROFESSOR TONY ALABASTER, ACADEMIC DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES AND WELLBEING, UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND.

The police force’s educational strategy is also soon due to change fundamentally: from 2020 onwards, new police officers will be required to be educated to degree level, either on entry or through workplace learning, by undertaking a degree apprenticeship. This is in recognition of the fact that the police force is increasingly undertaking complex activities, for which employees need to be properly trained, and for which they deserve recognition. A new police constable apprenticeship standard was published in 2018, and across the country, police forces are collaborating with universities to ensure strategic planning around the development of a future degree-educated constabulary.

These examples clearly show that degree apprenticeships have the potential to address significant challenges affecting public sector workforce development. Indeed, the government has set a target for public sector bodies in England with 250 or more staff to employ an average of at least 2.3% of their staff as new apprentice starts over the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2021 (DfE, 2019b:13). Yet significant barriers to their growth remain. In particular, the off-the-job training requirement that is built into degree apprenticeships makes them costly for the public sector. As the OfS has reported, in nursing:

“One particular challenge arises from the professional accreditation requirement that nursing degree apprentices must undergo off-the-job training for 50% of their hours, and that during this time they must be considered additional, rather than contributing, to minimum levels of patient care. This supernumerary status means that NHS trusts need to replace apprentices for half their working time, usually by paying agency staff.

OfS, 2019:7

We recommend that public sector employers deploy their levy funds flexibly to backfill wages, thus ensuring that degree apprenticeships can be used on a bigger and more impactful scale across health, social care and policing. This echoes a key proposal of the Education Select Committee’s 2018 inquiry into nursing degree apprenticeships, which concluded that remaining barriers must be ‘torn down’ to enable the government’s own ambitious targets for the expansion of public sector degree apprenticeships to be achieved (Education Select Committee, 2018).

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The DfE should work in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Home Office and other relevant government departments to plan a robust, high-quality and cost-effective degree apprenticeship strategy that supports public sector workforce development and training.
- The DfE should allow the public sector to use its levy flexibly to backfill wages.

2: THE SUCCESSES OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS: THE UNIVERSITY APPROACH

“Employers are up for a change process. They really value engaging with universities more, and the levy has been a catalyst for this.

JOE MARSHALL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, NATIONAL CENTRE FOR UNIVERSITIES AND BUSINESS (NCUB)

In response to clear demand from local and national employers, universities across England have enthusiastically embraced the degree apprenticeships agenda. Many institutions across the higher education sector view this form of learning provision as an opportunity to build on existing areas of strength, including well-developed vocational courses and strong relationships with businesses and communities. Degree apprenticeships are not limited to particular institutions and there is a true diversity that reflects the diversity of our higher education system. For example, in 2018, the University of Cambridge became the latest in a number of universities to join the register of apprenticeships training providers and begin to offer degree apprenticeships at postgraduate level.

The enhanced employer links that degree apprenticeships have enabled institutions to develop are already leading to extensive innovation in teaching, learning and assessment processes across higher education institutions. This is catalysing transformative developments, as employers and educators are increasingly collaborating to deliver effective work-based learning and improved strategies to support widening participation.

Notwithstanding the fact that degree apprenticeships are still in an early phase of development and delivery, the successes of these programmes – and the partnerships that they have generated – are already emerging. This chapter provides an overview of the rapid progress that universities have made to deliver degree apprenticeships, and outlines some of the early impacts that they are producing.

Rapid progress

There are now over 100 universities in England on the register of apprenticeships training providers, and the number of degree apprenticeship starts has increased, from 1,614 in 2016–17 to 7,114 in the first four months of 2018/19 (IfATE, 2019). The top five degree apprenticeship standards are Chartered Manager, Digital and Technology Solutions Professional, Senior Leader, Chartered Surveyor and Registered Nurse, and the range of degree apprenticeships increased from 11 in 2016–17 to 32 currently. We are seeing the first graduates of degree apprenticeships, and examples of excellent results.

Universities have responded to this clear interest and demand from employers through:

- joining the register of apprenticeship training providers
- recruiting and retraining new staff and developing expertise
- investing in new operational and strategic processes
- introducing innovation in teaching, learning and assessment approaches
- promoting degree apprenticeships to schools and employers
- providing advice and guidance to schools and employers
- supporting trailblazers and a wide range of different degree apprenticeships
- deepening partnerships with employers
- supporting employers with processes around the apprenticeships, such as developing talent strategies based on labour market information, and promotion, recruitment and engagement with schools

Case study **Sheffield Hallam University**



INNOVATION AT SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

A leading applied university with extensive employer relationships and a strong legacy of developing and offering vocational education, Sheffield Hallam views degree apprenticeships as a natural extension of its values and approach. It has invested in developing a new central service to support operations and business development; a cross-institutional work-based learning framework; new procedures for assessment boards; and staff development and training to ensure the delivery of high-quality apprenticeships.

Significant and time-intensive upstream investment has already produced a range of benefits. Chief among these are more, stronger relationships with SMEs, large employers and the local enterprise partnership (LEP), with which the university is collaborating closely to develop provision that addresses key skills gaps. An employer forum has been established for each apprenticeship and Sheffield Hallam representatives play a key role on regional local skills boards. Furthermore, Sheffield Hallam's schools and colleges team runs regular sessions in schools to raise awareness of degree apprenticeships.

Sheffield Hallam is proud of the rich innovation that its degree apprenticeship strategy is delivering. The university is due to become the first higher education institution to deliver a flagship level 6 degree apprenticeship in packaging, developed in collaboration with the National Skills Academy for Food and Drink (NSAFD) and a range of large multinationals such as Nestlé, Premier Foods and Smurfit Kappa. There is an urgent need to develop UK-based expertise in sustainable and innovative packaging solutions: Sheffield Hallam will be at the forefront of efforts to grow a UK talent pool of packaging professionals and food engineers. The university has also developed a new massive open online course (MOOC) to offer mentoring in the workplace and support degree apprentices in their on-the-job learning.

“*Sheffield Hallam is a committed provider of degree apprenticeships. Our 900 apprentices are drawn from a broad cross-section of society, including young school leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds and ‘upskillers’ seeking career progression.*”

**CONOR MOSS, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT,
SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY**

Room for significant growth

A key test of an employer-led system is whether the supply of apprenticeships evolves to meet the demand from employers.

Despite impressive growth, degree apprenticeships still make up a very small proportion of overall apprenticeship starts. In 2017–18, higher level apprenticeships (levels 4–7) represented 13% of all apprenticeship starts. Of these, only 23% were at levels 6 and 7, with not all of these being degree apprenticeships (House of Commons, 2019).

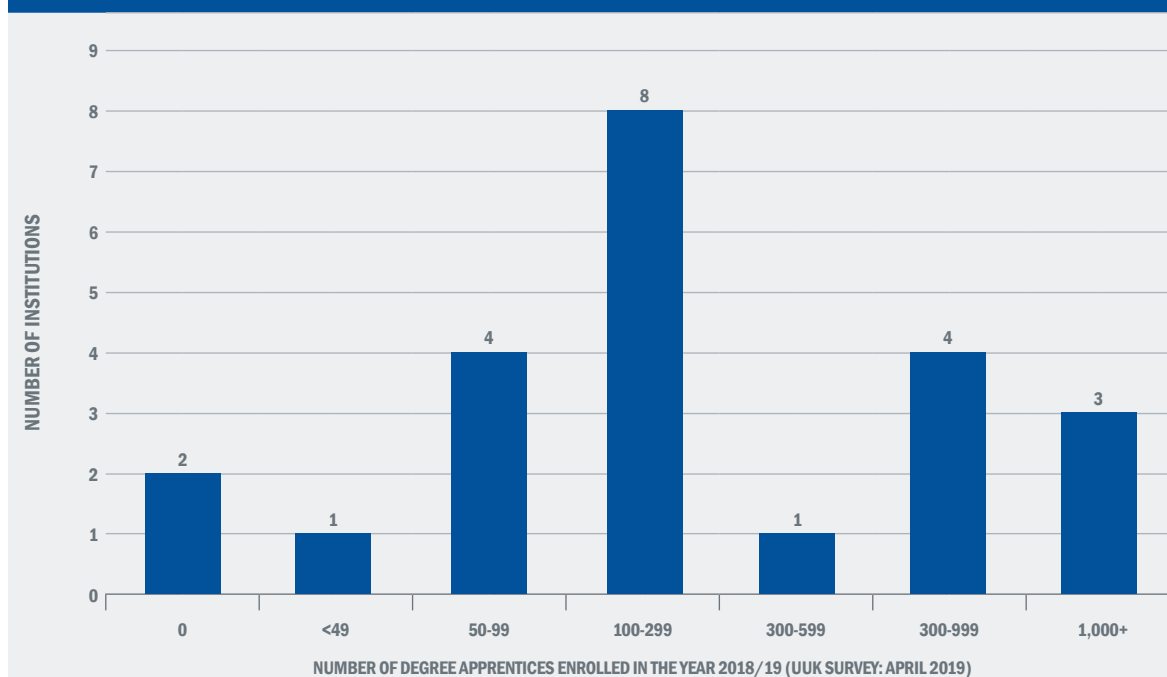
However, growth is contributing to increasing apprenticeship numbers, meeting the government's policy target to increase the number of degree apprenticeships specifically. There is evidence that there is considerable potential for growth in apprenticeship provision at levels 6 and 7 because an increasing number of apprenticeship standards in development are levels 6 and 7.

LEVEL 6 AND LEVEL 7 APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS AS A PROPORTION OF ALL STANDARDS			
		LEVEL 6	LEVEL 7
Current standards	369	49 (13%)	18 (4.9%)
In development	228	41 (18%)	27 (11.8%)
Proposed	81	17 (21%)	9 (23.5%)
Total	678	107 (15.8%)	64 (9.4%)

Source: UUK, December 2018

Our own research revealed that many universities are adopting a cautious approach to the delivery of degree apprenticeships. Out of the 23 institutions that we surveyed, the majority (65%) still have fewer than 300 degree apprentices currently enrolled on their courses (see figure 2). Almost all institutions that we surveyed reported plans to expand their degree apprenticeships significantly in the next operational year, however.

FIGURE 2: INSTITUTIONAL SURVEY: HOW MANY DEGREE APPRENTICES ARE CURRENTLY ENROLLED ON YOUR COURSES? (N=23)



Strategic and operational changes and the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund

In 2016, the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund (DADF) was established by the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) and the Department for Education (DfE), with the key objectives of:

- creating a stronger market for degree apprenticeships where demand was likely to be high
- creating partnerships that would strengthen degree apprenticeship growth
- establishing capacity and expertise to deliver a high volume of degree apprenticeships across higher education institutions.

The fund supported the strategic commitment of the government to increase the number of degree apprenticeships. Between November 2016 and November 2018, £8.8 million in funding was distributed to 103 higher education providers, comprising 56 further education colleges and 47 higher education institutions.

An evaluation of the DADF, conducted by Warwick Economics and Development (WECD), found that the funds had been ‘transformational’ insofar as they helped teams to secure senior commitment, and incentivised the development of strategic plans and the implementation of internal infrastructure. As our own research revealed too, these changes often required an overhaul of institutional systems and staff recruitment and development: 22 out of the 23 universities that responded to our survey identified the operational changes required by degree apprenticeships as being ‘extremely challenging’ or ‘quite challenging’, while 76% found ‘securing internal buy-in’ as being either ‘extremely challenging’ or ‘quite challenging.’ One university apprenticeship manager commented:

“ *This has required significant commitment, as apprenticeship provision is so different from our traditional undergraduate programmes.* ”

As the WECD evaluation of DADF found, a common approach taken by institutions has been the development of a ‘hub and spoke business model’, whereby a core team (the hub) takes on responsibility for activities such as employer and learner/provider engagement; employer and learner support; partnership and external relationship development; reporting processes; data collection, management and reporting; internal and external strategic alignment; and overall apprenticeship management and reporting. This team works in collaboration with different academic schools, faculties and departments (the ‘spokes’) to develop the academic content of the degree apprenticeships (WECD, 2019:12).

The significant upstream investment, as well as strategic, operational and cultural change required for universities to establish effective degree apprenticeship programmes, highlight the importance of establishing a stable policy environment and a clear and coherent set of government-led messages around the importance of growth in degree apprenticeships. Without this stability – and with uncertainty persisting around some areas such as funding bands and the inclusion of mandatory qualifications for some occupational standards – some universities are struggling to plan, strategise and secure adequate internal buy-in to develop a future-facing degree apprenticeships agenda. In **Chapter 3**, we explore the need for a government-led, promotional campaign around degree apprenticeships, while in **Chapter 4** we propose ways to reduce the bureaucracy and operational obstacles currently affecting the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships.

The value of employer–university collaboration

Benefits of employer–university collaboration for universities

Better and different ways of working were cited by institutions as one of the clearest positive impacts of their degree apprenticeships strategy. Of the university respondents surveyed, 65% ‘strongly agreed’ and 35% ‘agreed’ that they are now more innovative in relation to collaborating with employers, while 100% of the respondents reported that their relationships with large employers had strengthened as a result of degree apprenticeships. This has had knock-on effects on other areas of university business, enabling institutions to increase the geographic reach of their student recruitment through partnership with national as well as local employers; to rethink the kinds of courses they offer and the material they contain; and to strengthen university–business collaboration in other areas such as research by increasing the number and type of businesses with which they have partnerships.

“Our existing strong relationships with employers have strengthened further ... through ITTs, development of programmes, and the resulting overall increase in the frequency of engagement ... This has enabled us to develop not only our degree apprenticeship ... but to begin adjusting our overall provision to ensure our graduates have the appropriate knowledge, skills, behaviours and technical and methodological understanding that are in current demand. ... In terms of numbers, the institution has more than quadrupled its major employer relationship base.

HEAD OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT, HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Benefits of employer–university collaboration for employers

Our research also revealed high levels of satisfaction among employers who work with universities in the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships.

Among the trailblazer groups that we surveyed, 62% of employers rated their relationship with universities as ‘good,’ while 23% rated it as ‘excellent.’ Furthermore, 93% of trailblazer leads either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that the trailblazer group had benefited from involvement and advice from universities in the development of apprenticeship standards, particularly citing the invaluable expertise and guidance universities were able to provide on developing curriculum content and designing appropriate assessments. One employer remarked:

“We have noted that some further education colleges and independent training providers are poor at administration. Universities tend to be better and more professional.

Among the 36 employer survey respondents currently offering degree apprenticeships, 88% either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the statement: ‘Our organisation values the expertise available through collaboration with a university.’

Innovation in teaching and learning

Through more in-depth partnership working with employers, universities have begun developing numerous innovative approaches to teaching and learning, both in terms of content and delivery. This includes:

- the development of online platforms to support distance learning
- the design and development of e-portfolios and other online mechanisms to monitor and calculate off-the-job learning and to provide ease of reporting on the acquisition and demonstration of knowledge, skills and behaviours
- workplace mentoring models delivered both online and face to face
- the development of modules tailored to particular employers for ‘closed cohorts’ of degree apprentices
- the development of block, residential delivery models
- flexible timetables built around employer needs and preferences
- supplementary summer schools to support progression and provide foundational study skills
- increased use of individualised and one-to-one learning models to provide different starting points and levels of pace and challenge for different learners
- increased use of ‘data dashboards’ to monitor the progression of degree apprentices, with inbuilt ‘progression checkpoints’

Several institutions reported that the early evidence of the successes and strengths of reinforced workplace learning and associated reflective practices has prompted them to consider how they might embed some of the successful pedagogical approaches that they are developing through degree apprenticeships into standard provision.

Case study **Open University**

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY: REACHING 'COLD SPOTS' THROUGH FLEXIBLE LEARNING

The Open University (OU) is a provider of apprenticeships to over 400 large and small employers. In 2017–18, the OU was the second largest higher education provider of higher and degree apprenticeships, and it now has over 1,400 apprentices on programme.

The OU delivers the apprenticeship both online and face to face, which gives employers and apprentices more flexibility to tie learning in with working life. The apprenticeship can be delivered anywhere in the UK, so the OU's expert nationwide practice-based tutors are able to support apprentices at their workplaces, wherever they are located. This helps address geographical cold spots where there is perhaps no local higher or further education provision. For example, The Isle of Wight NHS Trust and the OU have just announced a collaboration to deliver a three-year apprenticeship programme to increase the number of registered nurses and nursing associates on the island. OU nursing students and apprentices are often recruited locally, and so have established roots in the community. They generally remain with their local hospitals once they have qualified. The apprenticeship programme is therefore vital to the retention and expansion of the nursing workforce on the Isle of Wight.

400

**employers provided with apprentices
through the Open University**

1,400

apprentices on the programme

Its model is also flexible, insofar as it operates across all levels and partners with further education colleges as well as other training providers. From a partnership with the Collab Group, through to licensing content and validating apprenticeships with organisations such as Chichester College, the OU can support the delivery of high-quality, flexible apprenticeships and build collaborative solutions across higher education, further education and other providers that help to fill skills gaps and promote social mobility.

Case study **University of Exeter**

MEETING EMPLOYER NEEDS THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY OF EXETER'S CIVIL ENGINEERING DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP

Launched in September 2017, the University of Exeter's Civil Engineering Degree Apprenticeship programme has been developed in collaboration with a consortium of employers led by international engineering company Laing O'Rourke. Laing O'Rourke was a member of the trailblazer group that developed the Civil Engineering Site Management Apprenticeship Standard, and now has apprentices working across 16 UK projects, including Manchester Airport, Thames Tideway and Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset, 90 minutes north of Exeter.

The programme, launched with a pathway in Site Management, was designed in terms of content and delivery model between Exeter academics and Laing O'Rourke engineers, to respond to the employers' needs and develop the skills of a site-based engineer. In 2018, a pathway was added to meet the needs of civil engineering consultancy firms as well.

“The long-term success of our industry depends on our capacity to attract new talent, so it is vital that we take steps today to build enthusiasm among young people, while also raising the prestige of our profession. We have a 10-point plan to bridge the skills gap within the engineering sector, also helping to widen the number of routes into the industry. Developing the block release apprenticeship model with the University of Exeter gave the unique opportunity to study an engineering degree apprenticeship at a prestigious establishment. As a company we have always placed the needs of the apprentice at the forefront of any programme design and we were pleased to see that the university shared the same philosophy. The university is extremely professional and have a wealth of subject and education knowledge.

SCOTT BELL, APPRENTICESHIPS MANAGER, LAING O'ROURKE

Support for apprentices and widening participation

As **Chapter 1** highlighted, employers and universities are already working together to ensure that degree apprenticeships are used to support social mobility, especially with regard to supporting the progression of existing employees who do not yet have a degree education.

In the second phase of DADF, social mobility was made an explicit criterion for funding, and the evaluation of the fund particularly highlights the activities of universities that have undertaken work to increase the interest in, and accessibility of, degree apprenticeships among young people and disadvantaged students.

The OfS and its predecessors have also established various networks, including those of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP), to promote and increase the uptake of apprenticeships in schools. NCOP partnerships work with local authorities, LEPs and employers to understand local skills gaps and careers advice needs. They help teachers and advisors to improve young people's knowledge and awareness of degree and higher apprenticeships, among other modes of higher education. The OfS has reported that, during 2017–18, it worked with around 1,500 schools and colleges to deliver targeted higher education outreach to 102,000 people. It notes that:

“because degree apprenticeships can help provide opportunities for disadvantaged learners to progress in higher education, we now include degree apprentice numbers when setting the premiums we give to universities and colleges to support disadvantaged learners in their studies, and in the investment, targets and activities we negotiate in access and participation plans.

OfS, 2019:6

We encourage this partnership working and support the use of targets around degree apprenticeships in access and participation plans. We also support the OfS's stated objective to do more to understand and promote degree apprenticeship opportunities to learners, as well as to further use data to monitor how far degree apprenticeships are expanding opportunities for disadvantaged students (ibid:8). To build on the high levels of employer enthusiasm for using degree apprenticeships to support social mobility, which we outlined in **Chapter 1**, we also recommend that employers should engage, and be invited and incentivised to engage, more proactively in outreach in schools, and to become further involved in providing careers advice and guidance. The need for increased levels of employer engagement in primary and secondary school education is outlined further in **Chapter 3**.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- As part of its commitment to improve the evidence-base on degree apprenticeships and highlight degree apprenticeship opportunities on a new website for learners, the OfS should use these new platforms and mechanisms to understand and highlight the achievements of outstanding degree apprentices, as well as the best practices of employers and universities that are using degree apprenticeships to support widening participation objectives. This could include introducing a degree apprenticeship award scheme for apprentices, employers and universities.
- Employers should engage, and be invited to engage, more proactively in outreach and information and guidance for students at the local level and in primary and secondary schools.
- We also support the OfS's objective to include degree apprenticeships in access and participation targets.

Areas for improvement in employer–university collaboration

Despite the numerous benefits and positive effects of employer–university partnership working, our research also highlighted some areas for improvement.

More flexibility from universities in teaching and assessment: A small number of employers said they wanted universities to be more flexible and innovative in the modes of teaching and assessment that they develop as part of apprenticeship delivery. Some employers wanted pedagogy and assessment to be more practical and hands on, with less focus on essays and exams.

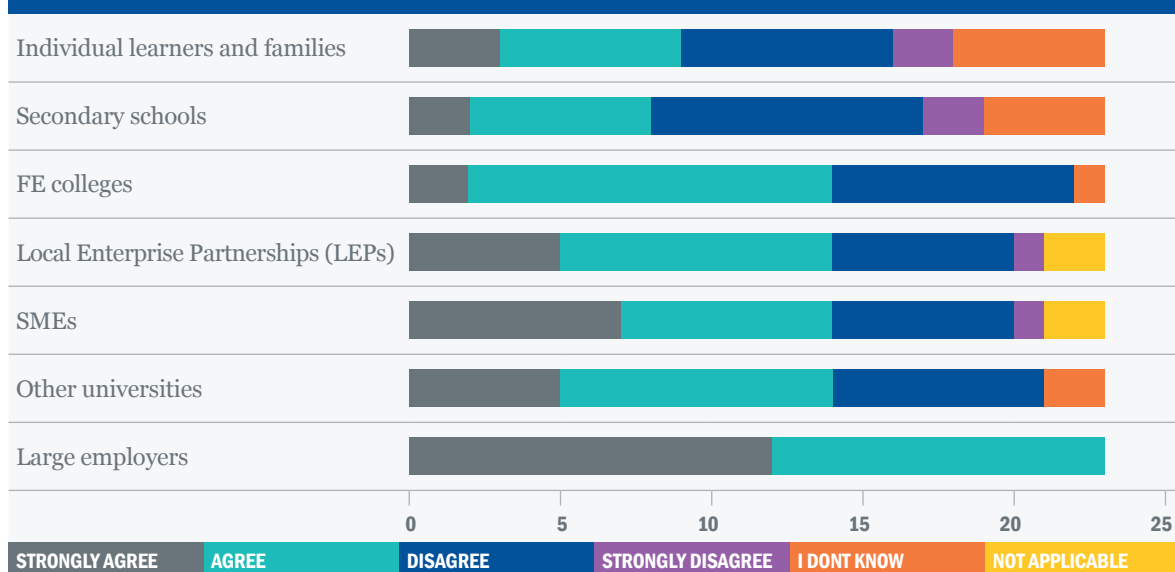
Improvements in communication with, and information provided to, employers: One employer highlighted the need for universities to provide more coherent, clear and comprehensive feedback on their apprentices, and to improve the overall management of their programmes. Another employer raised concerns that a university they had worked with viewed degree apprenticeships as simply an ‘add-on’ to what they were already doing, without taking sufficient account of the specific needs of the employer. Universities need to adopt best practice in their communications with employers, and the support that they offer to apprentices.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- Universities should continue to develop innovative modes of teaching, assessment and apprentice support to meet employer needs, and to share and learn from effective, innovative practice.

The value of new partnerships and cross-sector collaboration

Degree apprenticeships have not only supported universities to develop better, stronger relationships with employers; they have also catalysed better collaboration between universities and a wide range of other stakeholders, including other universities, further education colleges, schools and LEPs (see figure 3). Of the 23 university survey respondents, 61% either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that degree apprenticeships have enabled them to strengthen their relationships with other universities, particularly noting the benefits of more strategic partnership working around invitations to tender, in instances for example where individual universities are not able to meet the geographical reach required by employers.

FIGURE 3: UNIVERSITY RESPONSES: WE HAVE STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS WITH THIS STAKEHOLDER GROUP AS A RESULT OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS (N=23)

Source: Bachan (2018)

This is corroborated by the findings of the DADF evaluation, which details numerous examples of innovative partnership working between universities and other providers and relevant professional bodies, as well as organisations such as NCOP (WACD, 2019). In 2018, UUK commissioned CFE Research to produce a report, *Routes to High-Level Skills*, which outlines how partnerships between higher education providers, other education providers and employers have played – and stand to play – a vital role in addressing skills challenges by providing integrated, flexible pathways to high-level skills for learners, including higher and degree apprenticeships. One of the key findings of the report was that the best way to engage with employers in the apprenticeship space was to develop a way to meet employer needs across different qualification levels. This cannot be done by either universities or colleges working alone. In recognition of this, Middlesex University formed a strategic partnership with Capital City College Group (CCCG) to map where their current apprenticeship offers are aligned, and where new provision could create progression pathways from level 3 to level 6 and above. As part of this collaboration, the Middlesex University Centre for Apprenticeships and Skills was established. It provides a single point of contact for employers across the partnership (UUK, 2018b:18).

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- Universities should partner with other learning providers and employers to create flexible, integrated pathways for apprentices to progress to higher level skills and degree apprenticeships.

Early impacts

Degree apprenticeships are still in an early stage of development and delivery, and yet – as this chapter has revealed – evidence of their impact and successes is already accumulating. Universities are aware of the importance of gathering evidence of these positive outcomes.

Case study Sheffield Hallam University and Harper Adams University

EVIDENCING THE IMPACT OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

Sheffield Hallam University's approach to degree apprenticeships has attracted broad support from both regional and national stakeholders. In 2018, the university won a grant from the Sheffield City Region (SCR) Combined Authority to launch a National Centre of Excellence for degree apprenticeships, which was subsequently opened by the Northern Powerhouse Minister. Acting as a pioneering hub for the innovation, design and delivery of degree apprenticeships, the centre will develop a research base on the impact of degree apprenticeships, with the ambition to shape apprenticeship policy and future teaching and learning practice across the UK.

Harper Adams University has devised a productivity tool that allows employers to see increases in productivity that potentially could come from degree apprenticeships. This is a novel approach designed to capture the specific contribution of apprentices, rather than relying on the wider productivity of the business as a whole.

The universities that responded to our survey listed a range of activities and measures that they are using to understand the impact of degree apprenticeships, including:

- demographics of students undertaking degree apprenticeships
- student progression and attainment rates
- employer information on skills shortages
- student feedback on courses
- employer feedback on courses
- employer feedback on apprentice performance
- development of individual case studies
- longitudinal studies of students in the final year of the degree
- apprenticeship and first year after graduation
- widening participation figures
- records of apprentice achievement awards

The DADF evaluation observes that ‘there is some early anecdotal evidence of the relationship between degree apprenticeships and improvements in productivity and social mobility’ (WACD, 2019:iii). We support WACD’s recommendation that:

“ *Given the policy rationale underpinning the provision of degree apprenticeships, it would be beneficial to allow for sufficient resources and time to capture the effects and impact of degree apprenticeships on productivity and social mobility, through a systematic and robust longitudinal study.*

WACD, 2019:III

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- The DfE should place greater strategic emphasis on supporting the collection and analysis of evidence and data to demonstrate and understand the success of degree apprenticeships, especially in relation to productivity and social mobility outcomes.

3: STUDENT DEMAND FOR DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

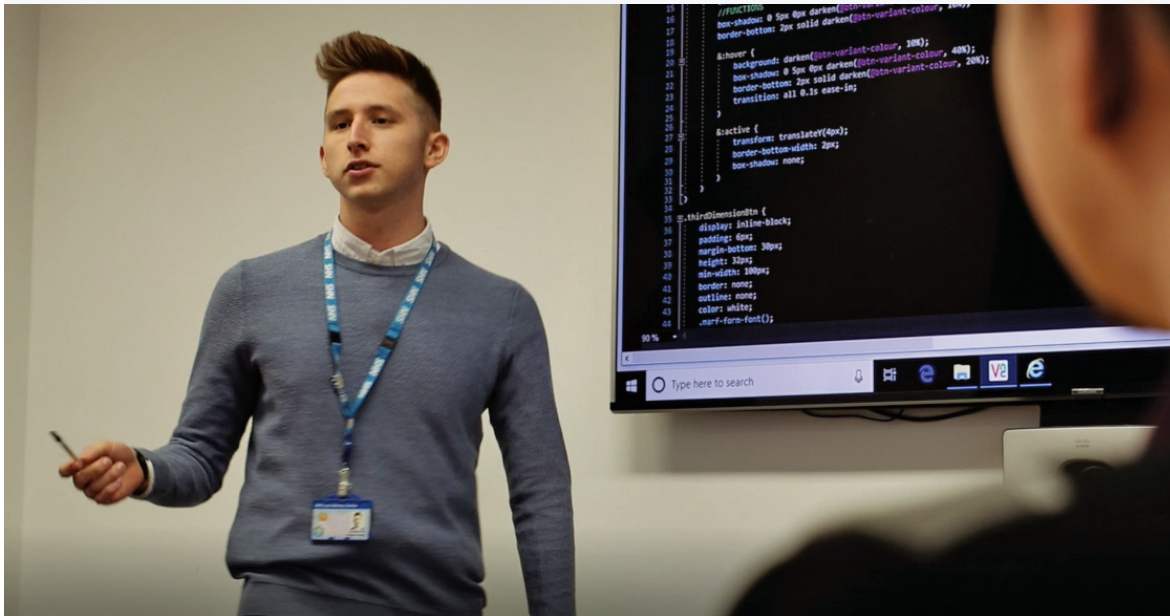
“ Our existing strong relationship with schools has resulted in repeated requests for events, workshops and talks to teachers, students and parents. This high demand addresses the lack of a formal programme within schools to promote and explain apprenticeships. Once the opportunity is explained, demand is very high. Such events see over 50% of all enquiries being about degree apprenticeships.

HEAD OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT, UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE

Students considering their post-school options stand to reap a range of benefits from choosing to do a degree apprenticeship, which offers them the opportunity to gain a degree qualification while also earning a wage and gaining practical skills and experience in the workplace.

As **Chapter 1** highlighted, employers see degree apprenticeships as having parity of esteem with conventional degrees and they stand to play an important role in a wider educational system that aims to raise the bar for vocational opportunities. Many of the stakeholders that we engaged with were keen to highlight the need for alignment between educational reforms that are currently under way, and degree apprenticeships. They underlined, for instance, the importance of planning and designing for coherence and progression between T-levels, the new technical qualifications due to be introduced in 2020, and degree apprenticeships.

But what do students and their parents currently think about degree apprenticeships? This chapter draws together insights gathered through research we commissioned through NEON, exploring the views of 747 Year 10 and Year 12 students and their parents from across England. It also considers wider principles that should inform improved information and guidance for learners within the context of a changing post-16 education system, at the same time as addressing the wider role that a broad coalition of government, employers and universities might play in developing a compelling vision and strategy for promoting and driving forward the degree apprenticeships agenda.

Case study **Open University**

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP WITH THE OU

21-year-old Robson Grant is currently doing a degree apprenticeship in software engineering for the NHS. He is completing a BA in Digital Technology Solutions with The Open University while working to help Milton Keynes Hospital with its digital transformation programme.

After completing a BTEC in computing at College, Robson decided to undertake the degree apprenticeship because he liked the idea of being able to gain four years of work experience in a busy, fast-paced hospital environment, while at the same time achieving a BA qualification without incurring any debt. He was encouraged to consider an apprenticeship by his line manager after completing a few days of work experience with the NHS. His projects and responsibilities have ranged from helping with the hospital's electronic patient record system, to being part of a team that developed and designed a website for paediatricians working with children with diabetes.

Robson's managers see the degree apprenticeship programme as an important part of the NHS talent strategy, building the skills, experience and qualifications of young people so that they can progress through the organisation to leadership roles. As with all degree apprenticeships, Robson must have 20% off-the-job training and spends one day every week devoted to academic study that is supported through The Open University's flexible learning model. Robson's bosses find the degree apprenticeship model "very easy" to manage, and Robson himself enjoys the flexibility involved in balancing work alongside study, finding that it has encouraged him to develop his time management skills and become more of a self-starter.

Though Robson was initially "shy", his confidence has grown enormously through his work in the hospital, and he recently won the 'Apprenticeship of the Year' award, out of 800 nominations from across the Trust. The award was for Robson "a massive confidence booster [...] it's great to feel that as part of the degree apprenticeship you are actually impacting the hospital itself."

Student and parent perceptions of degree apprenticeships

Across England, young people are enjoying the benefits of degree apprenticeships. However, NEON's research uncovered a clear insight that information about, and awareness of, degree apprenticeships remain poor among school-age students and their parents, and outdated ideas about the value of apprenticeships persist². A large majority of young people still view apprenticeships as a 'second-class' option, inferior to more conventional university degrees, and this attitude extends to degree apprenticeships.

“ *When you see the word ‘apprenticeship’, you kind of automatically associate it with lower achieving, even though it’s not.*

STUDENT, EXETER, YEAR 12

The research revealed, for example, that many students were unaware of the difference between apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships, reporting that they had often only heard about apprenticeships in relation to trades such as plumbing. Many students felt that there was a stigma surrounding apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships, and a lower social status attached to them, which they said could strongly discourage them from considering vocational post-school routes as a serious option. In the online survey, 27% of students either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement ‘Degree apprenticeships require fewer academic skills than an undergraduate/conventional degree.’

“ *People don’t want to deviate from what’s normal. So as long as going to university is what you feel comfortable with because it’s what you’ve been told to do all of your life, and if you’re suddenly told you can go a different route, even if it’s better, you’ll probably be put off because it’s different. People don’t like different things.*

STUDENT, EXETER, YEAR 12

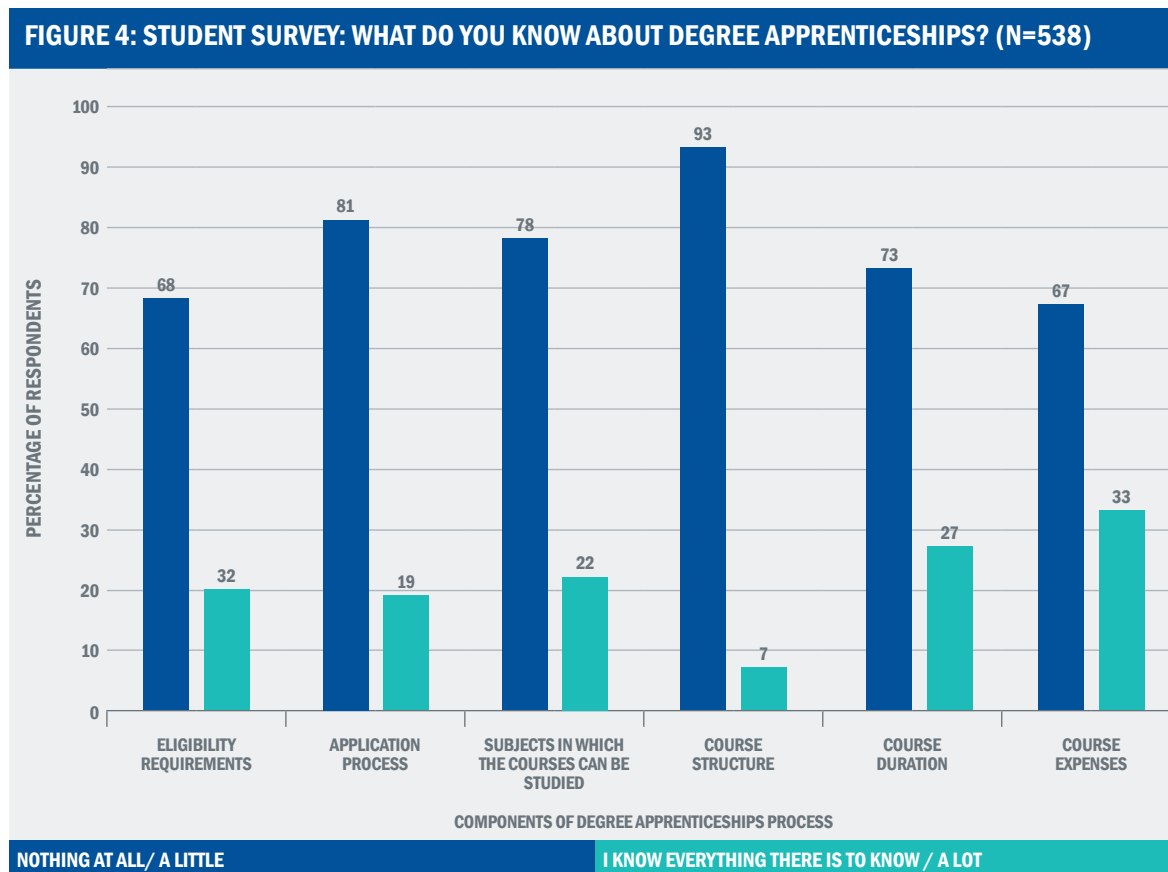
These perceptions are in many cases being shaped and perpetuated by the kinds of messaging and information that young people receive at school: the students who responded to the online survey and who were involved in focus groups commonly reported that teachers tended to place a strong emphasis on ‘traditional’ or ‘conventional’ degree routes, while other options – including apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships – were often not presented to them.

“ *You get high grades and then you go to university [to do a traditional degree]. That’s just the path that you’re told to go down.*

STUDENT, EXETER, YEAR 12

Based on the survey responses of 538 students from across the UK, **Figure 4** displays students’ levels of knowledge and awareness of different aspects of degree apprenticeships, from eligibility requirements to course expenses. A majority (81%) of students reported that they know ‘little or ‘nothing at all’ about the application process for degree apprenticeships; 78% reported that they know ‘little or nothing at all’ about subjects in which degree apprenticeships can be studied; 93% of students reported that they know ‘little or nothing at all’ about course structure; and 67% reported that they know ‘little or nothing at all’ about courses expenses for degree apprenticeships.

² See Annexe 1 for a breakdown of student characteristics.



Students' lack of knowledge about degree apprenticeships means that there is a strong need for more, and better, information about degree apprenticeships to enable them to make fully informed decisions about their post-school pathways.

The research found that almost half of parents share the view that information about options other than 'traditional' degrees needs to be improved: 45% of parents 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that information about degree apprenticeships at schools was sufficient, compared with 17% who 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that students were given adequate information.

Influence of awareness and knowledge on perceptions

The need for more information and positive messaging around degree apprenticeships is particularly important given that, once made aware of degree apprenticeships, students and their parents are enthusiastic about this form of learning provision.

“ *I think there could be more information on apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships because I know there is a lot about apprenticeships and degrees but not about degree apprenticeships. I've never really known much about that option before today. So, I think that it would be better to have more information, because it sounds like a nice mixture of both. It sounds like quite a good route to go down.*

STUDENT, BODMIN, YEAR 12

NEON's research found that just over a quarter of students felt strongly about the potential for degree apprenticeships to boost their employability, with 26% of students either 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' that 'the employment prospects for those completing a degree apprenticeship are better than for those completing a bachelor's degree', compared with 3% who disagreed with this statement. Many students pointed to the ability to improve in workplace professionalism and etiquette, interview skills and self-presentation as key advantages of undertaking degree apprenticeships.

Despite low levels of awareness of degree apprenticeships among parents as well as students, the former were keen to hear about degree apprenticeships as an option for young people to consider, with 78% of the parents surveyed reporting that they would advise their child to do an apprenticeship. For parents, the key appeal of degree apprenticeships relates to the ability of students to gain work experience while also gaining a degree without tuition fees attached.

“Of course, anything that means that my children don't come out of education with that millstone around their neck [tuition fees] is something that I am going to be pointing them towards.

PARENT, BODMIN

Students' and parents' concerns about degree apprenticeships

Even after learning about degree apprenticeships and what they involve – and despite recognising their appeal and benefits – the research found that parents and young people alike still have some key concerns about this form of learning provision. As employers and learning providers seek to increase the popularity of degree apprenticeships and improve and boost talent pipelines into their businesses via their apprenticeship programmes, it will be necessary to ensure that messaging around degree apprenticeships strives to provide reassurance around these concerns.

First, parents and young people worry that degree apprenticeships are more likely to lock young people into a specific career route, placing pressure on them to decide exactly what they want to do before the age of 18. In focus groups, a consistent theme emerged: traditional bachelor's degrees are seen as offering more flexibility than degree apprenticeships, providing young people with a more portable qualification and wider skills and knowledge base that open up more career choices for them in the future.

“I wouldn't want my child, at 18, to be spending six years of their lives and coming out of it with a degree that isn't really recognised by anybody else except the company that [you've been trained with].

PARENT, BODMIN

Secondly, parents and students share the concern that students undertaking degree apprenticeships will miss out on some of the more social, cultural and pastoral benefits offered by a more conventional university experience, such as meeting other young people from a wide range of backgrounds and taking part in extra-curricular activities. Degree apprenticeships are perceived largely as employment opportunities that cannot offer the same kind of enriching social experience as a residential university degree, nor the same level of care and support.

“ I think if you’re sending your 18 or 19-year-old into university, you know you’re sending them to a place that is ready and prepared for them at the stage that they’re at. If you’re sending them into a workplace but they’re not going in maybe in the way that some other people would enter the workplace, then they could really stand out. Would they have peers? How old would they be?

PARENT, BODMIN

“ I think [university] increases their confidence because they’re not just thrown together with lots of people of different ages. It’s meeting up with their peers and forming bonds there that they wouldn’t necessarily get if they went straight to work.

PARENT, EXETER

Parents, in particular, expressed the anxiety, in focus groups, that degree apprenticeships are a cheap form of labour and exploitation of young people. They raised concerns about the quality of the learning provision and the kinds of skills and knowledge that students would gain through these apprenticeships, often voicing the belief that these would be narrowly and mechanistically focused on the needs of the employer, rather than advantaging the learner.

“ Degree apprenticeships are poorly paid, they’re not taught properly.

PARENT, BODMIN

These findings underline the need for a collaborative, multi-stakeholder effort to raise the profile and understanding of degree apprenticeships among young people and families.

What students want from information and guidance

There is a desire and need for improved and effective forms and sources of information about post-school options, including degree apprenticeships.

As well as some of the oft-repeated concerns around degree apprenticeships, NEON’s research also uncovered wider issues with the kinds of information and guidance that students are receiving in relation to their post-school options.

- **Timeliness is key:** many parents, students and employers were of the strong opinion that information and guidance provided in Year 12 are too late, as most students have by this time already made up their minds about their next steps. One employer that we spoke to reported that they are targeting primary-age school children to raise awareness about aspirational apprenticeships as a viable post-school education route.
- **The availability of up-to-date information is crucial:** students raised concerns that the university prospectuses received in the post did not always reflect the most recent information.

- Students also reported that **social media increasingly has an influence** over their choices. Students said that they want to see more information shared online, in a range of different formats.
- Students value **exposure to alternative careers**, particularly citing the usefulness of careers meetings and apprenticeship fairs, which introduce them to a wider range of possibilities than they might otherwise have considered.
- **Relatable storytelling has a powerful influence** over students' decisions. Students gave examples of wanting to hear from degree apprentices who had felt pressurised to go to university but opted instead for a degree apprenticeship, or about the experience of particular apprenticeships. They also asked for more information on starting salaries.
- Students placed significant emphasis on wanting to receive **unbiased information and guidance** from a variety of sources. Throughout the research, many students expressed frustration at what they perceived to be 'hard sells' from teachers, employers and higher education providers, and wanted access to balanced information and advice that would allow them to make well-informed decisions about their future pathways. Students were put off by approaches that they perceived as being 'agenda pushing'.
- Students want **more opportunities to discuss their post-school options** as part of in-depth and well-facilitated conversations in which they are encouraged to ask questions and express concerns. Students felt that large information-sharing forums, such as assemblies, were not conducive to these more honest and in-depth discussions.

Many of these findings align with the eight guiding principles set out by the Gatsby Benchmark, which was introduced in 2018 as a best practice framework that schools should follow to improve the quality of their careers advice and guidance.³ These principles include greater frequency and quality of interactions between learners and employers and employees, need for better work experience opportunities, and more personalised careers advice and guidance. Building on these principles, we believe that the findings of our research should feed into a wholesale reform of careers information and guidance for students in the development of a system that places much greater emphasis on the opportunities and prospects available to students who choose to pursue higher level and degree apprenticeships.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The DfE should invest in and reform an information and guidance system that is fit for purpose. The system should embed vocational opportunities in early careers guidance in schools, encourage teachers to promote apprenticeships as an equal route for student success, and support universities and employers to engage with schools.

³ See <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/schools-colleges/understand-gatsby-benchmarks>

Case study University of Kent

GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC SERVICE DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

The Government Economic Service (GES) Degree Apprenticeship programme is run in close partnership with the University of Kent, and has been developed as part of an overall commitment to radically transform the diversity of the Civil Service. From the development of the marketing campaign to the assessment and eventual recruitment of employees, the university has collaborated with the GES and advised it on its approach.

Part of the marketing strategy has been to develop social media material that is more likely to reach the target audience, and this is something our research with potential apprentices demonstrated was a priority, especially if authentic voices or the experiences of apprentices is to be included. The university also used its social media channels to activate its links with schools, going into local schools to promote the programme and working closely with the GES to monitor and develop the campaign.

So far, the proportion of successful applicants to the degree apprenticeship programme from BAME backgrounds has been 28%, while 44% are women.

28%

of successful applicants are
from BAME backgrounds

44%

of successful applicants
are women



Raising awareness about degree apprenticeships among a broad spectrum of stakeholders

To tackle some of the misconceptions about degree apprenticeships, and raise demand among learners, there is a need for a multi-stakeholder partnership approach that combines the efforts of local and national government, employers and learning providers. Many of the stakeholders that we engaged through our research expressed disappointment that the DfE Fire It Up campaign, launched in January 2019 and intended to boost the status and visibility of apprenticeship opportunities across England, did not adequately emphasise the vital importance and value of degree and higher level apprenticeships. Some felt that the campaign tended to promote the message that apprenticeships were an alternative to more traditional academic routes, thus unhelpfully bolstering views of an education system built on a strict academic–vocational divide. Many of our research participants called for renewed efforts for a compelling national vision, campaign and strategy that promote and celebrate degree apprenticeships as integrating academic with vocational learning.

Our research also indicated that employers, universities and LEPs could do more to engage with schools, teachers and students around degree apprenticeships. Of the 13 employer respondents currently involved in trailblazers to develop new apprenticeship standards, 62% reported that they have no current relationship with secondary schools. Among the 36 employers that we surveyed that currently offer degree apprenticeships, 23% reported that they have no current relationship with secondary schools and a further 20% described their relationship with schools as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor.’ These figures were surprising, given that many employers we engaged with raised concerns over the fact that degree apprenticeships have limited visibility among young people, so limiting their ability to attract adequate numbers of talented applicants to their degree apprenticeship programmes. The research suggested a common pattern: employers view the need to raise the profile of degree apprenticeship as a priority, but do not see it as their responsibility to engage with schools themselves. A small number of employers did, however, note that they were either currently or planning to do further work with schools, with one respondent remarking:

“ *This is part of our attraction strategy; we recognise we need to improve within early talent.*

As noted in **Chapter 2**, effective collaboration with universities can support employers to engage effectively with schools and young people.

Some 60% of university survey respondents either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that a successful degree apprenticeship strategy must be based on a strong relationship with secondary schools, though many also noted that, because degree apprenticeships are employer led, this means that there is less imperative for universities to engage with secondary schools around degree apprenticeship opportunities. As one provider noted:

“ *Sometimes the employer focus means this is way down the priority list. The quality of information for individuals and advisors is incredibly poor. We are working extensively with the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) to assist understanding. Someone needs to pick this up.*

APPRENTICESHIP MANAGER, HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

These findings suggest that there is at present a vacuum of responsibility and leadership around the need to raise the appeal of degree apprenticeships at the school level. All stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships, including employers, universities and further education colleges, should view it as their role to drive this agenda forward as part of a coherent, government-led national strategy.

In addition, this information and awareness-raising campaign should not be limited to secondary schools, but should also extend to businesses, particularly SMEs, which often lack the specialist staff or extra resource to engage with the apprenticeship agenda, and in a large number of cases have no knowledge or understanding of degree apprenticeships. Several universities reported to us that engaging with employers to raise demand for degree apprenticeships was a key, resource-intensive challenge.

Need for degree apprenticeship brokerage

To raise the profile of degree apprenticeships, several of our Sounding Board members, as well as research participants, suggested that a national awareness-raising campaign for degree apprenticeships should be complemented by brokerage services that match employers with apprentices, thus improving the process of finding apprentices or finding and applying for appropriate degree apprenticeship opportunities. These kinds of brokerage service are already in operation locally, such as the Liverpool City Region's Apprenticeship Hub ([see case study below](#)). We recommend that the DfE and OfS, supported by UCAS, learn from what works in these local brokerage services and seek to scale up successful, innovative practice.

We also support the intention of UCAS to offer degree apprenticeships alongside other higher education routes. UCAS already supports students through comprehensive information and advice and an apprenticeship vacancy search facility. The development of an application service will make it much easier for students to explore a wider range of choices.

Case study **Apprenticeship hub**

LIVERPOOL CITY REGION'S APPRENTICESHIP HUB

The Liverpool City Region (LCR) Apprenticeship Hub is a collaborative group, responsible to the LCR Employment and Skills Board. Funded by the European Social Fund through ESFA, the hub aims to increase local demand for apprenticeships by creating high-quality apprenticeship opportunities for learners and employers, in line with local priorities.

A team made up of expert skills brokers provides impartial information, advice and guidance to all residents, employers, schools and apprenticeship providers about apprenticeships and traineeships, including degree apprenticeships. The hub has set up a centralised online platform that all stakeholders can use to find out how to apply for apprenticeships or recruit apprentices, and to search for opportunities and learning providers. The site also contains local case studies and vacancy information, as well as local news and details of forthcoming events relating to apprenticeships.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There should be a national, government-led, collaborative campaign to raise awareness about degree apprenticeships among schools, employers and employees.
- The OfS and DfE should learn from what works in local brokerage services for apprenticeships and seek to scale up successful, innovative practice.
- UCAS should pursue its plans to offer degree apprenticeships alongside other higher education routes.

4: ENSURING THE SUCCESS OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

“*I am still very positive about apprenticeships and see the value in the new standards, but that doesn't mean I like developing them as it is hard work.*

HEAD OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT, UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE

The development of new apprenticeship standards as part of the trailblazer process is a vital part of an effective apprenticeship system. Requiring employers and providers to work together to focus on occupations, design appropriate training delivery and assessment, and guarantee both value for money and high quality, the process of establishing successful apprenticeships will always involve considerable effort and potentially some frustration and compromise.

As our report has shown, the value of degree apprenticeships to universities, employers and apprentices makes most of this investment worthwhile. Employers engaged in standards development have already bought into apprenticeships, and want – as soon as possible – to be in a position to hire apprentices who can then begin adding value to their organisations. Yet to capitalise on these high levels of employer engagement, there is a need to ensure that the trailblazer process is as robust and efficient as possible, for all of the stakeholders involved.

Through our research, we engaged with 13 trailblazer leads involved in developing 34 standards at levels 6 and 7, of which 24 include a degree. We also engaged with 13 employers directly involved in trailblazers, and conducted additional qualitative interviews with employers and universities.⁴ In this chapter, we present the key findings from this research, outlining our suggestions for improvements to the trailblazer process and the associated approval of standards, funding bands and costing, inclusion of mandatory qualifications, and quality assurance. Getting these processes right will help to ensure that degree apprenticeships can achieve their potential, bringing stability to the overall system and ensuring the growth of degree apprenticeships without any compromises in value or quality.

⁴ See Annexe 1 for further details.

The development of degree apprenticeship standards

Before degree apprenticeships can be delivered, they need to exist as an approved standard with an approved assessment plan. They are only approved for delivery once the Secretary of State has approved a funding band. The process to develop apprenticeship standards involves employers collaborating to submit an occupational proposal, and then forming a trailblazer group to develop the proposal into a draft standard with an associated assessment plan. The standard then goes through the approvals process, which includes consideration by the IfATE route panel (an occupation-focused employer panel), and consideration by the IfATE Board. The process also includes the identification of the funding band, and consideration of the mandatory qualification. It is the key pipeline for bringing apprenticeship standards into existence and enabling employers to recruit apprentices.

Involving higher education institution expertise in the trailblazer process

As noted in **Chapter 2**, higher education institution expertise is highly valued as part of the development of apprenticeship standards and assessment methods. Some trailblazer contacts, however, highlighted an issue with inequitable governance between universities and employers at the trailblazer level, noting that it can be problematic when universities are outnumbered by employers in relation to designing appropriate assessments. Trailblazer leads also felt that earlier and more consistent engagement of universities in the trailblazer process and the development of standards would be desirable to ensure that degree apprenticeships are designed in the most effective and rigorous way possible, while also meeting employer needs.

Although the IfATE guidance enables universities to be involved with trailblazers, it was felt that the importance and value of early higher education institution involvement should be emphasised.



56%

of universities who responded to our survey found the trailblazer process extremely challenging

22%

of universities who responded to our survey found the trailblazer process quite challenging

Key challenges

The standards approval process has been challenging for IfATE to manage because the process has only recently moved from the DfE to IfATE. The organisation has therefore had to establish itself as a new organisation, and there is pent-up demand and pressure for new standards to be approved so that employers can invest their levy funds, which expire after two years. The IfATE has had to educate, support and inform employers as they engage with a new process. Despite these challenges, it had approved 360 standards by December 2018.

While trailblazers appreciate the IfATE's attempts to improve the trailblazer process through its recent 'faster and better' initiative, they have still reported to us considerable anger and frustration with the experience of getting standards approved.

Of the 13 trailblazer leads interviewed, 12 (over 90%) found the trailblazer process either 'extremely challenging' (38%) or 'quite challenging' (54%). The feedback that we had from trailblazers and employers was echoed in the feedback that we received from universities and our Sounding Board. Almost 80% of universities that responded to our survey found the process 'extremely challenging' (56%) or 'quite challenging' (22%).

Common issues and concerns that were repeated throughout our research with trailblazers included the following.

- Being part of a trailblazer is costly: as volunteers, participants in trailblazer groups receive no financial support; the process is entirely subsidised by the participating employers and the universities and professional bodies that support them.

“Quite simply, it costs a significant amount to involve staff in trailblazers, even in a light way.

TRAILBLAZER, ENGINEERING AND MANUFACTURING EMPLOYER

- Trailblazers feel that the IfATE makes inconsistent use of, and reference to, existing guidance and information, and that there is a lack of transparency around decision-making. This causes confusion and frustration when guidance either changes or is contradicted, sometimes more than once, throughout the process.

“Our occupation proposal was rejected three times and was only then approved when we (successfully) appealed. The appeal was on the basis that the third rejection was for reasons contrary to reasons given the first time.

TRAILBLAZER, ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING SECTOR

- The IfATE often requests information at the last minute.
- Staff at the IfATE sometimes lack appropriate expertise in the roles and standards that they have to advise upon and recommend. This was felt to be particularly problematic in relation to those standards that are cross-sector or cross-expertise.
- Some of the trailblazer leads and contacts we spoke to complained of inefficient systems and forms that are designed ‘for repetition rather than clarity’.
- Many employers and trailblazer contacts felt that the system did not feel ‘employer led’, and expressed concerns that the IfATE was instead making the decisions and forcing trailblazer groups to make compromises around the development of standards that they did not ultimately feel happy with.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Trailblazers involve higher education institution expertise in the development of apprenticeship standards from an early stage in the process.
- The IfATE improves the transparency, efficiency and consistency of communication and support in relation to the approval of apprenticeship standards. This should include:
 - ensuring greater consistency in advice and troubleshooting throughout the approval process, and the development of a swift feedback and informal appeals route for trailblazers who are experiencing these problems so that they can be resolved much earlier⁵
 - identifying the expertise that will be necessary in relation to the approval of a standard early on, and ensure the relevant expertise is in place in good time
 - improving the experience of route panels by sharing the advice that goes to route panels and ensuring that chairs of trailblazers attend the route panel discussions as standard practice to ensure a more effective dialogue to enhance mutual understanding
 - where standards are delayed unnecessarily, extending the timescale for digital account funds.

Funding bands

Funding bands determine the level of public/levy funding that can be used to pay for apprenticeship training and assessment. Funding band decisions are informed by estimates of provider costs based on employer requirements identified during the trailblazer process. There are specific rules about what providers can include as eligible costs from the ESFA and what factors the IfATE needs to take into account when making a funding band recommendation to the secretary of state.

The cost of provision is one of the factors that needs to be taken into account when recommending a funding band, but the recommended funding band does not necessarily have to reflect the eligible costs of provision. An initial funding band is identified at an early stage in the standards development process, and when existing standards are reviewed, the funding bands are also reviewed as part of this process.

The funding band process will naturally have potential to be contentious, given the limited amount of funding – the total levy pot – with multiple funding demands. The notions of what constitutes fair, sustainable or value-for-money funding bands are all contested. The process is further confused by the impression understood by many employers that the funding band reflects the total costs of training and assessment. It has been confirmed by the IfATE that the funding band (which includes a range within which employers are encouraged to negotiate) reflects the total contribution from public/levy funds, and there is potential for employers to be expected to ‘top up’ this amount from their own funds.

For levy-paying employers, having an approved funding band is the key decision that enables them to recruit apprentices and invest the levy funds from their digital account. For non-levy payers, it determines the amount of funding they receive and the funding they have to contribute. For providers, the funding band can determine whether the provision is viable, and whether they can meet employer expectations for the quality of provision.

Key challenges

Acquiring funding band approval was identified as the most challenging part of the trailblazer process. For trailblazers, 54% of the contacts identified this as ‘extremely challenging’ and 15% as ‘quite challenging’. Among university respondents, 70% of survey respondents identified uncertainty in relation to IfATE funding band decisions as being ‘extremely challenging’, while 21% said that it was ‘quite challenging’.

⁵ The option of having a contact email for raising concerns does not seem to be working. The scale of the problem requires an effective troubleshooting mechanism.

The challenges can be summarised as follows.

The calculation of eligible costs excludes capital costs: for a three-year apprenticeship, capital costs cannot be ignored, especially for more expensive subjects such as engineering. For these kinds of subjects, there are concerns about whether, even at the top funding band, the costs are being covered. There are many costs for employers in addition to apprentice training and assessment, including: leadership and mentoring support; paying for cover for the 20% off-the-job section; administration and management of the process; and any additional costs to support widening participation. Employers who participate in trailblazers have also invested considerable resources into establishing the standard. This ‘total’ cost of apprenticeships needs to be considered by decision-makers when recommending the funding band level. To have a sustainable apprenticeship system, all of the bodies involved need to consider the overall costs, and commit to reducing them, particularly the considerable time and resources required from the various processes including reporting and other monitoring requirements.

Decisions around funding bands are felt to lack transparency and give the impression that minimum cost is the priority, especially given that the lowest of the three required provider quotes is automatically chosen. Lack of transparency around decisions can mean that the judgement around the initial funding band, the approved funding band and the reviewed funding band are all made on a different basis. This leaves trailblazers, employers and providers uncertain about how decisions are made, and uncertain about the value of any evidence provided.

Initial funding bands are set so low as to lack credibility. The IfATE introduced initial funding bands in an attempt to improve the trailblazer process. However, estimating an initial funding band for degree apprenticeship provision is especially difficult when there has not been similar provision to compare it with, and there are concerns that, by being set so low, initial funding bands encourage an approach based on minimum possible cost.

Funding band decisions are deterring providers from wanting to deliver degree apprenticeships: two trailblazer contacts noted that the final funding band decision had the effect of prohibiting providers from wanting or being able to deliver the apprenticeship to a sufficiently high standard. Universities commented that decisions were affecting the sustainability of the provision and their ability to strategise around degree apprenticeships, or to deliver courses at all. One institution that we spoke to noted that it had many apprenticeship standards ‘in the pipeline’, but was unclear as to when it would be able to deliver these due to lack of clarity around funding decisions and potentially low funding bands.

“ We are contesting the funding bands – at the levels they have been set, we could not afford to deliver them and give quality.

TRAILBLAZER LEAD, RETAIL SECTOR

Changes in the funding bands are also creating uncertainty and disruption. Some institutions are being adversely affected by IfATE funding band decisions after having entered into contractual agreements with employers, only to find that the funding available for delivery is then reduced through the review process. This generates further resource implications when, after a long and challenging trailblazer process, the apprenticeship standard has to be revised and redesigned. This can significantly affect the ability of employers and providers to plan a long-term degree apprenticeship strategy.

“ It is frustrating that funding bands have been reduced when we are already committed to offering apprenticeships in that area. In some cases we are tied in through contractual agreements.

HEAD OF EMPLOYABILITY AND STUDENT ENTERPRISE, HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Review of the Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship

The secretary of state instructed the IfATE to conduct a review of the Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship and other early apprenticeship standards.

It is entirely appropriate for reviews of apprenticeship standards to be conducted, and in this case to apply the new approach to funding bands. However, the resulting change in the funding band demonstrates the lack of transparency around the process.

The recommendation of the review was to reduce the funding band from band 30 (upper limit £27,000) to band 25 (upper limit £22,000), a reduction of almost 20%. The letter confirming the change noted that the initial funding band would have been £8,000, a nonsensical figure representing just over a third of the final recommended funding band.

The challenge with the outcome of the review is determining how the decision was made and how it took account of costs. Provider estimates of costs were between £27,000 to £28,994, but costs were only one factor alongside a list of many, including affordability, strategic guidance, the expertise of the provider and route panel and other data. With a funding band set significantly below identified costs, and no clarity about whether the IfATE calculation of eligible costs is near the recommended funding band, this calls into question the value of submitting costings.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- IfATE, the ESFA and the DfE should work with UUK and employers to better understand the total costs that employers and providers are carrying especially when they consider setting low funding bands, or expecting employers or providers to pick up additional costs.
- We recommend that they work with UUK and employers, through for example a joint working group, to:
 - either radically improve, or remove, the initial funding bands
 - research eligible costs and build up a knowledge-base on degree apprenticeship costings
 - clarify eligible costs and their status in funding band decisions
 - go for an average of the three provider quotes, not the lowest
 - engage in more transparent dialogue on costings and decision-making
 - consider the impact on provision, demand and recruitment before making a funding band decision, and evidence this consideration
 - where funding bands are set so low that there are very few providers, extend the life of digital account funds for those employers affected

Costs and costing: the role of universities

While we have highlighted how the IfATE can improve the process of costs and costing, universities also need to play their part. Universities have had to understand the approach to costing apprenticeship provision and develop their systems accordingly. This has been challenging: there is a lack of clarity and understanding around the differences between costs and price, as well as reluctance to share what could be considered commercially confidential information. The funding rules are not necessarily straightforward, with one university describing them as ‘labyrinthine’.

Further issues for universities around costing degree apprenticeships relate to the need to have viable cohorts of students to make courses deliverable; building feasible costing models based on eligible funding bands; the investment risk associated with degree apprenticeships; the danger of running courses at a loss; and the lack of existing processes and procedures for costing courses in this way.

Universities have developed expertise in costings for the apprenticeship process, but there is also scope for improvement. The trailblazer contacts raised concerns that universities are not being sufficiently transparent about the costings of level 6 and level 7 apprenticeships. One trailblazer contact felt that the IfATE needs to do more to standardise and streamline the process of collecting higher education institution costings. Other respondents felt that it is the role of universities to ‘step up’ and provide more transparent and detailed information:

“Universities need to step up at the funding quote stage. If they want to charge £27,000 they need to demonstrate this to the IfATE through funding quotes that challenge the IfATE’s initial funding band, or live with the consequences! ... If they don’t/won’t provide quotes, it puts all efforts in huge jeopardy – and risks the standard ever being published.

TRAILBLAZER CONTACT

Further cooperation is needed between universities and the IfATE to ensure that costing information can be processed and understood efficiently: universities must be prepared and know how to share correct costings information, while the IfATE needs to be more transparent about how decisions about funding bands are reached.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- Universities should be as efficient and transparent as possible in providing costing information as part of the development and approval of standards, facilitated by a joint UUK/UVAC working group that works with the ESFA and the IfATE to share advice and good practice.

Mandatory qualifications

In earlier chapters, we outlined the value employers, universities, future apprentices and their parents place on being able to include or achieve a degree as part of the apprenticeship. Not all employers want level 6 or level 7 apprenticeships to include a degree qualification. Nonetheless, the priority for those who responded to our call for evidence was that, where employers deemed it valuable and necessary, they should be able to include a degree, and in a truly employer-led system, they would be able to.

“A degree is a very attractive component for the kind of apprentice that we want to attract, as they see a degree apprenticeship as an alternative to a residential degree.

TRAILBLAZER, DIGITAL AND IT EMPLOYER

For a qualification to be mandated, the current IfATE process requires that it conforms to one of three criteria: i) it is a regulatory requirement; ii) it is a professional registration requirement; or iii) the qualification is a sector entry requirement – known as the ‘hard sift’ criterion. The hard sift criterion requires 10 job adverts from employers that are representative of the sector (including small employers), demonstrating that the qualification is an entry requirement for a job, and presenting evidence to support its inclusion from consultation with employers on the standard. However, in addition to this process, the IfATE has suggested on a number of occasions that adding a degree to a standard is something that can be done simply, after the apprenticeship has been completed, but at additional cost to the employer. This gives the impression that reducing costs is the overall priority, rather than ensuring the quality and value of the apprenticeship that employers want.

In response to our survey, 85% of trailblazer contacts felt that employers should be able to specify a mandatory degree as part of the apprenticeship standard. Talk of removing degrees from apprenticeship standards has been a significant source of concern for employers who are currently involved in the development of apprenticeship standards. Many employers also raised concerns that, in some instances, the IfATE seems to actively discourage the inclusion of mandatory qualifications.

“ *We initially hoped to include an MSc in the level 7 standard ... We were actively discouraged to do so by the IfATE.*

TRAILBLAZER LEAD, ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING SECTOR

“ *Employers wanted a mandatory degree. The IfATE advised us it was not their preferred option... The wishes of employers were overruled – we had to compromise time and time again.*

TRAILBLAZER LEAD, RETAIL SECTOR

As a result of these experiences, employers may reconsider the inclusion of the degree, thereby compromising on the apprenticeship that they want simply to help their standard get through the approval process. An independent review and an anonymous survey of trailblazers could help to highlight this impact and reassure employers that the IfATE wishes to support them to develop the standards they want and need.

In recognition of the variety of reasons as to why many employers want to include a mandatory degree, we also support the recommendation of UVAC: that the IfATE revises its approach to mandatory qualifications, and allows employers, through the trailblazer process, to specify a mandatory degree in an apprenticeship where they can demonstrate that its inclusion will boost social mobility and is in the interests of employers in the sector. For example, a degree might be included if employers can prove that it ‘professionalises’ an occupation, helps attract new talent, raises performance standards for the occupation, and is based on a clear sector view of the skills that they need. This is a crucial test for the apprenticeship system to be truly seen as employer led.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- The IfATE should allow employers, through the trailblazer process, to specify a mandatory degree in an apprenticeship where they can demonstrate that its inclusion is in the interests of employers and apprentices in the sector. This supports a recommendation by UVAC.

Quality

Existing employer relationships and a well-established reputation

Universities have a well-established reputation among employers for providing high-quality teaching and support to students, and producing graduates with valuable knowledge, skills and attitudes. In the recent CBI/Pearson education survey (2018), universities scored highly in satisfaction rates for the quality of their trainers (+75%), and the relevance of the content to skill and training needs (+69%), exceeding the scores of further education colleges. In the most recent Employer Perspectives Survey (2016), 80% of the 18,000 employers surveyed rated English graduates as either 'well' or 'very well' prepared for work, higher than for further education and school leavers. The UK university system has a very good reputation internationally, and the UK degree provides graduates with international recognition and mobility.

In part, universities have built this reputation through their extensive and long-standing provision of vocational and professional education, in partnership with professional bodies. Universities have educated engineers, lawyers, nurses and doctors, social workers and teachers, all of which involve the development and assessment of competency for specific occupations and professional body requirements. In 2011 – before the establishment of degree apprenticeships – the importance of universities and level 6 and level 7 apprenticeships to the development of future routes into the professions was highlighted by the Professional Associations Research network. The involvement of professional bodies in higher education and apprenticeships takes in additional, employer-focused quality assurance requirements.

The OfS: a robust and risk-based approach to quality assessment

The reputation of universities and their well-established quality procedures has been recognised by the government in the establishment of the independent regulator the Office for Students (OfS). The OfS has adopted a risk-based approach to the assessment of quality and standards to reduce bureaucracy and unnecessary regulatory burden. The OfS has statutory responsibility for assessing or making arrangements to assess quality and standards for providers seeking registration with them, including for their apprenticeship provision. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is the designated body from which the OfS can seek and consider advice.

The OfS Register lists all the English higher education providers officially registered by the OfS. It is a single, authoritative reference about a provider's regulatory status. Providers must meet conditions of registration in order to be/stay registered, and demonstrate that they are able to offer high quality higher education to students. When the OfS considers a provider's application they look at all of the education and training that they provide at level 4 and above, including their apprenticeship provision. If the OfS have any concerns about the quality of apprenticeship provision they can refuse an application, impose specific conditions relating to that type of provision, require a provider to undergo more frequent or intensive monitoring.

The OfS approach to monitoring is designed to identify where further investigation is necessary to determine whether risk has increased in any particular area for an individual provider. The OfS has developed an apprenticeship dashboard which will enable it to use provider level data to monitor apprenticeship provision at levels 4–7 in registered providers. In addition to monitoring through lead indicators, the OfS will also operate a process to reassess providers' compliance with their ongoing conditions of registration and will do this for a random sample of providers (5% of the providers on the register) each year. The random sampling process will confirm whether a provider continues to satisfy its ongoing conditions of registration, and if a provider is delivering apprenticeships then it will need to provide evidence that these continue to meet the baseline requirements for quality and standards.

The OfS is also proposing to undertake a thematic review of this area, using targeted engagement with apprenticeship providers and additional research and review activities to inform the OfS's sector wide activities in this area, particularly in relation to how they engage with employers and meet the interests of apprentices.

The remit of the OfS extends to providers that are on its register and offer higher education qualifications, including degree apprenticeships. When a degree is a mandatory qualification in an apprenticeship, it means that all of the quality assurance mechanisms embedded in and operated by universities are applied to the development and delivery of the apprenticeship, as well as the oversight operated by the OfS. This provides reassurance to employers, apprentices, potential apprentices and their parents. For those level 6 and level 7 apprenticeships without degrees, there is a concerning quality gap that is now being addressed by the OfS.

In addition to the regulatory role of the OfS, the Quality Assurance Agency provides advice and has outlined the wide range of quality assurance processes that support the design and delivery of apprenticeships in universities, including: programme validation and approval; assessment processes; apprentice support; and regular monitoring and review.

The quality assurance of apprenticeships is already embedded in the work-based learning expectations of the UK Quality Code, and a characteristics statement on higher education in apprenticeships is currently being consulted on. The statement outlines all the expectations that relate to the delivery of apprenticeships that include a higher education qualification, and will become a formal part of the UK Quality Code and part of future reviews of universities.

The recent Augar Review (DfE, 2019a) suggested that Ofsted should become the body that is responsible for quality assurance of all apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships. Notwithstanding the fact that this would cut across existing regulation and the legal role of the OfS, established by the current government, the Augar report fails to make a clear case as to why this would be necessary. The review has not identified where the extensive existing university processes, or indeed the work of the OfS, leaves any 'gap' in quality assurance that Ofsted would fill. It is crucial that any quality assurance body has appropriate and relevant knowledge and expertise about those it inspects. Providers need to be reassured that the organisation and process will be fair, transparent and professional.

We have already highlighted the significant costs involved in apprenticeship provision, and the lack of any high-level commitment to reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and cost in the apprenticeship system. Ofsted could inform and develop its own risk-based approach by considering the government-approved, risk-based approach of the OfS. More than this, we believe that a great step forward in simplification would be for all providers registered with the OfS to have all their apprenticeship provision regulated by OfS. At a stroke this would simplify and clarify arrangements and remove any unnecessary duplication of process.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- All providers registered with the OfS have all their apprenticeship provision regulated by the OfS rather than Ofsted

Engaging with SMEs and non-levy paying employers

Engaging with SMEs is important for many reasons: they are a key sector in terms of the numbers of people they employ; they are key employers in many regions where there are limited numbers of large employers; they drive growth in some key sectors such as technology and the creative sector; and often they can substantially benefit from an increase in higher level skills.

Universities have many links with SMEs in their regions, and many SMEs have a strong local focus. Engaging with SMEs helps universities to increase their local economic impact, enhancing opportunities available to people in a locality.

Challenges around employer awareness and engagement that universities have experienced are magnified with SMEs, because they often have neither the specialist staff nor the time to engage with apprenticeship processes and requirements on their own. One university noted that it was a significant challenge to engage with smaller employers, as SMEs' knowledge of the new apprenticeship rules was 'shockingly poor'.

Universities have invested time and energy in engaging with SMEs to enhance their understanding and to develop their participation, often with SMEs that they already know well or are supporting in other ways. Over 80% of universities were working with SMEs in 2017, with a further 15% planning to do so over the following three years. It was extremely disappointing that the original ESFA non-levy procurement decision excluded universities and degree apprenticeships through proposing to favour existing providers; this was in effect a 'botched' process. Thankfully, this was reviewed, and an improved and fairer process adopted. However, this still left many universities without funding for non-levy employers, and created a large number of 'cold spots' where SMEs could not take advantage of the degree apprenticeships offered by their local university. This could go some way towards explaining the lack of opportunities for degree apprenticeships in some parts of the country, highlighted in the recent Higher Education Commission report (Higher Education Commission, 2019).

The results of the ESFA procurement process raise issues about an apparent lack of concern about the patchy geographical spread of provision of degree apprenticeships. This increases the disconnect between apprenticeship policy and the Industrial Strategy, especially when the regional clusters of SMEs are factored in.

There is a real risk that the convoluted and contentious procurement process, combined with lack of concern for the geographical spread of degree apprenticeship provision, will negatively affect SMEs' engagement. There are many universities that have been engaging with some SMEs in relation to the apprenticeships agenda since 2016, and still have no access to funding, despite going through two procurement processes. Even when universities have sought to use their own resources to support these SMEs through transferring their own levy funds, this has been denied by the funding rules. Some universities have reported that SMEs have blamed them for the outcomes of non-levy procurement, thereby undermining the investment in SME engagement.

Case study **University of Hertfordshire**

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

The University of Hertfordshire has long-standing partnerships with SMEs across the county, collaborating on a range of enterprise, innovation and skills initiatives. The university is also a key degree apprenticeship provider in the East of England, with increasing numbers of employers recognising the opportunities that apprenticeships offer in supporting the development of their workforce. However, for the past academic year, the university has not been able to offer degree apprenticeships to local SMEs, classed as non-levy paying, which has significantly affected engagement and the number of apprenticeship starts in the region.

Following the launch of the DADF, the university created 13 degree apprenticeship programmes and established progression routes with local further education colleges via the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium. While referrals to colleges have been appropriate for some SMEs seeking apprenticeships from levels 2 to 5, the university has unfortunately not been able to work with numerous SMEs who want apprenticeships at degree level and above. This has proven particularly challenging in the region, where 98% of the 50,000 Hertfordshire businesses are classed as non-levy paying micro- and small business. This has resulted in the university having to turn away or refer elsewhere the majority of degree apprenticeship enquirers due to the lack of funding, some of which had already committed to degree apprenticeships with the university in 2018.

The university is working in partnership with the Hertfordshire LEP on the county's skills strategy, and hopes that the ambitions for non-levy payers to access funding via the Apprenticeship service comes to fruition in 2020 to lessen the 'cold spot' that exists in Hertfordshire.

OUR RECOMMENDATION:

- The DfE and ESFA support universities to work more closely with non-levy paying SMEs through:
 - raising awareness about degree apprenticeships among SMEs
 - allowing all approved higher education institutions to deliver apprenticeships to SMEs, as per the HE Commission's recent recommendation
 - enabling higher education institutions to transfer their levy funds to SMEs to undertake apprenticeships at the transferring institution

ANNEXE 1: METHODOLOGY

This report has emerged from desk-based research, as well as extensive research and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- 13 trailblazer leads
- 49 employers
- Over 60 universities
- 11 schools
- 747 students
- 93 parents

The breakdown of these groups is shown below.

Trailblazer leads

Employer-led trailblazer groups play an important part in the apprenticeship strategy, since it is their role to develop new apprenticeship standards. The trailblazer process comprises multiple stages, including developing and writing an occupational standard; developing an end-point assessment plan; and securing a funding band decision. According to guidance issued by the IfATE, trailblazer groups should:

- have a wide range of employers who are committed to working actively on the development of a new apprenticeship standard and intend to use the apprenticeship standard once it has been approved for delivery
- have at least 10 different employers as members (in addition to any professional bodies, trade associations) who want to be involved
- reflect the range of companies that employ people in this occupation, including size, geographical spread and sector; any trailblazer group should normally include at least two employers with fewer than 50 employees (IfATE, 2019).

We issued a survey to all trailblazer leads currently involved in developing apprenticeship standards at level 6 and level 7, including those that do not include a degree qualification. We received 13 responses to this survey and gathered further evidence through semi-structured interviews with four trailblazer leads.

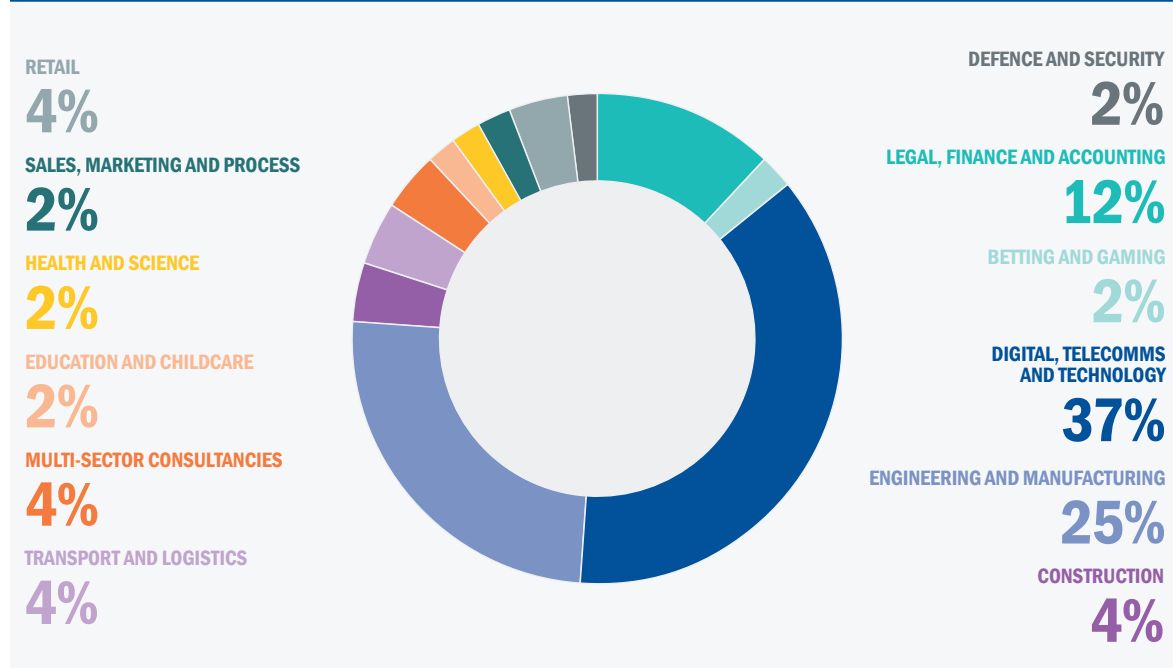
Employers

We received 49 responses to the two surveys of employers that we ran to gather their views about degree apprenticeships. One survey was aimed at employers who are currently involved in trailblazer groups, and this received 13 responses. Another survey was aimed at employers that are currently offering degree apprenticeships, and this received 36 responses, of which five came from different sections of the same large multi-national corporation.

Across both surveys, a large majority of employer respondents (95%) were levy-paying employers, while 72% of survey respondents reported having more than 5,000 employees.

The employers that responded to the survey represented a range of different sectors and principle activity areas ([see figure 5](#)). The largest proportion (37%) represented the digital, telecoms and technology sector, while 25% represented engineering and manufacturing, and 12% represented legal, finance and accounting industries.

FIGURE 5: WHAT IS YOUR ORGANISATION'S PRINCIPLE ACTIVITY AREA?



Universities and members of our expert Sounding Board ([see Annexe 2](#)) also shared evidence and insights that they had gathered through engagement with employers.

Universities

We used a mixed methodology approach to engage with over 60 universities across England.

Our engagement strategy included site visits to universities, qualitative interviews with higher education institution apprenticeship managers and their teams, and a roundtable event co-hosted with Yorkshire Universities, which was attended by apprenticeship managers from 10 universities across Yorkshire, as well as representatives from LEPs. We also received 23 responses from universities to a survey about degree apprenticeships.

Students and their parents

We commissioned NEON to engage with Year 10 and Year 12 students across England, through responses to a survey and 15 focus groups. A total of 11 secondary schools supported the evidence-gathering.

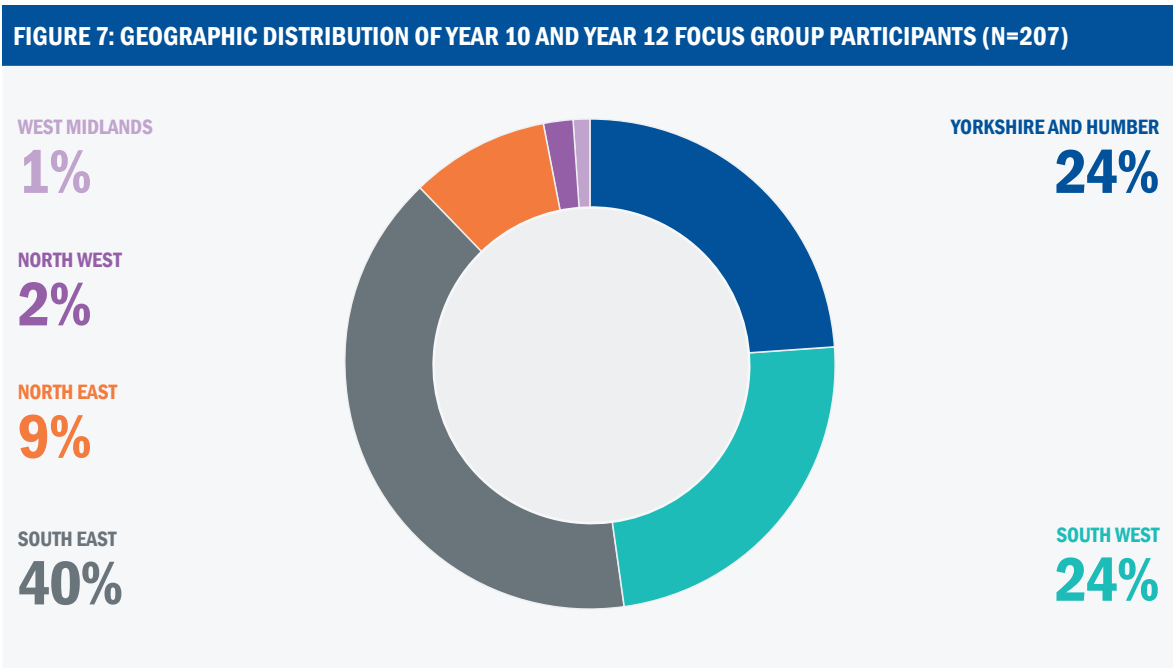
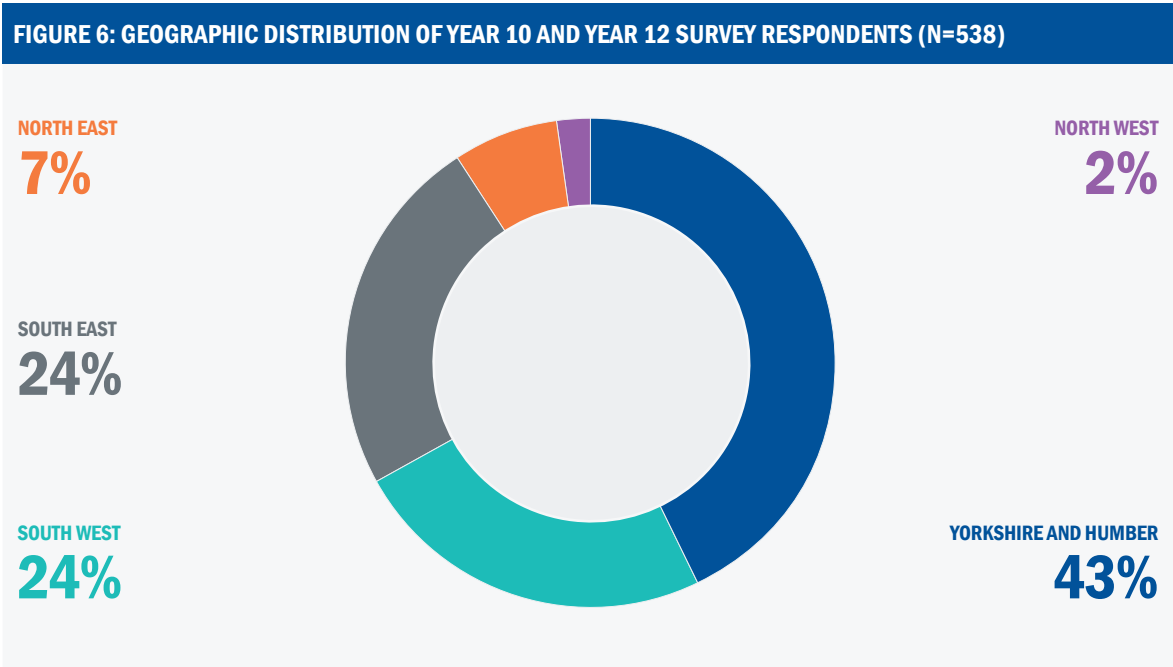
NEON also engaged with parents through a separate survey, and three focus groups. We had 80 parents participating in the online survey, and 13 parents took part in three focus groups.

Students

We received 538 student responses to a survey about degree apprenticeships and other post-18 education options. Around 77% and 22% of students reported being in Year 12 and Year 10 respectively. Of these, 54% were female; 43% were male; 0.2% did not answer the question; 2% provided unclear responses and 0.2% identified as ‘trans-male’, and 0.2% ‘preferred not to say’.

Just over 50% of students who responded to the survey identified as white, and between 0% and 2% of students each reported being from a mixed white and Black African background; a mixed white and Black Caribbean background, or mixed (other) background. Over 40% of students did not report their ethnicity.

Overall, 207 students took part in 15 focus groups (eight with Year 12 students and seven with Year 10 students) across nine schools. With the exception of students in the West Midlands (all of whom were of South Asian background), samples of students across the country were predominantly white. **Figure 6** and **Figure 7** display the geographic distribution of Year 10 and Year 12 survey respondents and focus group participants.



Parents

Around 80 parents participated in the online survey, of whom 64% were parents to students in Year 12. The remainder were parents to students in Year 10. Around 84% of parents identified as white, 3% as mixed ethnicity, 2% as Asian British and 8% as Asian Indian, while 3% 'preferred not to say'.

Over 50% of parents in the sample had obtained a degree or postgraduate degree.

NEON engaged with 13 parents across three focus groups in the South West and South East.

Expert Sounding Board

This report also draws on expert guidance from a sounding board of experts, chaired by a vice-chancellor, with universities, employers, professional bodies and partner organisations represented. These include UVAC, OfS, NCUB, Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Student Employers, Federation of Small Businesses, and the Tech Partnership Company. The membership of the expert Sounding Board, chaired by Professor Quintin McKellar, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hertfordshire, is shown in [Annexe 2](#).

The Sounding Board was an advisory group to the project. The report is a UUK report and represents the evidence, analysis and recommendations of UUK.

ANNEXE 2: MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOUNDING BOARD

Terms of reference

To support UUK in developing a positive vision of the future of degree apprenticeships by:

- considering the evidence gathered, key conclusions and any gaps
- providing strategic advice, a future focus and challenge where necessary
- supporting the gathering of any additional evidence and case studies
- linking with future events and reports
- advising on recommendations
- promoting the final report and recommendations

ADRIAN ANDERSON, Chief Executive, UVAC

HARRY ANDERSON, Senior Policy Adviser, CBI

PROFESSOR MARY BISHOP, Higher Education Commission

PROFESSOR TIM BLACKMAN, Vice-Chancellor, Middlesex University

BOB CLIFT, Director of Employer Relationships, Tech Partnership Company

ADELE DAWSON, Senior Impact and Partnership Development Manager, University of Exeter

NICOLA DRURY, UK Apprenticeship Manager, Amazon

PROFESSOR JOSIE FRASER, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, The Open University

AIDAN FRIEND, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Coventry University

PROFESSOR SIR CHRIS HUSBANDS, Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University

STEPHEN ISHERWOOD, Chief Executive, Institute of Student Employers

HARRIET JONES, Senior Political Affairs Officer, UUK

JOE MARSHALL, Chief Executive, NCUB

PROFESSOR QUINTIN MCKELLAR, Vice-Chancellor, University of Hertfordshire (chair)

ANN POTTERTON, Head of Apprenticeships – Relationship Management & Design, BT Group

MARK PRICE, Postgraduate and Professional Operations, University of Wolverhampton Business School

CHINARA RUSTAMOVA, Policy Adviser, Federation of Small Businesses

LEONIE SHANKS, Policy Researcher, UUK

GREG WADE, Policy Manager, UUK

ROB WALL, Head of Policy, CMI

ANNEXE 3: ORGANISATIONAL GLOSSARY

THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION (DFE): accountable for the apprenticeship programme in England, including securing value for money.

THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY (ESFA): responsible for apprenticeships policy and funding, and for overseeing delivery of the programme. It formally regulates and funds apprenticeships, operates the register of apprenticeship training providers, and designates the procurement processes through which these providers engage with smaller employers.

THE INSTITUTE FOR APPRENTICES AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (IfATE): responsible for ensuring the quality, consistency and credibility of apprenticeships. It is responsible for helping employers to develop apprenticeship standards, approves new standards and makes recommendations to the government concerning funding bands.

THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS (OFS): supports the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships and assesses their quality.

THE OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SKILLS (OFSTED): assesses the quality of apprenticeships at levels 2 to 5.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY (QAA): responsible for Quality and Standards Review (QSR) which is the monitoring and intervention process that provides evidence to the OfS about whether providers (both registered and those applying for registration) meet the core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES ADMISSIONS SERVICE (UCAS): an independent charity providing information, advice, and admissions services to inspire and facilitate educational progression. Its core business is admissions to full-time undergraduate education but it recognises that there are many pathways to higher education and seeks to embrace the wider perspective of the student journey which includes apprenticeships and employment.

UNIVERSITIES UK: the collective voice of 136 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its mission is to create the conditions for UK universities to be the best in the world; maximising their positive impact locally, nationally and globally. UUK acts on behalf of universities, represented by their heads of institution.

UNIVERSITIES VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL: a not-for-profit organisation set up in 1999 by the higher and further education sector. They provide an independent voice for members on matters relating to technical and professional higher level learning including higher and degree apprenticeships. Their mission is to champion higher level vocational learning.

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Universities UK

Woburn House
20 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HQ

+44 (0)20 7419 4111

info@universitiesuk.ac.uk

universitiesuk.ac.uk

@UniversitiesUK

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