

‘Apprenticeships in Wales 2017’

A response by Universities Wales to the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee’s inquiry into apprenticeships.

About Universities Wales

- Universities Wales represents the interests of universities in Wales and is a National Council of Universities UK. Universities Wales’ Governing Council consists of the Vice-Chancellors of all the universities in Wales and the Director of the Open University in Wales.
- In responding to this inquiry, we have focused on the inquiry areas that have a particular relevance to Welsh higher education and universities in Wales.

Executive Summary

- i.** Across the UK, universities play a key role in the delivery of vocational education including higher level apprenticeships.
- ii.** The past four years have seen a significant growth in the number of people undertaking higher level apprenticeships in Wales. However, the majority of these programmes are at level 4 with only a handful of apprenticeship frameworks in Wales being at levels 6 and 7.
- iii.** In England, degree apprenticeships were launched in September 2015 and provide a three to four year programme at the end of which the apprentice will attain a degree. In 2017, there will be over 7,600 degree apprenticeships in England. Scotland launched their equivalent, Graduate Level Apprenticeships, this year.
- iv.** Degree apprenticeships in Wales are currently in development with matters such as how apprenticeships will be structured and the funding model yet to be decided.
- v.** Universities Wales believes that degree apprenticeships offer an effective vehicle for improving skills levels in Wales, for providing businesses in Wales with innovative forms of professional development for their staff, and a means of widening access. Universities in Wales also have a significant role to play across the broader development of higher level apprenticeships.
- vi.** Through the UK-wide apprenticeship levy and, in England, the development of industry-led trailblazer groups, the nature of employer engagement has changed considerably since the 2012 committee report on apprenticeships.
- vii.** Universities in England report that the development of degree apprenticeships has led to greater engagement with employers. The development of degree apprenticeships in Wales offers an opportunity to both increase employer engagement with universities and employer engagement with apprenticeship opportunities in Wales more broadly.

Consultation Areas

1. **Progress since the 2012 report of the Enterprise and Business Committee: Apprenticeships in Wales**

- 1.1. The 2012 report recommended that the Welsh Government ‘target funding at higher level apprenticeships in the most appropriate sectors to ensure that the right skills are being delivered to meet the needs of a vibrant, modern Welsh economy’¹.
- 1.2. Since then, there has been a significant growth in the number of individuals undertaking higher level apprenticeships. In 2015/16 there were 5,980 starts on higher level apprenticeship programmes, compared to 2,275 in 2012/13. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of individuals starting a higher level apprenticeship in Wales has increased on average by 38% every year. Similar growth has taken place elsewhere in the UK with an average growth of 49% a year in England between 2013 and 2016².
- 1.3. In 2014/15, 16% of apprentices in Wales were taking higher-level apprenticeships, predominantly in management and/or social care³. However, it does not appear that Welsh Government statistics distinguish between levels 4, 5, 6, or 7, and as such it is not possible to identify the spread of apprentices across these levels.
- 1.4. There have been significant changes to the structure of higher level apprenticeships in England with a move from frameworks to standards, and the introduction of degree apprenticeships in 2015. Degree apprenticeships in England are delivered by universities and enable an apprentice to gain a degree, while employed, at no cost to themselves. By the end of 2017 there will be more than 7,600 degree apprentices in England. Similarly, the Scottish Government introduced Graduate Level Apprenticeships this year which also provide an apprenticeship with an honours degree.
- 1.5. Over 70 universities have been accepted onto the UK Government’s new register of apprenticeship providers⁴.
- 1.6. The development of degree apprenticeships in England was pump primed with £4.5m through HEFCE’s Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund.
- 1.7. This funded 18 projects spread across three common activities:
 - 1.7.1. Building infrastructure
 - 1.7.2. Curriculum design
 - 1.7.3. Employer engagement
- 1.8. Each project has a lead university, many also included further education colleges as delivery partners⁵.
- 1.9. In April 2017, the second phase of the Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund was confirmed with an allocation of £4 million from the Department of Education. At least 90% of this must go to universities via a competitive call to be spent on activities and innovative approaches

¹See <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s11015/Apprenticeships%20in%20Wales%20Report%20-%20October%202012.pdf>

² See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

³ StatsWales

⁴ See <http://roatp.apprenticeships.sfa.bis.gov.uk/download>

⁵For a list of funded projects and institutions, see <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/skills/apprentice/dadf/>

that will increase starts on degree apprenticeships⁶.

1.10. The two most popular degree apprenticeship programmes in England are the chartered manager degree apprenticeship which represents 36% of all degree apprenticeship numbers and the digital and technology solution professional which represents 33%.

1.11. Research carried out by Universities UK found that universities identified 'increased business engagement and closer links with employers' and 'social mobility, widening and diversifying participation' as the main benefits of degree apprenticeships⁷.

1.12. Degree apprenticeships are currently under development in Wales. In December 2016, HEFCW invited plans from institutions to develop degree level qualifications which could form part of an apprenticeship⁸. HEFCW identified engineering, advanced manufacturing and IT/computing as particular areas of interest.

1.13. Universities Wales recommends that the Welsh Government prioritises the development of degree apprenticeships, and does so with close engagement with universities in Wales.

1.14. Universities Wales would recommend engagement with employers in Wales to ensure 'buy-in' to the concept and to identify the demand for degree apprenticeships, including which subject areas are sought after. Where desirable, aligning degree apprenticeships in Wales with those developed in England will help foster awareness and engagement with large, cross-border employers.

2. How can better parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes be achieved?

2.1. Degree apprenticeships are an effective tool for improving parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes as they provide an apprentice with an equivalent qualification to those who choose to study at a university and will likely include a university in a prominent role in the design and delivery of the programme.

3. How can people from the lowest income families be supported to take-up apprenticeships?

3.1. The manner in which degree apprenticeships have been developed in England means they offer an attractive mix of a tuition-fee free pathway to a degree coupled with paid employment.

3.2. Research by UUK found that of the universities that are delivering degree apprenticeships, 71% are doing so with delivery partners and are 'working closely with other delivery providers, especially further education colleges'.

3.3. There has been much progress in Wales in developing universities as collaborative institutions, which leads to more efficient use of facilities and infrastructure, and ensures a focus on delivery not structures. For example, a strategic alliance was established between the University of South Wales and four further education colleges to provide higher education in further education across South East Wales. This provides structured progression routes from entry level to FE and HE, and provides access to learning opportunities locally at 23 campuses across South Wales.

3.4. As many apprenticeships are locally based, building on the collaboration already inherent in our universities across Wales could be one way of effectively reaching individuals in their communities and supporting those from the lowest income families to take-up higher level and degree apprenticeships.

⁶ See http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/News/2017/DADF2_funding_letter.pdf

⁷ See <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/degree-apprenticeships-realising-opportunities.pdf>

⁸See

https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2016/W16%2047HE%20Supporting%20Strategic%20Change%20Fund.pdf

4. To scrutinise the development of higher level apprenticeships, with the support of further and higher education institutions?

- 4.1. As outlined above, there has been a significant growth in starts in higher level apprenticeships in Wales with 5,980 individuals starting a higher-level apprenticeship in 2015/16.
- 4.2. There are currently 59 higher-level apprenticeship frameworks available in Wales⁹ spanning levels 4-7. The majority of frameworks are level 4 with 42 being available. There are currently only three frameworks available at level 6 and two at level 7. Several higher level apprenticeship frameworks include qualifications delivered by universities.
- 4.3. The development of degree apprenticeships in England in 2015 has seen a significant growth in the number of people taking apprenticeships at level 6. There will be over 7,600 degree apprentices in England by the end of 2017¹⁰.
- 4.4. In Scotland, Graduate Level Apprenticeships launched this year. Initially there will be 19 courses on offer across four subject areas. Currently available courses include:
 - 4.4.1. IT Software Development (honours degree)
 - 4.4.2. IT Management for Business (honours degree)
 - 4.4.3. Engineering Design and Manufacturing (honours degree)
- 4.5. In both England and Scotland, 80% of a degree apprentice's time is spent in work and 20% in study.
- 4.6. While there has been significant growth in higher level apprenticeships in Wales, the UK-wide picture of higher level apprenticeship delivery is changing with the introduction in both England and Scotland of apprenticeships which result in the award of a degree. Although development of equivalent programmes in Wales are underway, there remain a number of areas of uncertainty including:
 - 4.6.1. Funding approach
 - 4.6.2. Structure of the qualifications
 - 4.6.3. Subject areas
 - 4.6.4. Employer demand
- 4.7. The development of degree apprenticeships in England can provide a useful learning resource in the development of equivalent programmes in Wales. For example, in England the question of who is accountable for the quality of degree apprenticeships has only recently been settled with HEFCE being accountable for all elements of apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7¹¹. An understanding of these challenges could improve the quality and speed with which degree apprenticeships can be developed in Wales.
- 4.8. In December 2016, the College for Policing announced plans to require new police officers in England and Wales to have a degree qualification. One vehicle for delivering this is the degree apprenticeship in policing currently under development in England¹². It is not apparent how these

⁹ See <http://www.afo.sscalliance.org/frameworks-library>

¹⁰ See <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/degree-apprenticeships-realising-opportunities.aspx>

¹¹ See <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2017/Name.113266.en.html>

¹² See <http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Learning/Policing-Education-Qualifications-Framework/Pages/Policing-Education-Qualifications-Framework.aspx>

plans relate to either policing in Wales or the development of degree apprenticeships in Wales.

5. How can employer engagement with apprenticeships be improved

- 5.1. Through the UK-wide apprenticeship levy and, in England, the development of industry-led trailblazer groups, the nature of employer engagement has changed significantly since the 2012 report.
- 5.2. Trailblazer groups in England have been responsible for the development of new apprenticeship standards and have at least 10 different employers as members in addition to any relevant professional bodies and trade associations. Any group must also include at least two employers with less than 50 employees.
- 5.3. The introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017 has raised the profile of apprenticeships across the UK. However, the differing apprenticeship policies across the UK has led to confusion amongst employers in Wales regarding what support they are able to access and what will be available to them subsequent to the levy's introduction.
- 5.4. The increased profile of apprenticeships in Wales as a result of the levy provides the Welsh Government with an opportunity to increase employer engagement and highlight what apprenticeship opportunities are available.
- 5.5. The development of degree apprenticeships offers another vehicle through which to improve employer engagement. Research by Universities UK regarding the implementation of the degree apprenticeships found that one of the main benefits cited by universities was 'increased business engagement and closer links with employers'. 80% of universities that responded to the survey said they had engaged with employer groups.
- 5.6. These findings echo some of the points put forward to the 2012 inquiry, which suggested employers would be keen to engage with apprenticeship programmes at higher levels including degree level.

Universities Wales, 3 May 2017