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Ymateb gan Prifysgol De Cymru

National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee
Degree Apprenticeships

Evidence from University of South Wales



National Assembly for Wales (NaFW)

Inquiry into Degree Apprenticeships

6th December 2019

Summary & USW Process

This inquiry seeks contributions to the above inquiry into Degree Apprenticeships.

The response is formulated from comments received from the University of South Wales' Academic community, its business/employer engagement function and from the Director of HE in FE and Degree Apprenticeships. We have also sought the views of employers in the drafting of this response.

Overview

The University of South Wales is a leading contributor to higher education in Wales and, in particular, employer engaged curriculum with significant experience in this area from its former institutions. Degree Apprenticeships align closely to our current and future strategy.

Area	University of South Wales Response
The rationale for degree apprenticeships	The rationale for these programmes is clear and robust. The demand and requirement for work-based high-level skills development in Wales is clear cut and vital for the sustainability and growth of many industries in Wales.

	<p>The place of these programmes within Universities is also clear particularly in Universities with a long-standing tradition and reputation for the delivery of employer led/facing curricula.</p> <p>The regional and national economy continue to indicate a need for high level staff with the ability to apply knowledge, skills and behaviours in the real world – Degree Apprenticeships are a good vehicle for this.</p> <p>The model for delivery enables employers to retain key staff whilst also ensuring development for their staff in key higher-level skills. For Universities the relationships with employers provide significant value which is wider than academic delivery and provides opportunities in research and innovation. As will be noted later on in this response, the current framework is felt to be limiting, however, and could be enhanced through additional development areas and through level 7 delivery.</p>
<p>The process and criteria for approving proposals from providers to deliver degree apprenticeships</p>	<p>The process development has been challenging, but the University of South Wales supports the current arrangements where the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales administers the process. The process of development has had some issues with timescales as noted later in this document. The scale of developments is also limited which will also be discussed further.</p> <p>In terms of the process itself, it is clear that both development and monitoring processes are less burdensome and bureaucratic than those in England which is welcomed although differences does mean the establishment of parallel systems.</p>
<p>Demand from employers and learners, both for the current frameworks or any demand for additional frameworks, and how it is being managed</p>	<p>It is clear that there is demand from employers for activity of this kind.</p> <p>We have demand from for example construction, surveying and supply chain in Wales where there are no degree apprenticeships and are working with employers and others to encourage engagement with this enquiry and with the regional skills partnerships.</p>

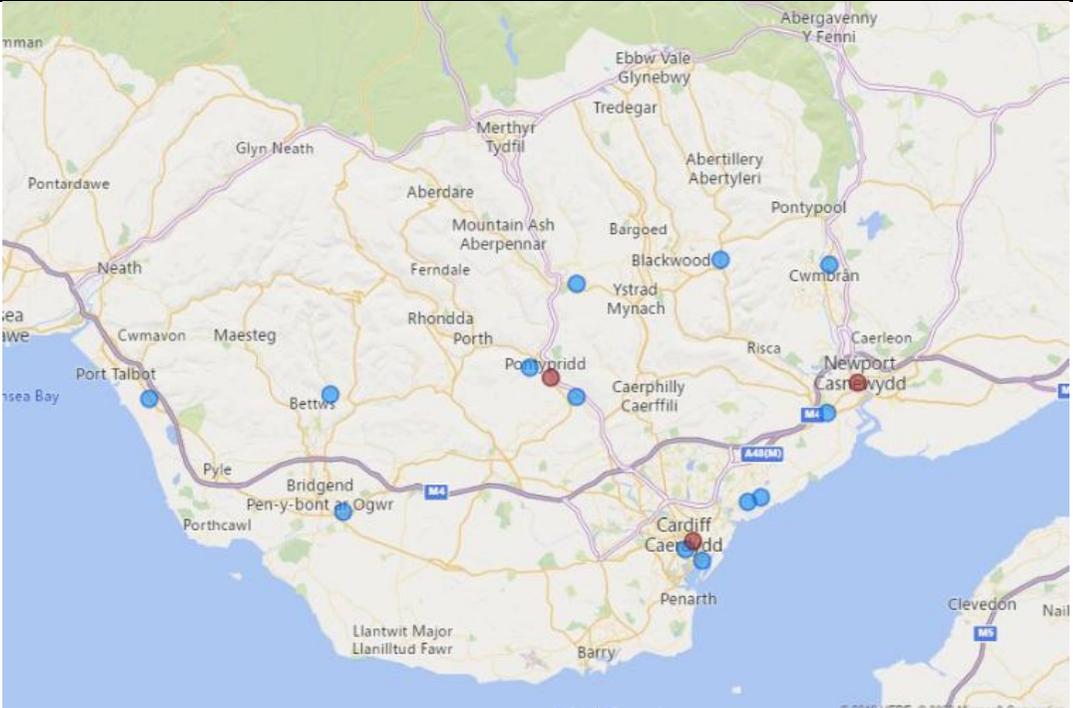
	<p>We also have demand for higher level provision at L7 from a range of companies in Cyber, Data Science and Engineering.</p> <p>Many of the courses delivered by the University of South Wales, whilst not Degree Apprenticeships are clearly aligned to professions either through UG courses leading to professional registration or accreditation or through CPD. We work closely with employers across all sectors and skills development is crucial for the sustainability and growth of the Welsh economy. At present the scope for Degree Apprenticeships in Wales is narrow and confirmed to a significantly lower number of frameworks or standards than other areas of the UK. The limit at Level 6 is also problematic.</p>
<p>The recruitment of degree apprentices and the personal characteristics of the 2018/19 cohort and the 2019/20 cohort so far to evaluate how they reflect groups under-represented in higher education and wider Welsh Government equality ambitions, including gender balance</p>	<p>The demographics of the 2019/20 cohorts are as follows:</p> <p>Age: Over 21 65%, Under 21 35%</p> <p>Gender: Male 83%, Female 17%, Other 0%</p> <p>Disability: No known disability 93%, Declared disability 7%</p> <p>Ethnicity: White 96%, BME 4%</p> <p>The only pattern across differing sectors is within gender with the ‘digital’ programme attracting proportionally more female learners.</p>
<p>Employer engagement and the profile of employers accessing the degree apprenticeship programme including, if possible, the geographic spread</p>	<p>The current cohorts are delivered in partnership with the following employers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ARUP & Partners ● Axiom ● Capgemini UK PLC ● Dwr Cymru ● Euro Clad Limited ● Fitzgerald Plant Services Ltd ● Flintec ● FP Hurley

- Irving GQ
- Newport Water FAB
- Tata Steel
- Transport for Wales
- Welsh Revenue Authority

The employers are spread across the following sectors:

- Manufacturing – 5
- Water supply, sewerage, waste management & remediation activities – 1
- Construction – 3
- Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles – 1
- Transport and storage – 1
- Information and communication – 1
- Professional, scientific and technical activities - 2

Employers are spread across the geographical area plotted in the figure below:

	 <p>Employer ■ USW Campuses ■</p>
<p>The degree apprenticeship funding model, the overall funding level and the funding commitment needed to 'teach-out' the three year pilot apprentices</p>	<p>The funding model is deemed to be appropriate.</p>
<p>Early views from employers, educational providers and learners on how well degree apprenticeships are working and lessons from their introduction</p>	<p>Feedback from employers and learners has been positive in terms of the quality of the provision provided. As noted elsewhere in this document the experience of the University of South Wales has been a generally positive one. The experience would be improved with clarity around future strategy and improvements in timescales for development.</p>

<p>Views on Welsh Government’s overall approach to degree apprenticeships, their rolling out, and their impact on, and relationship with sub-degree apprentices</p>	<p>It is felt that there could be an enhancement in how the developments could be brought more closely together with additional strategic direction setting and oversight. The development of Degree Apprenticeships Frameworks in Wales does allow for potential APL, Mapping and Progression Routes where time is allowed to develop programmes that build on needs of existing employees as well as new recruits.</p>
<p>Views on the future direction and potential of degree apprenticeships</p>	<p>There needs to be a clear roadmap for the development of the activity. This should include additional sector frameworks and level 7 development not least to mitigate against the risk of cross border flow of learners and therefore risks to the future workforce of Wales. The process for feeding in demand also needs to be clearer for employers</p>
<p>Have any issues become apparent during the rollout of degree apprentices and what lessons can be learnt from their introduction?</p>	<p>There have been some challenges in the timescales placed in development of what can be bespoke programmes of activities. This has inevitably led to delays, primarily in employer readiness, to recruitment to the full capacity of some programmes.</p> <p>The University of South Wales has processes and procedures in place to respond rapidly and flexibly to the requirements of the Welsh Government in this area but does feel that a longer (perhaps medium-term strategy or direction of travel) in terms of the areas for priority.</p> <p>Given the large number of standards available in England, the University of South Wales has also engaged with opportunities here and is delivering degree apprenticeships in this area. This has led to requirements for dual processes and systems (as they differ) to be established.</p>
<p>Was the process and criteria used for approving proposals from providers to deliver degree apprenticeships satisfactory?</p>	<p>Yes, other than timing being an issue. The timescales between agreement of frameworks and delivery points has been short which has led to delays in the ability for employers to recruit learners in a timely manner. Employers and HEIs need a longer feed in timeline both for development of degree apprenticeships and recruitment and advertising of new posts and plans in place</p>

	to enable backfill for existing workforce who undertake these programmes for upskilling.
What are your views on the demand for degree apprenticeships and how that demand should be managed, both in terms of the range of frameworks and demand from employers and learners?	<p>It is clear that there exists demand for these programmes but the lack of an apparent short to medium term strategy is a cause for concern. There is evidence that there is a risk to demand due to the challenges in timescales. By means of an example the University of South Wales received interest (and attendance at an information session) from over 30 employers for the Digital Framework. Many employers were unable to commit due to the timescales not being long enough to allow for recruitment and HR processes to be concluded.</p> <p>A cohesive ‘bringing together’ of parties including further education and employers could provide significant successes in plotting progression pathways for prospective learners. The link of current frameworks to skills need in Wales is clear and transparent but as noted in other areas of this response, limited. The risk of cross border flow of individuals to programmes that exist in England is a real one, particularly for areas of South East and North East Wales. The current rules around military only being funded by UK Government stops provision in Wales for military based in Wales on current engineering and digital provision.</p>
To what extent should activity aimed at widening access feature in degree apprenticeship recruitment, and how can this be used to ensure that cohorts are representative?	Widening access should be a key activity in any development. As the HEIs in Wales with the largest WA/WP population we are equipped with the working models and relationships to enable this. The current monitoring process from HEFCW is a good tool for measuring WA outcomes
Do you have any comments on the cost of degree apprenticeships, how degree apprenticeships are funded and the level of funding committed to them?	The funding model is deemed to be appropriate. It is suggested that it would be beneficial for an all Wales review of the funding and the full cost of delivery to be undertaken.
How has the degree apprenticeship pilot impacted on other level apprenticeships, if at all?	This is not clear as a HEI, we are clear that students have opted to study degree apprenticeships as an alternative to traditional three-year undergraduate programmes.

Should any aspect of the approach to delivering degree apprenticeships change and if so, what should be the future direction?

This has been covered elsewhere in the response. In summary there needs to be a longer term roadmap/strategy in this area, include more subject areas and be widened to Level 7.