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National Assembly for Wales
Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee

Degree Apprenticeships

Evidence from University of Wales
Trinity St David

The Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee inquiry into Degree Apprenticeships.

UWTSD response

UWTSD is delighted to have the opportunity to provide evidence for the National Assembly for Wales inquiry into Degree Apprenticeships.

The University has worked with employers across Wales, and wider, for many years in a vast array of initiatives including collaborative programme development, research lead innovations, product development, short professional development interventions, student research projects and work-experience placements.

The introduction of Degree Apprenticeships in Computing in 2018 followed by Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing in 2019 provided an excellent opportunity for the university to expand this support in a practical way. Since the introduction of the programme the university has started 146 Apprentices working in 43 companies across the following 8 pathways –

Software Engineering	Advanced Manufacturing Operations
Data Science	Materials Science
Cyber Security and Networks	Manufacturing Systems Engineering
Ordnance, Munitions and Explosives	Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering
Electrical and Electronics Engineering	

Although delivered in the main on our Swansea campus, the Degree Apprenticeship programme draws individuals from employers across the full length of the M4 corridor and into Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion in the west.

All of the Degree Apprenticeship programmes have been developed collaboratively with our employer networks and are delivered in a pattern agreed with the employers – day or block release; over an extended academic year (42 weeks); and/or over an extended day (1pm to 8pm; 9am to 7pm)

Have any issues become apparent during the rollout of Degree Apprenticeships and what lessons can be learnt from their introduction?

The length and size of Degree Apprenticeship programmes need employers to be able to include the programme within their medium and long term resource and succession planning – time scales have made this very difficult to facilitate.

Uncertainty and timescales surrounding the introduction of the pilot meant that it was challenging to secure employer commitment initially. The ongoing short term nature of the pilot (funds allocated annually in July for a programme starting during the following academic year, September - May) and the uncertainty surrounding the extension of the pilot are still creating concerns. Questions arise from employers around the continuity of a 4 or 5 year programme which started during a 3 year pilot.

Allocating longer contracts to HEI's, and on a longer term basis, would give universities, and the employers that they work with, the confidence to invest in the programmes and resource them accordingly. Employers would be able to develop significant long term development plans for their workforce. For example, employers currently recruiting Level 3 Apprentices in Engineering do not know whether the Degree Apprenticeship will be available to those individuals in 2022 upon completion of their initial Apprenticeship programmes at level 3 and level 4.

This university would seek parity with other Welsh Government funded Work-based Learning contract holders for length of contract.

Employers still do not have a clear understanding of an 'Apprenticeship' – there is a huge variability in the use of the programme and of the term 'Apprenticeship'.

There are challenges for potential Apprentices finding vacancies, with the availability of Careers Wales services not recognised or fully understood by employers and potential Apprentices alike.

Was the process and criteria used for approving proposals from providers to deliver degree apprenticeships satisfactory?

The Degree Apprenticeship approval process involved universities providing a narrative around the proposed provision, engagement with current WG WBL contract holders, engagement with employers and consideration of the impact of Degree Apprenticeships. The process was clearly explained to universities; the panel requested some points of clarification and then final numbers were allocated to the universities. The process was completed through April, May and June 2019 for provision that was due to commence in September 2019; UWTSO consider that the timescale for confirmation of numbers was very short for employers to be able to utilise the programme to its full potential and for universities to fully resource the provision.

One question that arises from the process is around the ongoing evaluation of the programme against the narrative of the tenders. Is there/Will there be a mechanism for evaluating what was promised in the tenders? HEFCW currently monitor the numbers enrolled to the programme, and consider the profile of the candidates and employers, but there seems to be little quality assurance monitoring.

There was an evidence requirement aligned to the approval process, which involved visiting individual employers to secure a commitment and potential numbers for spaces on the programme. Again the timescales involved made this a particularly difficult exercise – long programmes need employers to be able to include in long term strategic planning/succession planning

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?

There is high demand for the 3 Degree Apprenticeship pathways currently available but current evidence within this university demonstrates that demand is not outweighing supply. Existence of the programmes is, however, fuelling further demand.

There is limited understanding of the programme amongst employers and the most effective form of communication, face-to-face discussion, is time consuming and expensive but where this time is spent with employers they demonstrate a very keen interest in being involved with Degree Apprenticeships in the future.

A more robust mechanism for ensuring that current L3/4 Apprentices understand the progression opportunities through Apprenticeship provision would also generate further demand for the programme.

This university has evidence of demand for Degree Apprenticeships in other sectors – a new Higher Apprenticeship programme in Quantity Surveying or Construction Management has increased in number from 7 starts in 2018 to 41 starts in 2019 – indications are that this figure will increase again in 2020. This programme currently finishes at HND level, the industry standard in these roles is degree level, current Apprentices and their employers are requesting the inclusion of this programme in Degree Apprenticeship Frameworks.

Regional Learning Partnerships are identifying sectors where Degree Apprenticeships are an appropriate mechanism for developing employees within the sector in particular the sectors that traditionally recruit and develop individuals through apprenticeship provision such as engineering, computing and construction as mentioned above.

Welsh Government do need to facilitate an efficient and flexible system for developing and updating Apprenticeship frameworks (this work is currently in process) that enables Apprentices to progress through all levels of Apprenticeship provision from entry through the Degree level, where that is appropriate for their career pathway (see Quantity Surveying above).

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?

The inclusion of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales has increased access into higher education for a number of individuals who would never have considered this to be an option for them. The introduction of the programmes has enabled people to 'learn and earn', avoid student debt, gain access to promotion within their employment, provided an alternative route into higher education, facilitated access into higher education for those for whom academic study has not been the preferred route through their career to date, and improved employability, in addition to supporting employers to recruit ambitious individuals into their businesses at an early point of career development. The Degree Apprenticeship programme has encouraged individuals who have entered employment in one pathway to gain higher education and skills in a different pathway that they now find themselves working in – for example 35 year-old female commenced employment in Administration when she left school at 18, now completing a Digital Degree Apprenticeship in Data

Science. This university's statistics demonstrate that Degree Apprenticeships are attracting a significant number of mature students, with 91% of those currently on programme being over the age of 21 when starting the programme.

Degree Apprenticeships are programmes that are established for individuals in work, support inclusion and diversity; the programmes are made accessible to fit with employer requirements. They are all about widening access to Higher Education.

Almost 20% of the Degree Apprentices in this university reside in postcode areas identified within the lowest quartile of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD).

30% of the Apprentices on the Digital Degree Apprenticeship are female; this compares to 10% of the full time undergraduates on Computer Science programmes.

Degree Apprenticeships offer the opportunity for individuals to complete their workplace assessment and the reviewing process through the medium of Welsh.

Do you have any comments on the cost of degree apprenticeships, how degree apprenticeships are funded and the level of funding committed to them?

Degree Apprenticeships are expensive programmes to deliver and require considerable resource to support the provision properly.

In addition to the academic delivery of a programme over 4 or 5 years, an individual Apprentice will be allocated an Apprenticeship Liaison Officer, who will visit them every 6 weeks throughout the programme to review progress, support skills development, set targets and provide any additional support that the Apprentice and their employer require in order to achieve.

The funding allocated to a Degree Apprentice is comparable, on an annual pro rata basis, to that allocated to a Level 3 or 4 Engineering Apprentice.

Apprenticeship provision at lower levels is funded on a programme costed basis. Should a costing model be developed for Degree Apprentices? Please note that this may prove to be more expensive than the current funding allocation.

The £27,000 Degree Apprenticeship fee covers –

- 4 or 5 years of academic delivery – day release provision of 8 hour days over 42 weeks of the year;
- On demand, face to face and on-line academic tutorial support;
- An allocated Apprentice Liaison Officer who visits the workplace every 6 weeks to provide support, review progress and establish short, medium and long term targets;
- In company assessment that links academic research to business specific projects;
- Study support and student services as required;
- Full access to extensive physical and online academic library;
- Essential skills delivery and assessment;
- Wider support of university Apprenticeship Unit;
- Validation, accreditation of specific pathways;
- BCS, IMechE and other professional body accreditation as appropriate.

How has the degree apprenticeship pilot impacted on other level apprenticeships, if at all?

The Apprentices who have enrolled onto the Degree Apprenticeship pathways in this university have a wide profile – a small number have started straight from school and may have followed a level 3 or 4 Apprenticeship if they had not been given the opportunity to start the Degree programme (most of these individuals have been recruited and employed as Degree Apprentices by their employers); the remainder had a wide range of experiences and qualifications prior to starting the Degree Apprenticeship programme, some have progressed from L2 to L4 Apprenticeships, many have BTEC qualifications, and a couple have degrees in a totally unrelated subject (for example law or sports science).

In engineering a total of 75% have a related prior qualification (HNC or HND), many of those achieved through Apprenticeships, and have progressed into the Degree Apprenticeship at the appropriate level. The Degree Apprenticeship programme has given them the opportunity to complete a full undergraduate programme in their chosen career pathway.

Anecdotally, Degree Apprenticeships are having a positive impact on Apprenticeship provision, both in providing progression opportunities and raising the profile of Apprenticeships as being a high quality option to gain higher level knowledge and skills.

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

Degree Apprenticeships are long term programmes that require stability and certainty for all parties involved – the employer, the Apprentice, the deliverer and for Apprentices currently starting their careers at Levels 2, 3 and 4.

As Degree and level 6 Apprenticeships are well established in England, they need to become an established element of the offer for employers and learners in Wales. This will ensure equality of opportunity for learners and a level playing field for employers looking to recruit highly motivated and well qualified individuals who will live and work in Wales.