

This response correlates with the Cardiff University feedback given to Universities Wales on 22/10/19 in response to a Cross-party Group relating to degree apprenticeships. This session included recent degree apprentices sharing their experiences with Assembly Members and Vice-Chancellors.

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

Timescales for the development and publication of frameworks have been unsatisfactory. Delays in this area have hampered the development of programmes and discussions with employers and give rise to the potential for lack of engagement further along the line. Without frameworks, there is no opportunity to develop and support industry needs which are key to Welsh Government Apprenticeship skills policy plan.

Allocation of numbers and the bidding process remains late in the cycle. This presents significant difficulties when working with employers particularly as they have finalised budgets in advance for their training allocation. Suitable time also needs to be allocated between the call for funded places being released and the deadline in order for employers to have suitable time to confirm their intentions.

Recent requests for additional GDPR mechanisms have not been planned and have caused difficulties for individual institutions when HEFCW has not been clear on what the reporting mechanisms are of the data sharing requirements.

At present, Policy events relating to Apprenticeships such as the HEFCW Workshop in January 2019, and the Apprenticeships in Wales Event in November are lacking representatives from Industry which should be the focal point of gathering key intelligence for the range and demand for these qualifications.

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

The sign off mechanisms for putting qualifications onto the Frameworks need further development. Whilst we support a holistic approach to looking at each individual degree apprenticeship programme and how they meet the Framework requirements, as provision grows, this approach will be unsustainable particularly as, to date, the work has been undertaken by a single person.

We would welcome further discussion in this area to ensure that a proportionate approach is developed with clear criteria for development and approval taking into consideration the wide range of employers needs and linked in with the revised processes outlined as part of the PCET reforms. We believe the role of the Regional Skills Partnerships is critical to this process as identified below.

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?

Cardiff University continues to identify opportunities to provide level 7 skills due to demand from employers and learners, but we cannot support such provision under current arrangements. We recommend an urgent review of the current approach in order to future proof the workforce and raise aspirations of learners. This area continues to develop in England and therefore Wales risks being left behind despite being home to the UK leading academics in many cases. A prime example is the level 7 Artificial Intelligence (AI) Data Specialist Apprenticeship which will provide the skills to help employers stay ahead in a data-driven future.

http://www.ncub.co.uk/success-stories/bbc-and-partners-announce-new-apprenticeship-to-drive-data-skills-in-the-uk?utm_source=Weekly+Member+Update&utm_campaign=9215002395-

Regional Skills Partnerships (RSP), properly constituted, should continue to be at the centre of skills policy development ensuring that there is a consistent approach to supporting the improvement of employability and skills, one of the five cross-cutting priorities for Welsh Government. Each Annual Report should provide clear, robust evidence of employer demand to support the recommendations made within the Planning and Funding Template and should be used in discussions with stakeholders when developing future frameworks.

Regional Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) Reports should be released at regular points throughout the year to ensure all LMI is as up to date as possible. This must be balanced with the need to have a full plan produced at an early enough point to allow meaningful engagement with stakeholders/curriculum planners on the plans and RSP recommendations.

Developing higher level skills to future-proof the workforce should be the key focus that supports the increase in demand for post level 6 qualifications and to encourage progression beyond levels 5 and 6 to meet forecasted higher-level skills demand. At present, the focus has been to encourage progression beyond level 2 and 3 which has been successful. The challenge now is to move swiftly to ensure that learners have the opportunity to progress when they have completed their degree apprenticeship at level 6.

Increasing the number and range of apprenticeships offered should be a priority to maximise the demand from employers in response to the Apprenticeship Levy. Extending the range of degree apprenticeships as an alternative, and cost effective, route to higher level qualifications, with greater opportunity to progress into employment should be seriously considered including practical support for sharing apprenticeships in response to demand from industry and particularly SMEs.

Improving industry engagement with education and marketing of career opportunities and pathways should be another priority to ensure there is sustained engagement by industry with schools and colleges to foster education/industry links. There needs to be targeted continuous professional development of teachers and tutors in industry relevant skills, improved information/intelligence and marketing of career options linked to employment opportunities, and better use of industry engagement to challenge perceptions and promote parity between vocational pathways, apprenticeships and academic qualifications.

Brexit must be a key focus of discussion for all RSPs to highlight risks of associated skills gaps/shortages to initiate discussions about longer term workforce planning. It is critical that RSPs

report on any engagement and communications activity/ opportunities to cascade information to employers and stakeholders e.g. via Skills Summits or regional meetings.

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?

All institutions aim to widen participation and fair access and welcome applications from students of all backgrounds. At Cardiff University, we use [contextual information](#) as part of our commitment to widening participation, taking into account the context in which an applicant has achieved or will achieve their qualifications, to provide greater understanding of their potential to study an undergraduate degree programme with us.

As identified above, further consideration needs to be given to targeted continuous professional development of employers, teachers and tutors in industry relevant skills to ensure they understand the benefits and entry requirements of degree apprenticeships and promote them to all appropriate candidates.

As apprentices are selected by employers, care must be taken on how to support this message as the application process must be equitable from both an employer and an educational perspective. The wider benefits of degree apprenticeships can be promoted in a holistic campaign where students of all backgrounds can be encouraged to participate.

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

Funding for degree apprenticeships needs serious consideration particularly in relation to the Apprenticeship Levy as funding provided to Wales is not ring-fenced. A fundamental principle of devolution is that Welsh Ministers allocate resources in their Budget according to Welsh priorities, as approved by the Assembly, and this needs to be considered by increasing the number and range of apprenticeships to employers and the level of apprenticeships on offer.

Commitment to stabilising/increasing the funding would help to promote the benefits of degree apprenticeships into the future where it is seen as an area of growth rather than an area of trial.

Capping the total funding at £27k for the totality of the degree apprenticeship can be difficult for educational institutions given that experience shows that in order to fulfil the requirements of the framework, many apprentices and employers require the learning (work based and academic) to take place over an extended period of 3 to 5 years. In order to encourage institutions to continue to develop provision in wider areas, further thought should be given to the current funding model.

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

Whilst Cardiff University does not deliver any lower level apprenticeships, care must be taken to ensure that there are sufficient pathways for apprentices to seamlessly move up through the levels. By

restricting the availability of degree apprenticeships at level 6, this may discourage employers and apprentices at lower levels if they cannot see progression pathways through the levels.

The ambitions of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 must also be considered and how all apprenticeships can continue to support Welsh Government and other public bodies to deliver the commitments helping us to create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future.

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

The approach to developing and delivering degree apprenticeships in Wales should be more dynamic and agile in line with the up to date current and future labour market data in Wales. Prosperity for All, our National Strategy, recognises skills and employability as one of five priority areas that have the greatest potential contribution to long-term prosperity and well-being. The better people's skills, the better their chances of getting fair, secure and rewarding employment, and the stronger the skills base is in Wales, the more chance we have of attracting new businesses and growing existing ones to improve prosperity. A key aim is to enable people to develop the skills they need to get the jobs they want, supporting businesses to start, innovate and grow, creating decent, secure employment.

Key areas for the delivery of degree apprenticeships should be based on the following:

- What are the main skills shortages for employer recruitment in the region?
- What sectors/areas of business are in decline in the region?
- What are the emerging occupations which require particular skills and/or new qualifications' needs?
- In the view of employers from the region, what are the key elements they look for when recruiting an individual?
- In the view of employers from the region, what skills development support is required, if any, to assist an individual to remain and/or progress within the workplace?
- How are higher education providers engaging with the RSP? Are there areas for improvement?
- What higher level skills needs have been identified for the region that are not being addressed by HE providers? What are the reasons for this?
- What demand is there for degree apprenticeships in the region including estimated numbers by course?
- In which sectors, where it is recommended that provision should be prioritised, have Welsh language skills gaps been identified?