

Inquiry Terms of Reference

The Committee will explore, discuss and seek information on the following aspects of degree apprenticeships:

- The rationale for degree apprenticeships;

Offering degree level education is essential to underpin economic growth and prosperity. Providing an alternative education pathway verses that of going to university (as a full time student) is an essential element of securing growth as it provides an educational pathway suited to students with differing learning styles.

Additionally, the business benefit of having a apprentice in employment whilst they are studying is a well understood win win and provides a well rounded and experienced employee who often will stay with the organisation for the long term

- The process and criteria for approving proposals from providers to deliver degree apprenticeships;

A review of this process needs to be made. The current administrative bodies that cover education in Wales are operating in Silos, one part responsible for Further education and the other responsible for Higher education.

Degree apprenticeships by their very nature transcend these bounders as learners start at level 3 and progress over the life of the apprenticeship to level 6.

Currently the ownership of apprenticeships, both their frameworks development and funding is confusing and unclear. Clear accountability needs to be defined to ensure the validity and quality of the Apprenticeship is understood and maintained inline with business needs.

- Demand from employers and learners, both for the current frameworks or any demand for additional frameworks, and how it is being managed;

Attracting talent is essential for our future survival. Developing pathways that support future skilling needs is essential. The process currently underpinning Apprenticeship Framework development is underpinned by the Sector skills councils.

The onset of standards in England and the subsequent demise of the SSC role means that a credible alternative for development and control of framework development must be found quickly to ensure that the knowledge based

needed to develop these frameworks is owned and protected by a Welsh administrative body.

- 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;

Equality targets will only be met when the product being offered is attractive to all. Ensuring gender balance in sectors like engineering will only be achieved through improving the students general awareness of STEM and the opportunities/career paths that can follow the study of such subjects.

The source of developing this awareness lies deep with our education system. A fundamental change in the infrastructure and methods that currently support career path selection is essential to achieve the fundamental shift in gender balance. “Do what we have always done and we will get what we have always got!”

- Employer engagement and the profile of employers accessing the degree apprenticeship programme including, if possible, the geographic spread;

The offering of funded degree apprenticeships needs to be balanced and centred around the identified regional employment needs identified by the RSP. This will allow the appropriate funding to be applied to support the required level of education in each key sectors.

- The degree apprenticeship funding model, the overall funding level and the funding commitment needed to ‘teach-out’ the three year pilot apprentices;
- Early views from employers, educational providers and learners on how well degree apprenticeships are working and lessons from their introduction;
- Views on Welsh Government’s overall approach to degree apprenticeships, their rolling out, and their impact on, and relationship with sub-degree apprentices; and
- Views on the future direction and potential of degree apprenticeships.”

Invitation to contribute to the inquiry

The Committee would like to invite you to submit written evidence to assist with the inquiry. General information regarding consultation procedures, which should be considered carefully before submitting evidence to the Committee, is set out in the Annex.

The Committee would welcome your views on any or all of the issues covered in the terms of reference, and in particular on the following questions:

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

The demise of the SSC has meant that there is a severe shortage of experienced education practitioners to develop the degree frameworks. In the long term this issue will become more acute as development and review cycles reduce (to support industrial evolution).

Clear ownership and therefore knowledge retention needs to be defined to ensure the validity and quality of the Apprenticeship are maintained in line with business needs.

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

No. Whilst the outcome has provided a quality education path, there was an underpinning reliance on one individual to run to both collate and develop the educational pathways. This individual was a contractor with no long term affiliation with Wales. We see this as a considerable risk to long term knowledge management.

- 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?

The offering of funded degree apprenticeships needs to be balanced and centred around the identified regional employment needs identified by the RSP. This will allow the appropriate funding to be applied to support the required level of education needed in each key sector.

- 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 point should be not to limit the development of degree programmes, the point should be to make sure their availability supports regional and national needs. This strategic link is what is missing in the English system and has resulted in the proliferation of degree programmes and a subsequent impact on funding availability.

- 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 programmes should be fully funded as long as they are meeting the strategic needs defined by the RSP.

Secondly, structured negotiations are needed with universities to challenge the 9k flat cost. An apprenticeship by its nature is part time, therefore there is sound logic to approach costing in the same way it is applied in FE i.e. bottom

up with the burden of proof necessary to create a competitive costing structure. This will provide a cost effective way for the Welsh Gov to support all levels of apprenticeship.

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

Not aware of any direct impact other than the cost impact of the costs incurred by the universities 9k flat charge rate.

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

1. Based on defined regional and sector needs.

2. Programme content should be owned and maintained by a body of specialists. The approach to content development should be treated as a project and draw on the expertise and knowledge of relevant business/sectors representatives into a multifunctional team who both guide the content development and review the final proposed content.

3. Maximum by-annual content review to keep pace with change.