
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

Background information about Estyn

Estyn is the Office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, Estyn is independent of the Welsh Government.

Estyn's principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, Estyn must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by education and training providers in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Estyn's remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary schools, secondary schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and teacher education and training.

Estyn may give advice to the Assembly on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, Estyn has set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

Estyn welcomes the opportunity provided by the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee to provide evidence for the inquiry into Degree Apprenticeships. The degree apprenticeship programmes are new and in their pilot phase and therefore have not yet been subject to any formal review regarding their quality and effectiveness. Therefore the comments below are based on information gained from a range of activities including conversations with key stakeholders, meetings and conferences as well as our evidence base relating to delivery of apprenticeships at other levels.

Overall, Estyn welcomes the further development of the apprenticeship programme at all levels. Work-based learning has the potential to respond in an agile way to ensure that we have the skilled workforce we need now and in the future. The development of the degree apprenticeship programmes are an important part of the strategy and have the potential to further raise awareness of the value of apprenticeships with employers, learners and parents. We have provided more detailed feedback below, but would urge that going forward:

- There is clear and structured work-based activity including visiting learners regularly in their workplaces to undertake on-the-job assessment, and allocation of mentor in the workplace.
- The range of degree apprenticeship frameworks is broadened, to build credibility of the apprenticeship route.
- Recruitment is used pro-actively to widen participation.

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?**

Currently, degree apprenticeship programmes are not widely advertised so few people outside of employers and providers delivering the programmes have an awareness and understanding of them. The programme has had a very quiet introduction at a time when vocational training is becoming more acknowledged as a viable alternative to traditional academic routes. The opportunity has been missed to re-launch the apprenticeship offer in its entirety, including the degree programme. This is a missed opportunity to clearly show the entry and progression routes that are available to learners. The narrow range of degree apprenticeships available, does not help in marketing the apprenticeship route as an important alternative at degree level.

It is essential that universities design and deliver programmes that are constructed in the format of work-based learning, as delivered by those training providers who are successful/effective in delivering higher apprenticeship programmes. This means working with employers to design and deliver bespoke programmes and not being over-reliant on adapting existing courses.

The majority of funded learners on the degree apprenticeships have come from large national companies during the initial roll-out of programmes not to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro businesses. Degree apprenticeship opportunities

need to be marketed more thoroughly after the pilot to make sure all employers and learners are aware of the available opportunities.

Employers state that due to the lack of work-based activity included in the degree apprenticeships, they need to sometimes work with other training providers simultaneously to ensure that apprentices gain other, often lower level, qualifications to equip them with the practical skills they need for their job role.

The monitoring of learner progress through workplace progress reviews for degree apprentices should be carried out at regular intervals, similar to practice for existing apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship programmes. These reviews will support learners in making progress towards the completion of their programme or identify slow progress and the risk of not completing.

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

Apprenticeships at all levels have key components that were not part of the original proposal for the degree apprenticeships. These include the need to visit learners regularly in their workplaces to undertake on-the-job assessment and to undertake comprehensive learner progress reviews and assessment target-setting.

Apprenticeship programmes are highly reliant on coaching and mentoring in the workplace. In our report on higher apprenticeships¹ we reported that in the best cases, employers allocate an experienced mentor to work with their learners, but, in a few cases, learners do not receive any mentoring support from their employers. To ensure that learners reach their full potential and develop the workplace skills required by their employers, a workplace mentor should be identified at the start of the programme. Proposal and approval documentation should have a sharper focus regarding how these elements would be delivered and monitored. Higher education institutions have expertise in the design and delivery of degree courses but have less experience of liaison with employers and learners in the workplace for the work-based learning element.

In future, it would be beneficial for the criteria for approving proposals to state clearly how the key requirements of work-based learning within the programmes would be met. It is essential the programme is clearly designed and delivered as a work-based learning programme and not a slightly modified existing degree sandwich programme or one that contains a small element of workplace experience or internship.

- **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?**

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<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/www.estyn.gov.wales/files/documents/Higher%20apprenticeships%20in%20work-based%20learning%20-%20en.pdf>

The demand should be managed to match the economic needs of the country, employers and the learners. The demand should not be driven by large employers to secure the bulk of the funding allocation, nor should it be used to supplement training programmes where the employer may be reasonably expected to pay for training.

Currently the range of frameworks is limited to the pilot offer. However to meet the needs of a wide range of employers the offer should be expanded after the pilot. A wider range of opportunities would establish this type of degree level training as a known and viable alternative to full-time university-based degree courses.

The range of frameworks also needs to build more clearly on the range of apprenticeship frameworks and other vocational qualifications at levels 1-5. This will enable learners to progressively develop their skills through their career.

- **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?**

Degree apprenticeships need to be better promoted in schools and a wider spread of young people targeted through marketing and promotion events. For the current pilots, less than 14% of the first year cohort for the degree apprenticeships were under 21 years of age. Degree apprenticeships should be promoted as an alternative to studying for a traditional degree for those with A level or level 3 equivalent qualifications.

Recruitment methods and entry criteria should mirror the existing work-based learning recruitment methodology by using initial assessment methods to determine a learner's practical skill set and ability. Regular progress review meetings with learners and employers should be included to monitor progress and ensure that learners complete their qualification in the given timeframe. Programmes should include a structured programme of off-the-job training to ensure learners network with other learners, share best practice and exchange ideas about the working practices.

Degree apprenticeship programmes have the opportunity to focus on two clear entry routes. Firstly, those learners who have been in an employer and progressed to higher levels may be offered the opportunity to progress to degree level training. The second route would be for new entrant learners who may enter directly onto a degree apprenticeship programme.

The pilot degree apprenticeship programme mainly comprises of existing learners who have progressed to a higher level. As a result, it is not widening access from non-traditional groups at this stage. Following an evaluation of the pilot programme and with the introduction of more degree programmes, there would be an opportunity to widen employer and public perception and understanding of degree apprenticeship programmes. This could market programmes and engage with underrepresented groups such as females into non-traditional programmes and black and minority ethnic groups.

The committee may find our earlier reports on Barriers to Apprenticeships (2014)² and Breaking down Barriers to Apprenticeships helpful³.

- **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 cost of degree apprenticeships is similar to the cost of equivalent degree courses. However, the funding is via the Welsh Government and not by means of a student loan of £9/10k funded by Welsh Government for each degree apprentice programme.

This option may become more popular for learners and parents when access is available to new entrants and not those already in employment with their employer. A tension and subsequent pressure on funding will come from levy-paying employers who often see a need to recoup the money they have paid into the levy for training programmes. The funding for degree programmes should not be at the detriment of lower level programmes. The need exists to upskill the workforce across Wales. However, there remains a significant need to upskill learners to level 2 and level 3 and to establish clear progression routes thereafter to the higher levels, where appropriate.

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

Currently, little information is available regarding any substantial impact on other levels. The sector needs to be aware that the high cost of degree apprenticeships may reduce the number of learners entering training at lower levels due to funding limitations. Degree apprenticeships need to supplement the apprenticeship programme offer and not place a forced restriction on those entering at lower levels.

There is a significant demand from learners and employers for apprenticeships. Many employers across Wales recognise level 3 frameworks as providing skilled status, with learners being valued members of their employers' staff. However, there is still work to be done to communicate the value of apprenticeship routes to parents.

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

The approach to delivering and assessing degree apprenticeship programmes should mirror the way other apprenticeship programmes are delivered and assessed. Work-based learning, like all other education and training sectors, has established requirements and specialisms. Arguably the most important facet is the need for specialist staff who can regularly visit learners in their workplaces to undertake

² <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/barriers-apprenticeship-november-2014>

³ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/breaking-down-barriers-apprenticeships-october-2015>

progress reviews and set challenging targets for the completion of work. These staff also act as the conduit between the employer and learner to make sure the training meets the criteria for work-based learning. The matching of on and off-the-job activities needs to be carefully structured and planned. Work-based learning involves a programme of on and off-the-job activities across a calendar year and as such should not be only fitted to an academic year. With the enhancing and widening of the degree apprenticeship offer, higher education institutions will need to train or recruit specialist assessors for these programmes.

In our higher apprenticeship report, we found that in a majority of cases, employers provide helpful mentoring support for learners. It is essential to have a designated workplace mentor to enable learners to be supported, share best practice and discuss ideas about how best to achieve their goals. However, in a few cases, learners do not receive any mentoring support from their employer. This means that they make slower progress and do not develop and apply their theory skills well enough.

In terms of quality assuring degree apprenticeships, Estyn and QAA have established joint protocols of working together with HEFCW. Estyn would be keen to work with other quality assurance organisations on developing a joint quality review, to build on our expertise and experience in inspecting apprenticeships at levels 1-5.