

Russell George AM
Economy, Infrastructure & Skills Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

4 March 2020

Dear Russell George AM

Following the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's inquiry into Degree Apprenticeships on 27 February, it may be useful for us to clarify our written evidence, as we feel that our response may have been misinterpreted in the committee session. Our responses to the questions you asked were intended to be helpful and to support the review of the pilot degree apprenticeship programmes, and was not intended as a criticism of the pilot programmes.

Our written evidence to the Committee is based on our extensive experience of inspecting apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships, including the messages and recommendations from our [Higher Apprenticeships](#) report. The evidence also drew on the discussions we have had in the sector with work-based learning providers and employers as part of our inspections, thematic inspections and link inspector visits. We have not been involved with the design of the pilot degree apprenticeships, the selection of providers, or any ongoing quality monitoring. Our response to the questions about the design and criteria of the pilot programmes were based on what we have learnt from our experience of the practice of effective providers of higher apprenticeships. This caveat was stated clearly in our written submission.

In our evidence, we mentioned that *'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.'* This did not mean that we felt that the existing pilot degree programmes lacked work-based learning activity as we have not been involved in the criteria for approving proposals. The degree apprenticeship frameworks identify clearly the need to provide both off-the-job and on-the-job

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training. Our comments were aimed at reinforcing the importance of these aspects complementing each other effectively, and of including the opportunity to gain any other relevant technical qualifications in addition to the degree. We have found in our inspections of the delivery of apprenticeships at other levels, that it is essential that both the on and off-the job training are designed to complement each other and that this relationship is reviewed regularly to ensure it delivers as planned.

From our report on higher apprenticeships we noted 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. This was one of the recommendations from our report which we felt would be helpful advice for the degree apprenticeship programmes.

When we mentioned in our written evidence that higher education institutions may have less experience of liaison with employers and learners in the workplace for the work-based learning element, we meant only that degree apprenticeships is a new way of delivering higher education, which is distinct and different from previous models. It was not to suggest that universities and other regulated institutions of higher education do not already have a range of partnerships with employers through the diverse work they do. When we write 'work-based learning' we are referring specifically to apprenticeships not elements of learning which have work-experience attached.

In discussing the monitoring of the quality of support offered by employers to apprentices, some witnesses highlighted the difference of approach currently in the methodology of quality assurance reviews between QAA and Estyn. In our written evidence we state that we 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.'* We do not have a one-size fits all approach to inspection. Our methodology for inspecting apprenticeship provision is different to a school inspection and includes first hand observation of learners in on-the-job training in their workplace and off-the job training delivered in various ways both off-site or in the workplace. These inspections include peer inspectors from other apprenticeship providers as part of every team and consider the voice of apprentices, training provider staff and the employer through bespoke surveys. First-hand observation of training and assessor activity, as well as scrutiny

of the training provider's own quality assurance and improvement work, form the evidence base for our judgements.

We have welcomed HEFCW's invitation for us to join QAA in carrying out a joint developmental quality assurance review of the pilot degree apprenticeship programmes. This has the potential to enable collaboration between the two quality bodies to ensure that both our experiences can inform the bespoke quality review for these pilot programmes. This would help to share understanding of our respective approaches to quality assurance and enhancement and enable the review to focus on all aspects of the degree apprenticeship programme, based on our respective experience and expertise in quality assuring apprenticeships (Estyn) and higher education (QAA). We already have a good working relationship with HEFCW and QAA which is maintained through joint working protocols and regular meetings to share information, particularly where our responsibilities/interests overlap – such as with these new programmes and when discussing HE in FE.

We would be happy to talk to the Committee about the work we do if you feel it would be helpful to the inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Meilyr Rowlands
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Education and Training in Wales