

## **Professions and Professional/Degree Apprenticeships study 2024**

### **Summary of interim findings**

The study focusses on level 6 and 7 apprenticeships, though refers to level 5 where there is a close link e.g. nursing, HR.

Informed by Lester (2008/9) on professional entry-routes, Hordern (2015) on professions and higher apprenticeships, PARN (2011, 2015, 2017) on professions and higher/degree apprenticeships, and Lester & Bravenboer (2020), Jones *et al* (2023) and others on degree apprenticeships.

21 professional bodies and 11 providers – interviews/questionnaires June-October 2024. 21 fields.

#### Qualifying requirements

3 main models –

- A. Closely linked to approved courses – mainly health professions – flexibility often within the course e.g. FT, PT, DA, RPL – but no alternative routes in
- B. Varied routes with different options – greater or lesser flexibility – the majority (some e.g. HR and legal executives already geared to supporting people in work)
- C. Based on comprehensive professional assessment, regardless of route – cultural, ecology.

Overall becoming more flexible, e.g. recent changes in architecture and law (solicitors), influence of H/DAs.

#### Use of higher-level apprenticeships

Widespread in professional fields – major/minor entry/progression route or in development. Strong level of endorsement in line with the qualifying routes as above. Most accept towards professional status, some with additional requirements (e.g. level 6 apprenticeship + further learning at level 7 for chartership, or an additional assessment). ‘Group C’ bodies can endorse them as a route but they don’t provide exemptions from assessment.

#### Structure and functioning

Distinction between (a) long-programme apprenticeships e.g. law and ecology, enter from level 3 and progress to level 7, and (b) those split into two or more levels – e.g. nursing, HR – with engineering & surveying in the middle. Advantages/disadvantages to each – depends who they are intended for, but (a) greater likelihood of drop-out, v. (b) more attractive to people already in work *but* potential for blocks to progression between one level and the next. Also influenced by employers – e.g. L6 + L7 sequence in architecture rarely used, intake is mainly FT graduates to L7.

Some concern that there are too many apprenticeships in some fields e.g. engineering – too narrow, job roles rather than professional careers, not broad enough to allow qualifying requirements to be met.

Some L6 apprenticeships with a master's degree - used in surveying, social work, physiotherapy to attract graduates, engineering considering. Advantages/disadvantages.

Some non-degree apprenticeships incorporating a degree, e.g. L7 law + LIB, L7 curating + MA. Perceived labour market disadvantage if apprentices complete without a degree.

EPAs. Mixed models – integrated with degree, integrated with professional assessment, non-integrated. Challenging to integrate all 3 unless professional requirements are already covered by the degree. Some questioning of the value of the EPA v. see it positively as additional quality assurance. EPAs without linkage to either lead to low completion of the apprenticeship (learners want degree + prof qual).

#### Professions' attitudes towards apprenticeships

Overwhelmingly positive. Health sector strongly supportive throughout, occasional lack of understanding of how they work. Most others very positive – way of attracting more people in, diversifying entry, routes for people already in workforce etc. HR & legal executives already have strong work-based routes so more measured – a funded version of what's there already?

Some reservations from 'more traditional' firms and practitioners – e.g. don't understand apprenticeships, want Russell Group graduates.

Recognition that they are not for everyone – hard work and a lot of commitment.

#### Apprentice backgrounds and diversity

Several have a substantial uptake from people in the workforce but at an assistant level or otherwise not professionally qualified, as well as return-to-work and career-change entrants. Major successes providing routes through to professional jobs for people who were not confident about HE, unable to find time/funds to return, or were stuck in their careers – largest effect on social mobility. Includes graduates who become stuck in first-level roles e.g. psychology assistants. Other aspects of diversity tend to depend on composition of lower-level v. professional workforce.

School-leaver entrants typically no more diverse than FT students, and may be less so – recruit from the same pool of applicants and can be harder to get in to. Some potential for greater ethnic and gender diversity discussed but no concrete examples offered.

#### Success and progression

Apprenticeship route widely described as more successful than FT degree + professional training. Evidence includes high employment levels after completing, rapid promotion, more 1sts, quicker progression to qualified level (e.g. 'an accelerated route to chartership'), reports from employers. Apprentice-route entrants typically described as highly capable and contributing more to their organisation. Can be weaker initially on academic learning but most catch up quickly.

More difficult to control for existing experience – many apprentices already have work experience, sometimes 10-20 years. Some evidence of faster progression in social work for comparable cohorts.

### Views on design and governance

Professions are now reasonably satisfied with their level of influence on apprenticeship design and development, e.g. well-represented on Trailblazers. Criticism of bureaucracy and lack of responsiveness of national system.

Some concerns about QA, particularly Ofsted – duplicating QA, bringing in ‘school-level’ requirements, lack of flexibility on functional skills.

### Views on delivery

Good level of satisfaction with off-job delivery, plus examples of good practice.

Less favourable from professional bodies about how theory and practice are integrated, and the support and training provided by employers. Sometimes treated by employers (and providers) as a part-time degree, little recognition of how workplace learning fits in. In several fields employers not always providing the full range of experience needed and not allowing apprentices to take responsibility. Other employment issues e.g. being expected to continue doing old role as well as apprenticeship one.

### Barriers

Reluctance from some universities to become apprenticeship providers – a problem for small professions when research-intensives have the sector expertise – do they opt for alternative providers without experience in their field/at levels 6 & 7?

Lack of understanding/enthusiasm among employers, particularly in sectors used to taking on graduates. Can also be linked to e.g. recruitment freezes/financial constraints.

Employment matters – e.g. smaller firms can’t offer breadth of experience coupled with a shortage of placements, expected to do current role as well as train for new one, employers not supporting progression between levels (e.g. nursing 5 to 6).

Some struggles to get apprenticeships started in the face of low numbers, lack of interest from universities, employer cutbacks, lengthy approvals process, finding an EPAO.

Geographical distribution of providers/employer recruitment – major problem for smaller professions but also physiotherapy, osteopathy.

Perceptions of apprenticeships as low-level/manual, e.g. in law and curating, or degree apprenticeships as not as academically credible as FT degrees – but much less than it was 5 years ago.

### Next steps

Focus groups November 2024

Final report early 2025

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