DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS: UNDERSTANDING THE OPPORTUNITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper provides an overview of the outcomes of the roundtable held on Tuesday 19 July at Universities UK (UUK), as part of a one-day seminar on degree apprenticeships. The information included in this briefing reflects the views of the 39 delegates who completed the survey.

KEY FINDINGS

- 30 (**88%**) of delegates in the roundtable were from institutions **currently implementing or considering the implementation** of degree apprenticeships.

- **Access to a new student market** is the most cited **benefit** of degree apprenticeships (53.85% of delegates).

- Respondents see **regulations and bureaucracy** as the two most important **barriers** to the implementation of degree apprenticeships.

- **Business engagement** is considered as one of the most important **benefits** of degree apprenticeships but also as one of the main **challenges** to their implementation.

- **Students and families** were scarcely mentioned either as motivators or barriers to degree apprenticeships.

- Institutions are currently looking to develop **partnerships with a vast range of employers**, both in the public and private sector, for the successful implementation of degree apprenticeships.

INTRODUCTION

This briefing provides an overview of the outcomes of the roundtable held on Tuesday 19 July at Universities UK, as part of a one-day seminar on degree apprenticeships.

Throughout the day, speakers from leading organisations discussed the current state of development of degree apprenticeships, and future options to ensure degree apprenticeships' growth and success. Among others, presentations were conducted by representatives of UUK, the Institute for Apprenticeships, the Skills Funding Agency, the University Vocational Awards Council, and the Higher Education Council for England.

Seminar themes included the critical role of universities in the delivery of degree apprenticeships, the Degree Apprenticeships Development Fund, the national policy

landscape, and future challenges and opportunities for the growth of degree apprenticeships.

Participants at the event had the chance to actively engage in the discussion by joining a seminar session in which they discussed the current state of development of degree apprenticeships, identified key motivators and barriers, and suggested areas of improvement. Participants also completed a questionnaire on these specific topics.

The information included in this briefing reflects the views of the 39 delegates who completed the survey. For more information on what degree apprenticeships are, please refer to Annexe A.

FINDINGS FROM THE ROUNDTABLE

1. Institutions' current approach to degree apprenticeships

Of the 39 questionnaire respondents, 33 were from higher education institutions potentially able to provide degree apprenticeships[1], and six were from other organisations involved or interested in degree apprenticeships[2].

According to delegates, 35% of the institutions represented are currently considering the implementation of degree apprenticeships and 26% are implementing degree apprenticeships in a selection of faculties/schools or departments. Only 10% have an institution-wide implementation of degree apprenticeships, while 16% are at the trialling stage.

Figure 1. Institutions' approach to degree apprenticeships

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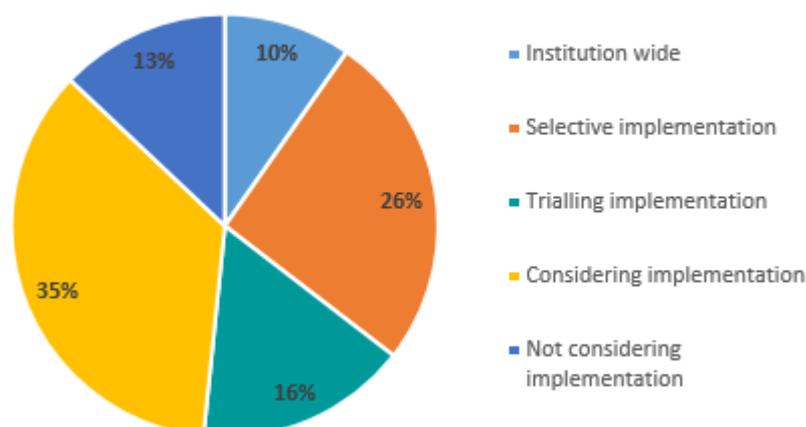
[1] Listed in Annexe B
[2] Listed in Annexe C

Altogether, 30 (87%) of the delegates engaging in the discussion were from institutions implementing or considering implementation of degree apprenticeships.

Given the nature of the event, it is not surprising that only 13% of participants stated their institution is not considering the implementation of degree apprenticeships. However, this percentage may not be representative of the current state of the sector and, therefore, it is important to keep this figure in mind when interpreting the findings.

2. Benefits of degree apprenticeships

The list of potential benefits related to the implementation of degree apprenticeships is long and varied. Degree apprenticeships could have a positive impact not only on institutions, but also on their main stakeholders.

For 41% of delegates, degree apprenticeships could favour business engagement, offering institutions the opportunity to create closer links with employers.

Employers and the economy as a whole would benefit too. Degree apprenticeships would ensure provision of vocational education relevant to employers according to 33% of delegates, and, for 13% of them, the implementation of degree apprenticeships could stimulate growth and promote regional development.

The creation of a more widely educated population is also mentioned among the potential benefits, together with upskilling the local community (13%).
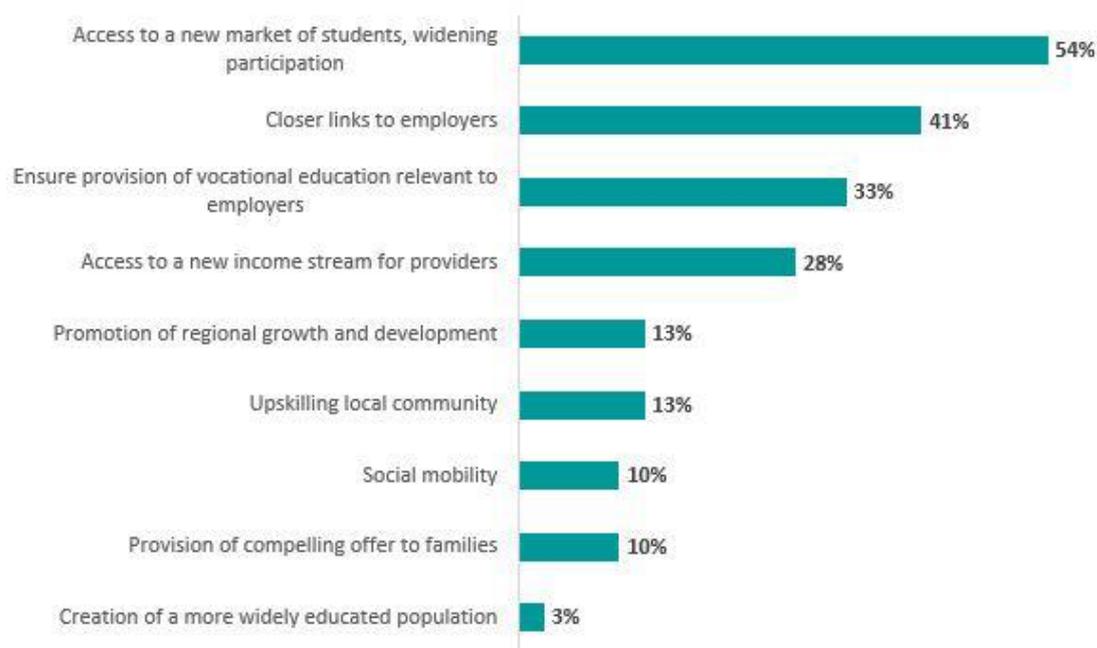
These last two benefits are somewhat related to another benefit mentioned by 10% of delegates: social mobility, one of the core objectives of the sector in recent years.

Similarly, 54% of delegates mentioned widening participation as a major benefit of degree apprenticeship's implementation.

Furthermore, according to 28% of respondents, institutions as providers could benefit from the new income stream coming from degree apprenticeships.

Lastly, 10% of respondents highlighted the benefits for students and their families. Given their structure, degree apprenticeships would offer families a financially and academically compelling alternative to current routes.

Figure 2. Potential benefits of degree apprenticeships implementation

Benefit	Percentage
Access to a new market of students, widening participation	54%
Closer links to employers	41%
Ensure provision of vocational education relevant to employers	33%
Access to a new income stream for providers	28%
Promotion of regional growth and development	13%
Upskilling local community	13%
Social mobility	10%
Provision of compelling offer to families	10%
Creation of a more widely educated population	3%

3. Barriers to the implementation of degree apprenticeships

Together with the numerous benefits related to the implementation of degree apprenticeships, delegates also identified a consistent number of challenges to the provision of these new degrees.

The most cited category of challenges is policy and regulations-related. Indeed, 36% of issues mentioned by delegates fall in this category. Uncertainty around the policy landscape and the timeline for the implementation of degree apprenticeships were identified as the top of the challenges for this category.

Some respondents also complained about the lack of information and guidance, and about the lack of standards for delivery. In addition to that, there is considerable confusion around what degree apprenticeships are, the levy, and the process for standards' approval.

28% of delegates agreed that bureaucracy was a significant barrier to the implementation of degree apprenticeships. This category includes issues related to the functioning of the levy, requirements related to the approval of new standards, and post-implementation data requirements.

Challenges, however, are not only external. Issues that negatively affect the implementation of degree apprenticeships also come from within institutions.

26% of delegates suggested that a lack of institutional interest in degree apprenticeships, and/or the lack of staff trained to manage degree apprenticeship projects are important barriers to implementation.

Academic resistance to degree apprenticeships is compounded by many different and urgent priorities which characterize the current academic landscape. As 8% of respondents reported, a sizeable challenge to degree apprenticeships is the initiative overload to which institutions are currently exposed. The presence of urgent priorities is diverting the attention from degree apprenticeships, delaying their implementation.

Another important aspect of degree apprenticeships implementation is employers' engagement. Although the possibility of creating closer links with employers is considered one of the most important benefits of degree apprenticeships, business engagement was identified by 18% of delegates as one of the main challenges to implementation.
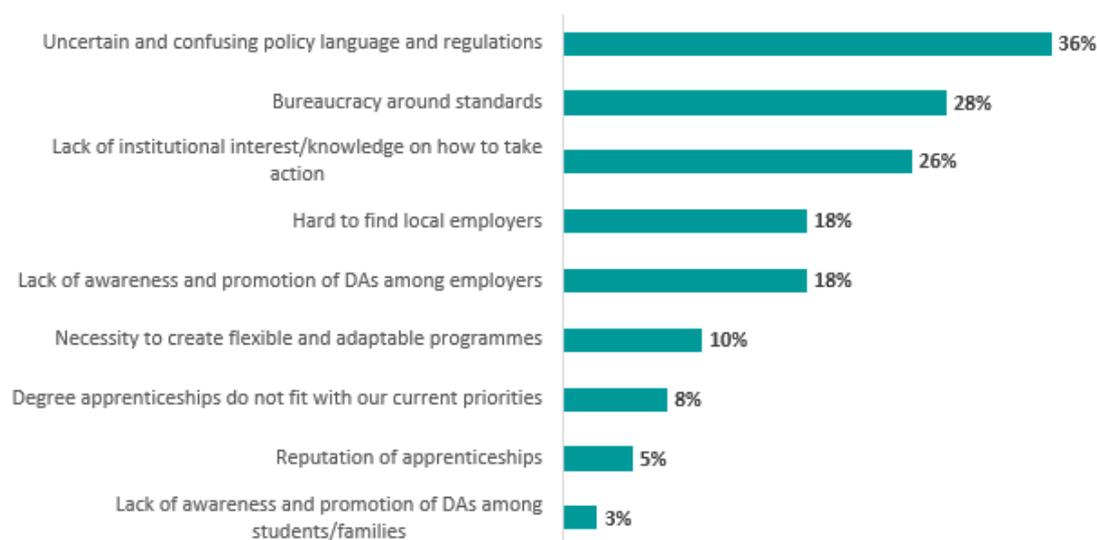
Respondents found it difficult to identify employers potentially interested in degree apprenticeships, in particular at the local level. Furthermore, the lack of a good network of employers and institutions at the regional and national level makes employer' engagement even more difficult.

In addition to the identification problem, 18% of respondents also mentioned the lack of awareness of degree apprenticeships among employers as a major issue.

The main feature of degree apprenticeships is that programmes are co-designed with employers to address their skills gaps. However, this feature is also one of the obstacles to implementation. The necessity of creating programmes that are flexible and adaptable to a range of different employers often within the same standard or framework is creating further challenges for institutions, as 10% of delegates suggested.

Lastly, 5% of respondents pointed to the perception around apprenticeships as a challenge to their implementation. This, together with a lack of awareness on degree apprenticeships by students and families (cited by 3% of delegates), could negatively affect learners' demand for degree apprenticeships.

Figure 3. Main barriers to the implementation of degree apprenticeships

Barrier	%
Uncertain and confusing policy language and regulations	36%
Bureaucracy around standards	28%
Lack of institutional interest/knowledge on how to take action	26%
Hard to find local employers	18%
Lack of awareness and promotion of DAs among employers	18%
Necessity to create flexible and adaptable programmes	10%
Degree apprenticeships do not fit with our current priorities	8%
Reputation of apprenticeships	5%
Lack of awareness and promotion of DAs among students/families	3%

## 4. Partnerships for the development of degree apprenticeships

To ensure the delivery of degree apprenticeships, institutions are currently developing numerous partnerships. Given the combination of university study and workplace learning which characterises degree apprenticeships, it is not surprising that the majority of institutions are currently developing relationships with employers.

According to seminar participants, their institutions are mainly working with private employers, be they single local employers or employers' partnerships. Some institutions are trying to further develop existing relationships with employers to involve them in the delivery of degree apprenticeships.

Furthermore, institutions are working with professional bodies and chambers of commerce, and partnerships are also being developed with the public sector, local councils and the NHS.

On the educational side, institutions are working to secure partnerships with regional further education colleges, local colleges and degree awarding institutions.

Figure 4. Partnerships for the development of degree apprenticeships
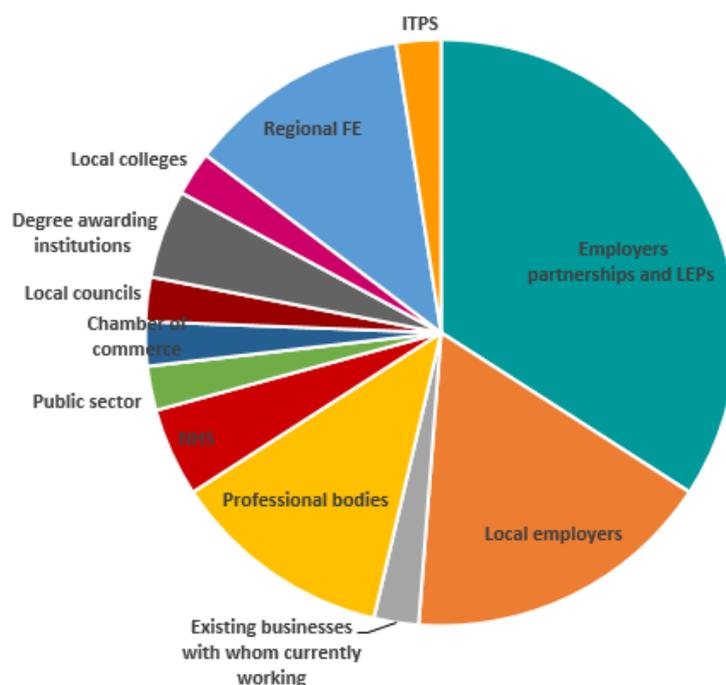
5. Areas of further support: moving forward

Overall, there is strong enthusiasm for degree apprenticeships, but confusion over policy and regulations, and the burdensome bureaucratic process required for their implementation risks reducing their potential.

According to delegates, institutions would need further support, both online and face-to-face, on every step of degree apprenticeships' delivery, from the designing of standards to their practical implementation.

More research on degree apprenticeships, the promotion and marketing of case studies, and the sharing of good practice have also been identified as areas in which institutions would like to see support. Reviewing the evidence on degree apprenticeships would facilitate the implementation process by signalling best approaches.

In addition, institutions need support in reducing the bureaucratic burden, at all points of the process: from the entitlement to provision of degree apprenticeships, to data reporting. Furthermore, participants would like to have clarity about the levy and its use.

Lastly, Universities UK and other sector-wide organizations could, according to participants, play a networking role, raising awareness and promoting degree apprenticeships among employers, connecting organizations and, hence, facilitating the implementation of degree apprenticeships.

ANNEXE A – WHAT ARE DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS?

Degree apprenticeships are a combination of university's study and workplace learning that enables learners to achieve a full bachelor's or master's degree. Programmes are co-designed with employers to precisely address their skills gaps, and apprentices are granted employment status and entitled to a salary. Furthermore, they do not pay tuition fees.

Degree apprenticeships are part of a wider plan of the government to increase the overall country productivity by 2020, and are partly funded by the government and partly by employers.

The first degree apprenticeships were launched in the 2015–16 academic year in four sectors: digital, automotive engineering, banking relationship manager and construction. Estimates suggest 1,500–2,000 degree apprentices started in 2016, but numbers will increase in the upcoming years given the announcement of degree apprenticeships in further nine sectors.

ANNEXE B – LIST OF INSTITUTIONS WHOSE DELEGATES COMPLETED THE SURVEY

1. Bangor University
2. Birkbeck, University of London
3. Duchy College
4. Durham University Business School
5. King's College London
6. Kingston University
7. London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
8. London Southbank University
9. Manchester Metropolitan University
10. Nottingham Trent University
11. Queen Mary University of London
12. Royal College of Music
13. Royal Veterinary College
14. St. Patrick's College
15. Staffordshire University
16. The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama
17. University of the Arts London
18. University of Bath
19. University of Brighton
20. University of Chichester
21. University of East London

22. University of Gloucestershire
23. University of Kent
24. University of Lincoln
25. University of London International Academy
26. University of Reading
27. University of the West of England, Bristol
28. University of Westminster
29. University of Wolverhampton
30. York St. John University

ANNEXE C – LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS WHOSE DELEGATES COMPLETED THE SURVEY

1. Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
2. Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
3. Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply
4. Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland
5. Graduate Prospects
6. Health and Care Professions Council