

Review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales

Overview report

October 2021



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Introduction

1 In the spring term 2021, QAA conducted a review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales funded through the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) by the Welsh Government. At the time of the review, pilot funding for Degree Apprenticeships has been made available in the priority areas of: Digital, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing. The Degree Apprenticeships review was designed to be a developmental review focused on higher education providers' delivery of the distinctive characteristics of higher education apprenticeships, including work-based learning, using the QAA Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships (Characteristics Statement) as its reference point. A review was undertaken for each lead Degree Apprenticeship provider in Wales in receipt of funding from HEFCW, eight providers in total, and included partnership arrangements with further education providers in its scope (for further details see Annex 1). This report forms an overview of the eight provider reports and presents a summary of the provision and findings of the reviews. It makes a number of recommendations for the sector in Wales on future delivery of Degree Apprenticeship programmes. As this was a developmental review, individual provider reports are not being published and this sector-wide report summarises the findings anonymously.

Aims of the review

2 The Degree Apprenticeships review is a developmental process designed to assist stakeholders in the development of Degree Apprenticeship provision in Wales. In particular, the review aims to:

- inform the development of Degree Apprenticeship provision through a review report of the provider's provision
- share practice with partners and employers, and inform future apprenticeship provision
- promote sharing of sector good practice, learning and areas for development through an overview report
- enhance the value of the apprentice learning experience and the value of apprenticeships for employers
- inform the future development of Degree Apprenticeship provision in Wales.

Scope of the review

3 Reviews were undertaken for each lead Degree Apprenticeship provider in Wales in receipt of funding from HEFCW for the priority subject areas. The scope of individual provider reviews included delivery partners - further education colleges - in order to consider the effectiveness of the collaboration and scope for development of further pathways. The review used programme trails to sample provision, one programme per Degree Apprenticeship framework¹ where relevant. For some providers whose current provision comprises one programme overall or one programme per framework, these programmes formed the programme trail. Where a provider delivered different programmes with different college partners, it was ensured that sampling included a programme with each college partner and that consideration was also given to delivery in different regions of Wales. For further information, see Annex 2.

¹ There are two apprenticeship frameworks for the priority areas of funding: Digital Degree Apprenticeship (Wales) www.acwcerts.co.uk/web/framework/digital-degree-apprenticeship and Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Degree Apprenticeship (Wales) www.acwcerts.co.uk/web/framework/engineering-and-advanced-manufacturing-degree-apprenticeship

4 The review included engagements with employers in the workplace within the selected programme trails, to assess the effectiveness in the delivery of institutional processes both at a local level and across the institution as a whole. There were a number of mechanisms to take account of the apprentice voice and experience through engagement with apprentices individually and collectively where possible. Reviewers took account of how the Welsh language has been considered in the delivery of apprenticeship programmes and considered the contribution of Degree Apprenticeships to supporting access, equality and equity of opportunity.

The review method

5 The review methodology is described in full in the Handbook: [Review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales](#). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the review was delivered wholly online.

6 The review focused on the key areas in the design, structure and delivery of Degree Apprenticeships set out in the [Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships](#). It considered how the characteristics and distinctive features of Degree Apprenticeships are supported through these key areas. A summary of the key considerations for the five areas was presented in the review handbook (pages 5-8) for the benefit of both providers and reviewers.

7 As a developmental review, review teams did not make an overall judgement on the standards and/or quality of the provider's provision. Instead, reviews identified good practice and areas for development to improve and enhance the design, structure and delivery of Degree Apprenticeship provision. Good practice was defined as an aspect of the management of the provision making a particularly positive contribution to the apprentice experience. Areas for development are processes or practices which if improved or modified would strengthen and enhance the delivery of the characteristics/distinctive features of the provider's Degree Apprenticeship provision.

8 The key elements of the review approach were:

- a provider Facilitator appointed by the lead provider who had day-to-day responsibility for the arrangements for the review
- opportunities for apprentice input through a lead apprentice representative and an apprentice submission or to be represented by student representatives (for example, student union officers)
- a reflective analysis and evidence base prepared by the lead provider to assess their performance
- programme trails to sample provision and form the basis of employer and apprentice engagement in the workplace
- a review team of two reviewers selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience of higher apprenticeships and work-based learning
- opportunity for individual employers and apprentices to make an input through a pre-review questionnaire
- flexibility in the length of review visits to take account of the size and complexity of provision, the type and number of employers and the number of apprentices employed, as well as flexibility in the timings of review meetings to accommodate the availability of staff, employers and apprentices
- meetings with further education collaborative partners as part of the review visit
- a report for the provider including the opportunity to comment on factual accuracy.

9 QAA consulted on a draft review handbook over August and the first half of September 2020, publishing a finalised version on 16 October. A briefing for providers was

held on 2 November. Review visits took place between March and May 2021. Resources from the briefing, including questions and answers, were published on the [QAA website](#).

Summary of findings

10 The main findings of the review are summarised in this section while in the following sections a more detailed discussion of the findings by key area are presented.

11 The level of engagement with employers in the design, operation and flexibility of work-based learning opportunities is commented upon widely across providers as being a positive feature of Degree Apprenticeships. In addition, the providers' use of industry liaison panels in the design and development of Degree Apprenticeships was seen as a feature of good practice.

12 Employers and apprentices spoke positively about the responsiveness and flexibility of providers who acted quickly to ensure the continuation of the apprenticeship programme and moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

13 The appointment by providers of key link tutors with employers, apprentices and partner colleges was valued by all. This is further evidenced by all providers having in place a tripartite agreement between employers, the university and apprentices.

14 The added value that apprentices bring to employers through the development and delivery of work-based projects was highlighted by employers working with the majority of providers as a key benefit of the Degree Apprenticeship programmes. The majority of employers added that the apprenticeship students were taking forward innovations in new projects and supporting their workforce planning by filling future skills-gaps in the development of their businesses.

15 The integration of Degree Apprenticeships in the majority of providers' overarching quality assurance frameworks ensures that employer and apprentice issues are raised and formally addressed through annual monitoring cycles.

16 Apprentices and employers at the large majority of providers were positive about the mode of study of their programme and flexibility of providers to meet their needs.

17 While recognising employers are responsible in the main for the recruitment of apprentices, providers are employing a range of methods to address equality, diversity and inclusion. All providers recognised there is more work to do to attract a more diverse intake onto Degree Apprenticeships programmes and many providers are working with stakeholders to promote this issue.

18 There is a need for some providers to review their mechanisms for engaging with employers on differing aspects of the design and implementation of the apprenticeship programmes. In particular, a number of providers need to establish regular formal communications with employers and apprentices on all aspects of academic progress of the apprentice. Progress Reviews are a requirement of the Characteristics Statement and need to be implemented consistently.

19 Furthermore, at a small number of providers, this development of regular formal communication channels with partner colleges, employers and apprentices needs addressing to deal with issues as they arise. A number of employers across a range of providers outlined that improvements in communication could be made and that there was a reliance on one individual at the provider being the channel for all discussions on Degree

Apprenticeships. A number of providers accepted the need to do more to formalise the communication and operational systems and processes on Degree Apprenticeships with partner colleges and employers. Providers also acknowledged the need for authentic assessments and to engage employers in developing these.

20 Several providers needed to do more to ensure that the apprentice voice was heard through the formal feedback mechanisms of either the partner college or their own module evaluation systems and processes. In addition, apprentices at provider partner colleges needed to be more effectively supported in terms of being inducted into the availability of resources and support at the lead provider.

21 A number of providers needed to address the issue of how they engage formally with employers as part of the quality assurance of Degree Apprenticeships, in particular, the issue of ensuring employers are made aware of the issues arising in external examiner reports and how the provider is responding to them.

The findings

22 The following sections present the findings of the review for each of the five key areas. Review teams identified a total of 19 instances of good practice across the eight reviews. While there was a spread of good practice across all the key areas, a total of eight good practices were identified for learning and teaching suggesting this area as a particular strength of the sector. In two reviews, several key areas contributed to examples of wider and more integrated good practice; however, for the purposes of this report, these good practices have been reported under the key area of most relevance. In terms of areas for development, for which 20 in total were identified, these are spread across all five key areas, although six instances came under the heading of support for apprentice achievement.

Design and development of programmes

23 The reviews evaluated whether, and to what extent, programmes had been developed and designed to deliver the defining characteristics and distinctive features of a higher education apprenticeship. The findings reported from the reviews under this heading are summarised below and cover the following areas: design of programmes; the referencing of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Qualifications Frameworks and the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales*; Welsh language requirements; the design of on-the-job and off-the-job learning; employer engagement; engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; progression routes; and continuing professional development opportunities.

24 The review found there was alignment across all providers with the key quality reference points including the UK Quality Code, the EU Quality Framework, and HEFCW's Quality Assessment Framework for Wales. All providers use their established institutional quality frameworks to design and develop Degree Apprenticeship programmes. Where it was required for programme development, providers engaged with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), mapping them to professional requirements and, in some cases, gaining PSRB approval. For one provider, the embedding of the requirements of how to develop a new apprenticeship qualification into the quality manual was identified as **good practice** as it helped inform decision-making by validation panels. In another example of **good practice**, the mapping of apprenticeship characteristics and standards to programmes areas was used to support the achievement of apprentices and track and monitor achievement through learning plans. Where it fitted in with the operation of academic provision, some providers have played an active role in the development of apprenticeship standards.

25 The majority of providers met the full design requirements of the Degree Apprenticeship and the essential elements of the Characteristics Statement. As an **area for development**, one provider needed to provide further evidence of engagement to ensure it met the requirements of the Characteristics Statement in full.

26 All providers, in their processes for the development of Degree Apprenticeship programmes, align to the *Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales* and Welsh language requirements which are requisites for HEFCW funding.² All providers offered the opportunity to apprentices for work to be submitted and marked in Welsh.

27 The majority of providers have involved employers fully in the design and development of programmes including the integration of on-the-job and off-the-job learning to varying degrees. One provider, as an **area for development**, needed to further develop its strategy for engaging with employers on the design and development of programmes. A number of providers use existing structures such as industry liaison groups to engage with employers. Where appropriate, all providers support employers in the recruitment of apprentices by working with existing local and regional skills networks.

28 Across all providers, apprentices are largely content with the balance between on-the-job and off-the-job learning. All providers' apprentices confirmed that all programmes effectively linked the classroom or laboratory-based learning with learning in the workplace. In one review, the positive impact of workplace live brief projects delivered by the apprentices and the value they added to the company, was identified as **good practice**.

29 Providers have external examiners in place for programmes. An area that could be strengthened is where external examiners cover more than an apprenticeship programme and whether they are able to make specific comments in relation to apprenticeship provision in their reports. A number of providers give information to employers and workplace mentors on the academic context and progress of apprentices but, for some providers, the need to strengthen this was identified as an **area for development**.

30 All lead university providers that work in partnership with local college providers are delivering their Degree Apprenticeship programmes effectively. Some of these partnerships have operated for some time. There were two instances of **good practice** in this area; the contribution of the strength of the collaborative partnership to the design, development and delivery of programmes, and the contribution of the partnership in developing a Degree Apprenticeship programme which meets the skills needs of local employers.

Modes of delivery

31 The reviews evaluated the range of factors that informed how Degree Apprenticeship programmes are delivered in order to support the characteristics and distinctive features of the qualification. The mode of delivery of programmes may be influenced by the pedagogic approach, employer and apprentice requirements, the individual apprenticeship, PSRB and fitness-to-practise requirements. The findings reported from the reviews under this heading are summarised below and cover the following areas: alignment of off-the-job learning opportunities; employer engagement; inclusion and diversity; and quality assurance of learning.

32 The review found all providers, through the development of programmes, engage with employers in their preferred delivery modes and delivery locations to ensure the best outcomes for apprentices and employers. Providers ensure through the delivery models, that

² HEFCW Circular W20/05HE Degree Apprenticeships in Wales and Proposals for Funding 2020-2021

off-the-job learning is integrated into day-to-day work activities to ensure apprentices maximise their learning opportunities. In one example, the lead provider has made effective use of an industry liaison panel in the development of creative work-based learning opportunities and this was identified by the review as **good practice**.

33 All employers and apprentices expressed satisfaction with the balance between off-the-job learning and day-to-day work activities. At one provider **good practice** was identified where there was a positive integration of academic/work-based learning built into work-based assessments. A large number of employers confirmed the value that apprentices were adding to the workplace through the engagement and delivery of work-based projects integrated into the Degree Apprenticeship.

34 The majority of providers had integrated the Degree Apprenticeship programmes into their overarching quality assurance processes and systems. The range of quality assurance systems in place included reporting through institutional formal committee structures and mechanisms, use of annual monitoring reports, external examiner reports and the development of action plans to address issues arising. All providers had in place tripartite agreements between the university, employer and apprentice setting out the responsibilities and expectations for each party.

35 The majority of providers have formal opportunities for apprentices to feedback on their experiences through the completion of module evaluation forms. All providers have effective structures in place with employers and college partners to ensure that operational issues that arise in relation to the day-to-day running of Degree Apprenticeships are dealt with in a timely manner. For three providers, employers wanted improved communication on the support and academic progress of apprentices, and greater engagement in the design of the programme, and this was an **area for development** for one provider.

36 Providers have a variety of lead/link tutors working with employers and supporting apprentices. Good practice was identified in the case of one provider which has appointed a lead role for apprenticeships that is benchmarking against sector best practice and actively engaged with employers.

37 There is a range of methods by which providers address equality, diversity and inclusion; for example, through discussion as part of the validation process and through use of equality impact statements. Recruitment to Degree Apprenticeships formed part of providers' widening access initiatives to attract and provide access for students from diverse backgrounds. All providers acknowledged there was more work to be done in attracting more diversity to the apprenticeship intake. Many providers were working with employers and other local and regional agencies to promote apprenticeship opportunities to encourage females into STEM-based apprenticeships.

Learning and teaching

38 The reviews evaluated the range of learning and teaching methods used in order to support the needs of Degree Apprentices and their individual workplace. The findings reported from the reviews under this heading are summarised below and cover the following areas: an appropriate range of learning and teaching methods; the involvement of employers in designing/agreeing details on assessment; clear agreement of responsibilities of all parties; appropriate time being set aside to enable quality-based learning; how self-directed learning is supported through mechanisms such as learning agreements; the integration of on and off-the-job learning; students' ability to access Welsh medium provision; and the recording of learners' progress.

39 The review found appropriate learning and teaching strategies are employed across all provision, with a mix of approaches including lectures, tutorials, workshops, practical exercises, projects and case studies. Providers' programme specifications and module descriptors set out in detail the knowledge and skills to be developed and the methods of learning, teaching and assessment. Apprentices are also given access to the provider's virtual learning environment.

40 In the majority of cases, programmes have been flexibly designed to ensure teaching and learning methods reflect the needs of the apprentice and the employer. This bespoke approach allows apprentices to learn and develop skills that are required specifically by their employer. There are excellent examples of how this is working effectively, with three providers having identified this as a feature of **good practice** - where module content and assessment have been agreed between the provider and employers to allow apprentices to work in a simulated real-world project development environment; and where projects have been prescribed and developed directly with employers and apprentices, and support them in their individual workplace situations to achieve their learning outcomes.

41 The requirement for there to be both on and off-the-job learning is met by all providers, in line with HEFCW's conditions for funding Degree Apprenticeships. Programmes have been designed to meet the suggested minimum of 20% off-the-job learning, as set out in the Characteristics Statement, with providers working with employers to ensure that the delivery pattern meets their needs. This leads to some flexibility in delivery - in some cases a full day at the provider, in others a half-day and an evening. Other concessions offered by employers vary: one employer adjusts their workload model, giving some remission to enable apprentices to focus on university work; while another allows time for shadowing, so that apprentices can learn from colleagues within the workplace alongside their own work. A third, identified as **good practice**, has half a day per week set aside for project catch-up meetings between the apprentices and the project module supervisor, which is seen by the relevant professional body to lead to a high standard of individual and group projects and to be a major strength of the programme. A further provider where this was identified as **good practice**, makes online materials available through an app and the provider's website. This offers an accessible and flexible way to learn that complements the blended learning approach and supports employers to arrange for their apprentices to be 'out of the office' at different times. It allows the employer to be able to negotiate flexibility around service pressures, allowing apprentices to more effectively meet the needs of service provision. Apprentices highlighted this as a positive contribution to the learner experience that actively encourages apprentice achievement.

42 Some apprentices report considerable time pressures in working, attending classes and needing to complete self-study and assessments outside of these, but see the benefits gained from working and earning while studying as outweighing this disadvantage. Delivery of the Degree Apprenticeship programmes in most cases runs through a 12-month cycle to include some summer delivery (outside a 'normal' academic year). Examples are given of flexibility in delivery where requested, with an instance of module delivery being changed from two to three semesters to support apprentices in coping with the demands of their programme and of a timetable change to accommodate both the employer and the apprentice. Two providers were given **good practice** in this area for their flexibility in delivering learning opportunities and meeting the requirements of individual employers.

43 There are differences in approach as to whether apprentices are co-taught with others on a traditional degree programme or are taught separately. In the one instance, where apprentices are co-taught alongside on-campus students for most modules, elements of work-related learning are included in all programmes delivered by the provider. For another provider, there is some co-teaching and some teaching specific to apprentices, although the provider is moving away from this model to separate teaching of apprentices

in the future. In other providers, modules are delivered purely for Degree Apprentices. In another instance, apprentices are encouraged to engage with peers from other employer organisations for group work and tutorial discussions to expose them to a wide range of experiences, viewpoints and contexts from those new to the industry to those with significant experience in employment, to create a rich learning experience.

44 As set out in HEFCW's requirements for funding Degree Apprenticeships, a three-way Apprenticeship Learner Agreement (ALA) setting out the respective responsibilities of the employer, the apprentice and the provider, and being signed by each, is utilised across all provision. In some cases, this has been supplemented by the provider's own learning agreement, as the standard ALA was not felt to cover all obligations - for example, the role of the workplace mentor and the hours of study attendance - and a further provider plans to do similar.

45 Both the Characteristics Statement and HEFCW's conditions for funding Degree Apprenticeships set out the requirement in Wales for apprentices to have their progress reviewed at least every two months. However, this is variable in its implementation with one provider regularly scheduling reviews to monitor achievement, progression and success, and recording this, but other providers, although visiting regularly, not conducting formal progress reviews consistently. For four providers this was identified as an **area for development**.

46 Providers have responded well to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, putting together supportive packages of measures to ensure that apprentices are not disadvantaged in terms of their achievement; including revised arrangements for the delivery of teaching, support and assessment, and additional online resources; and, in one instance, an end-of-term workshop specifically for apprentices. Overall, the reviews found that apprentices experienced minimal disruption to their studies. In one case, the comprehensive way in which the University and employer worked together to support and ensure apprentices' studies were uninterrupted, particularly in relation to work-based learning activities, was identified as an area of **good practice**.

47 All providers offer the opportunity for apprentices to have learning materials or assessment in Welsh but in the majority of cases this opportunity has not been taken up. Some employers offered informal opportunities for engagement with the Welsh language. For some providers, encouraging students to gain credits for study through the medium of Welsh is a strategic goal or understood as a serious responsibility and actively promoted in order to prepare apprentices for a bilingual career. Two providers received **good practice** for their promotion and support of Welsh language in their apprenticeship provision.

Supporting apprentice achievement

48 The reviews evaluated the mechanisms in place to support Degree Apprentices throughout their journey - from admissions and transition into the workplace and programme, to completion of the award. Consideration was given to the support needs of apprentices from both their employers and higher education providers. The findings reported from the reviews under this heading are summarised below and cover the following areas: induction arrangements for apprentices; access to student support services; support for inclusion and diversity; opportunities for career progression; and support for staff who teach and employees who mentor.

49 The review found apprentices are made aware of the demands and challenges of the apprenticeship by both their employer and the provider being given detailed information on their programme and the learning support available, thus meeting HEFCW's requirements for funding Degree Apprenticeships. Induction is comprehensive and effective across

providers, with various means of delivery which include a three-day, pre-arrival 'boot-camp', detailed briefing sessions for new apprentices and their line managers, the introduction of apprentices to their Practice Tutor to develop a study plan and structure their forthcoming work and study, and familiarisation with student support services and the virtual learning environment.

50 Apprentices also commonly receive programme handbooks and student handbooks although for two providers a greater distinction needs to be made between apprentices and traditional students' needs, with one review identifying this as an **area for development**.

51 Apprentices across all provision have a personal tutor and can access their higher education provider's student support services and the resources and facilities of the students' union. This meets HEFCW's requirements for funding Degree Apprenticeships, although in one case the apprentices were unaware of all the additional support available and this was identified as an **area for development**.

52 Apprentices' career progression is supported in various ways. The Characteristics Statement notes that 'there should be flexible and transparent ongoing career progression' and that 'potential progression routes should be established, between provider and employers, when a higher education in apprenticeship programme is approved'. While there are **areas for development** highlighted in terms of this not having been explicitly considered at the approval stage, and the identification and development of skills to meet the specific needs of the workplace; across the provision support for career progression is evident - through workshops, soft skills development, online resources and modules specifically designed to support career development. Employers and apprentices comment positively that the Degree Apprenticeship programme helps to increase career options and prospects, with employers also indicating that the apprenticeship programme supports the natural evolution of the organisation and keeps them apprised of current technical innovations which promotes their competitiveness.

53 Frequent visits are made to workplaces by module tutors, programme leaders or other liaison role holders (in virtual form during COVID-19 restrictions), enabling regular contact between mentor and tutor, and apprentice and tutor, although (as noted above) formalised progress review reports are less well established. Apprentices report that they feel well supported, have good access to learning resources and have multiple opportunities to provide feedback to the provider. In one instance, however, this was highlighted as an **area for development** as the feedback received by the provider through its module review process cannot be viewed through the lens of the Degree Apprenticeship programme.

54 Support is given by providers to the employer's staff involved in degree apprentice training, mentoring and assessment to enable them to undertake their work effectively. Examples of the ways in which providers are providing support include: complementary mentoring, professional supervision and coaching courses to expand the skills of apprentice supervisors and managers; and the production of an Employer Mentor and Line Manager Guide with associated formal induction, a resource bank and mentor training. In one instance - identified as an **area for development** - the mentorship process was acknowledged to be inconsistent and at times misunderstood by employers; however, the provider is in the process of developing a mentorship tool which will be accessible to all mentors to support their understanding of the role.

55 Members of programme teams across all providers have opportunities for staff development, including industrial placements. Provider staff are often also active researchers and/or working closely with industry.

56 Apprentices needing support may be identified at application stage or at any point thereafter and an individual learning support plan can be put in place, if needed, in line with HEFCW's requirements for funding Degree Apprenticeships. Examples were given of employers and providers working to ensure unnecessary barriers to learning are removed, including outreach work such as using apprentices to deliver activity in schools under the 'You can't be what you can't see' initiative and active encouragement of greater participation of females, underrepresented in STEM subjects. At one provider, final-year students provide Peer Assisted Study Support sessions for first-year apprentices to assist them in preparing material for their first assignment submissions. Assessment practices also support inclusion and diversity in the workplace, with relevant university guidelines being applied to ensure assessment tasks are inclusive.

57 Progression data is monitored through assessment boards and the providers' annual monitoring procedures, providing oversight and assurance of the quality of the student experience including student satisfaction, curriculum design and delivery, and data on award, progression and non-continuation.

58 The clear identification of key roles plays an important part in the successful operation of Degree Apprenticeships and the support of apprentices, and there are several examples identified as **good practice** including those below.

- The Practice Tutor facilitates the integration of academic and work-based learning, and performs a key academic liaison role between the provider, apprentices and employers. Apprentices report that meetings with Practice Tutors are an important support mechanism that enables them to plan their work and study time effectively, along with Associate Lecturers who facilitate learning through personalised tuition, student support and feedback
- The Central Apprenticeship Unit is responsible for the development of apprentice provision and is critical in supporting apprentice achievement. Each degree apprentice is allocated an Apprentice Liaison Officer (ALO). The Apprenticeship Unit closely monitors the performance and engagement of every apprentice through the learning plans. The ALOs maintain records of all progress meetings which form part of a commentary on the apprentice journey through the programme and includes signposting of apprentices to support services, such as Student Services, as appropriate
- The complementary roles of the Degree Apprenticeships Lead and the Personal Tutor strengthen the tripartite link between the apprentice, the employer and the provider, and provide effective contact points for the provider in support of apprentice achievement.

59 Where delivery is through a partner college, these are managed through formal partnership agreements and quality assurance arrangements, and are seen to add considerable value to the programmes, gaining the additional experience of work-based learning from the partner and enabling greater access to apprenticeships through local delivery. Meetings between the partner and the lead provider at which any problems and successes are discussed, are beneficial in supporting the apprentices. Apprentices can access the student support services offered through both the partner and lead provider, and although apprentices felt well supported by both, some based at one partner college were not fully integrated into the support systems and processes of the university partner, and this was identified as an **area for development**. Access to the Students' Union at the lead provider was felt to be important as it gives support which goes beyond that available at the partner college, in particular as it provides the course representation system for students.

Assessment

60 The reviews evaluated the assessment strategies in place in relation to the nature of the elements of the apprenticeship learning programme. For Degree Apprenticeship programmes, a variety of methods of assessment will be required which may include a variety of formal and informal, and formative and summative techniques. An employer might be involved in the design and/or in agreeing details on assessment and confirming achievement of professional competence by the apprentice. The findings reported from the reviews under this heading are summarised below and cover the following areas: recognition of prior learning; design of the assessment strategy; use of authentic work experiences in assessment; development and training for those involved in assessment; and recording of progress and achievement.

61 The review found that, as called for in HEFCW's requirements for funding Degree Apprenticeships, apprentices' previous experience and learning is recognised where appropriate. Recognition of prior learning processes are available across all providers, to enable apprentices to gain entry or advanced standing, and there are examples of these being effectively used, including the opportunity with one provider for students who have completed Level 4 of its foundation degrees to transfer with advanced standing onto the funded Degree Apprenticeship route.

62 Degree Apprenticeship programmes use a range of assessment methods, including formal written examinations, coursework, case studies and projects, with designated work-based learning activities included in them. At programme-approval stage providers conduct detailed mapping in relation to learning outcomes and assessment. Comprehensive assessment information is available to apprentices in module assessment briefs or module descriptors, outlining the learning objectives being assessed, assessment criteria and submission requirements, although at one provider it is not always clear how these assessments can be contextualised for the workplace. In the vast majority of cases, apprentices report receiving timely and helpful feedback.

63 Providers work with the employer to ensure apprentices have suitable work-based projects which meet the learning outcomes. Where it has been difficult to allocate tasks to learners, as their job roles do not require them to undertake some requirements of the programme, learner scenarios have been provided, as well as opportunities within other workplaces, to cover the required outcomes. In another instance, other organisations are known to approach the provider with projects to be undertaken by apprentices and students.

64 Providers mostly engage with employers to agree assessments, to ensure that they are authentic and will enable improved innovation and business growth for the employer. The majority of providers contextualise assessment so that the Degree Apprentices can engage fully with their learning in practice, but in two instances further work remains to be done as **areas for development** to relate assessment more closely to the workplace. While the Characteristics Statement notes that employers may be involved in some aspects of summative assessment, the reviews did not find examples of this; however, there were examples of employer involvement in formative assessment including one instance identified as **good practice**. Formative assessments are widely used to inform the apprentices, their employers and the teaching staff about areas of strength and where to improve.

65 For two providers the sharing of external examiner reports with employers was identified as an **area for development**, to ensure that employers are made aware of the reports and how the provider is responding to them.

Recommendations for the future

66 While the review identified many instances of good practice across all key areas in the support of the characteristics of Degree Apprenticeships, several areas for development were recurring across a number of the reviews. These can be summarised in four overarching recommendations:

- Full recognition should be given to the distinctive nature of Degree Apprenticeships by ensuring that they are mapped to the Characteristics Statement during the design and development of programmes.
- Apprentices should be provided with support and guidance materials that are tailored to the distinct nature of the provision and its delivery.
- Providers should ensure the implementation of formal progress reviews at least every two months as required by the Characteristics Statement.
- To enhance provision, providers should give greater opportunities for employer involvement in the design and delivery of programmes and for employer-led assessment.

References

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HEFCW (2020) Quality Assessment Framework

HEFCW (2020) W20/05HE: Degree Apprenticeships in Wales and Proposals for Funding 2020/21

Instructus (2019) Apprenticeship Framework: Digital Degree Apprenticeship (Wales)

QAA (2020) [Review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales](#)

QAA (2019) [Characteristics Statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships](#)

SEMTA (2020) Apprenticeship Framework: Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Degree Apprenticeship (Wales)

UKSCQA/QAA (2018) The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Annex 1 - Lead providers and partners

A table of the reviews conducted with partner colleges

Lead provider	Colleges linked with this provider
Bangor University	Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
Cardiff University	
Cardiff Metropolitan University	
The Open University in Wales	
Swansea University	Coleg Cambria Gower College Swansea
University of South Wales	
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	Coleg Sir Gâr
Wrexham Glyndŵr University	Neath Port Talbot College

Annex 2 - Programme trails

Provider	Degree Apprenticeship Framework	Programme trail
Bangor University	Digital Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Applied Software Engineering • BEng (Hons) Applied Mechanical Engineering Systems
Cardiff University	Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Applied Software Engineering
Cardiff Metropolitan University	Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Applied Data Science
The Open University in Wales	Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Applied Software Engineering
Swansea University	Digital Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Applied Software Engineering • BEng (Hons) Aeronautical and Manufacturing Engineering • BEng (Hons) Advanced Manufacturing Engineering
University of South Wales	Digital Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Semiconductor Technologies • BEng (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering • BSc (Hons) Electrical and Electronic Engineering
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	Digital Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Computing (Computer Networks and Cyber Security) • BSc (Hons) Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering
Wrexham Glyndŵr University	Digital Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSc (Hons) Computing • BEng (Hons) Industrial Engineering Design (Mechanical)

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 Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
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Tel: 01452 557000
 Web: www.qaa.ac.uk