



Features of Apprenticeship programmes that support progression to higher education

Summary Phase 1 report, September 2007

Introduction

In January 2007 Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) commissioned the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) to research good practice in Apprenticeship programmes which provide progression to Foundation Degrees and other higher education (HE) programmes. The project was designed in two phases:

1. To identify and research specific examples of Apprenticeship programmes with a track record of successful progression to HE; and to make a preliminary assessment of the features of programmes that facilitate such progression
2. To develop the case for Apprenticeship progression through detailed further research of selected programmes, including Higher Apprenticeship programmes, and sectors; and to articulate, test and facilitate use of the findings in sectors seeking to develop this progression route.

This is a summary of Phase 1. Phase 2 is expected to be completed in Spring 2008.

Literature review

An initial literature review examined a range of material relevant to the project, particularly reports by the LSC, LSDA, Aimhigher, Action on Access and UVAC. The majority of case studies were of individual Apprentice examples of progression, rather than the systematic progression of Apprenticeship cohorts. Existing programmatic case studies addressed the implications for the development and delivery of HE, rather than Apprenticeship, programmes.

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) were making potentially important contributions to Apprenticeship progression in the area of frameworks – Foundation Degree Sector Frameworks and Higher Apprenticeship frameworks (incorporating a Foundation Degree and other HE programmes into an Apprenticeship programme).

Call for examples

A call for examples of Apprenticeship programmes providing progression to HE elicited 46 written responses. By far the biggest sector featured in the responses was engineering – unsurprisingly, given that sector's large size, need for high-level skills and long track record of promoting work-based progression to higher technical and management levels. Other sectors were accounting, IT, nursing, horticulture, construction, childcare and sport & leisure. In addition there was a range of support programmes, mostly produced by Aimhigher in the form of online and CD-ROM information, advice and guidance for Apprentices on progression to HE.

Fieldwork

Having considered the need for a balance of programmes and locations, fieldwork carried out was as follows:

SECTOR	EMPLOYER/ PROVIDER	PROGRAMME(S)
<i>(AA=Advanced Apprenticeship; FD= Foundation Degree)</i>		
Engineering	Ford/Thames Gateway College (CEME) Thames Gateway	AA→FD in Manufacturing Engineering
	Rolls Royce/Derby Uni and College Bridgewater College	AA→FD in Manufacturing Engineering
	Slack & Parr/Loughborough, Nottingham and Derby FE colleges/private training provider	AA→HNC/HND Engineering
Nursing	Sunderland PCT/local FE colleges/Northumbria Uni	AA Cadetship→ Diploma in Nursing
	South Tees Hospitals Trust/local FE colleges/Teeside Uni	AA Cadetship→ Diploma in Nursing
IT	EDS/Local colleges/Thames Valley Uni	AA IT Professional→ FD in Information Systems
Accounting	Accountancy firms/Bolton Community College	AA→AAT NVQ4 Accounting

Additional research

It was also agreed to examine the online/CD support programmes offered by respondents – Step-up (Northumbria University), getup.go (Aimhigher West Midlands), 'A' factor (Aimhigher Northamptonshire) and Building Pathways (Sheffield Hallam University/Aimhigher Humber).

Preliminary findings

Analysis of the information gathered provided the following checklist of characteristics of Apprenticeship programmes and sponsoring employers providing a significant level of progression to HE:

SECTOR

- Engineering – a sector with a long track record of 'stretching' Apprenticeships beyond Level 3 by incorporating Level 4 units and through progression to HNCs and HNDs. Also one of only two sectors whose SSCs have developed a Higher Apprenticeship framework (the other being IT)
- Sectors with established work-based progression routes to higher levels, often linked to professional accreditation (eg. engineering, construction, nursing, accountancy).
- There are individual instances of progression of Apprentices in many – probably all – sectors

SIZE OF EMPLOYER

- Typically large employer with established, substantial Apprenticeship programme– a major player in the local labour market
- Medium-sized company in high-skill, niche market
- Small and medium-sized professional firms (eg. accountancy)
- Individual, often employee-led examples with employers of all sizes

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- Capacity and commitment of employer to invest heavily in people and skills
- Generous allocation by employer of initial, fully-funded training time – typically four years
- Mature (25+) Apprentices often self-funding

PHYSICAL RESOURCES

- High quality training facilities – both in-house and through providers (machinery often donated by employers)

HUMAN RESOURCES

- Dedicated, enthusiastic staff committed to training and development
- Active support of senior management
- Dedicated provider liaison with large Apprenticeship contracts
- Provider instructors/tutors with industry background, supported by CPD

ETHOS/CULTURE

- Employer is a 'learning organisation' – strong commitment to developing people and skills at all levels
- Commitment to work-based learning and shop floor progression – senior executives include ex-Apprentices
- Apprenticeship and progression embedded within the company – it is normal company practice
- HE opportunities open to all – commitment to equality of opportunity and parity of esteem
- Often (though not invariably) entrepreneurial, proactive providers keen to develop work-based routes to HE

BUSINESS DRIVERS

- Intermediate and high-level skills – technical and managerial – are critical to the business
- Skills gaps at technician level
- Attraction of/need to grow own graduates alongside traditional graduate recruitment
- Retention a key driver
- Consideration of longer term interests as well short-term needs
- Professional accreditation/licence to practise are often significant incentives
- Government policy in the public sector

APPRENTICE RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

- Rigorous recruitment and selection, with a strong focus on aptitude and personal qualities, and an eye to HE potential
- Widening the professional recruitment net
- HE and opportunity for progression on the agenda from the start

NETWORKING

- Networked into the local learning and skills infrastructure – LSC, LLNs etc.
- Networking and learning from other sector employers
- Links with schools
- Involvement with SSC

PROMOTION

- Reputation as a good employer committed to training
- Articulation of business benefit
- Proactive promotion of Apprenticeship
- HE opportunities a key message
- Proactive internal as well as external 'selling' of Apprenticeship progression

PARTNERSHIPS

- Participant in the local partnership infrastructure
- Links to professional accreditation
- History of collaboration
- FD consortia – active employer involvement in development

DELIVERY

- Close alignment of learning to business objectives (esp. Foundation Degree)
- Flexible delivery – eg to accommodate shift patterns; ability to 'step on and off'
- Additional units to meet business need and/or prepare for HE
- High quality workplace mentoring
- Accessible college support – 'open door'
- Learners take charge of their learning
- Provider staff development programmes
- Clear, comprehensive documentation

INNOVATION

- HE transition strategies – eg. study skills units, HE induction during Apprenticeship
- Higher Apprenticeship, fast-track models, eg start HE alongside NVQ3
- Bespoke (often FD) programmes tailored to workforce needs
- Public policy drivers, eg. NHS Making a Difference calling for more flexible routes into nursing

QUALITY

- High demands and expectations of learners
- Close supervision and support of Apprentices in the workplace
- Learning agreements
- Close liaison between provider and employer
- High retention and completion rates
- Rigorous monitoring, review and continuous improvement.

The characteristics of Apprentices progressing to HE on these programmes emerged as follows:

APPRENTICES

- Highly motivated
- Mature for their age
- Career-orientated – acceptance of low trainee wage in return for longer-term gain
- May have underachieved at school, achieving less than the level 2 threshold (5 A-C GCSEs or equivalent)
- Strong preference for practical ways of learning
- Loyalty to employer – appreciative of the quality and value of training (though generally unaware of how exceptional Apprentice progression to HE is)
- Typically no history of HE in the family
- Learning must be combined with earning – strong aversion to student debt

The issues impeding the development of these programmes emerged as follows:

ISSUES

- Transition from Apprenticeship to HE can be difficult, particularly the written requirements
- Lack of LSC funding for NVQ Level 4
- Complex funding arrangements of programmes spanning FE and HE
- Employers and Apprentices resistant to paying fees

- Sustainability of programmes is vulnerable to recruitment constraints and personnel change
- Apprenticeships are not accredited within the UCAS Tariff
- Providers not always flexible enough, eg. in tailoring delivery to company shift patterns
- Continual policy developments and changes to professional requirements further complicate the development of progression routes.