

Turning Rhetoric into Reality - Implementing the Concept of Higher Apprenticeship through HE/FE Partnerships – Conference Report

1. Introduction

This paper outlines the discussion held at a conference sponsored by and held at Middlesex University on 23rd May 2011, which focused on how HE/FE partnerships could contribute to the growth, development and success of Higher Apprenticeship. The event was attended by 45 delegates drawn from HEIs, FECs, LLNs and SSCs and featured presentations from BIS, the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), UVAC, the LLN National Forum and Construction Skills.

The objectives of the event were:

- To update colleagues on Higher Apprenticeship policy, funding and development activity
- To share current activities in developing and delivering Higher Apprenticeship
- To brainstorm how HE and FE can implement Higher Apprenticeship and maximise its benefits for individual learners and employers.

In addition to recording the issues raised at the event, this paper outlines a series of action points, proposed to enable HEIs and FECs contribute to the development and delivery of Higher Apprenticeship. Colleagues are invited to respond to the issues raised in this paper by emailing [Caroline McKevitt](mailto:Caroline.McKevitt@uvac.ac.uk) or by posting your comments in the [Quick Contact](#) box on UVAC's website. UVAC looks forward to discussing the report and the action points proposed with the HE and FE sectors, LLNs, BIS, the NAS, SSCs and other partners.

2. Summary of Presentations

Copies of the slides used by presenters at the event are available on the [project webpage](#).

Policy and Funding Update from BIS and the NAS

The following is a UVAC summary and interpretation of the points raised:

- ***Apprenticeship has a very high political profile*** – The Government is committed to Apprenticeship, including Higher Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship progression to Higher Education. There was specific reference to Apprenticeship in the Coalition Agreement. Apprenticeship is a core aspect of the Skills Strategy and part of the Government's wider approach to vocational qualifications as outlined in the Wolf report. Government want to balance the priority of delivering increased volumes of apprenticeships, with a commitment to supporting progression and increasing the proportions of Advanced and Higher Level Apprenticeships. The Government aims to invest funding in the optimum levels and sectors to best deliver growth, whilst also leaving the system the flexibility to respond to local and individual demand.

- **Apprenticeship has a high profile with employers** – 91% of employers have heard of government-funded apprenticeships, although many are not aware of the different levels on offer.
- **The market for Apprenticeship progression** – Research by the NAS suggests that half of all level 3 apprentices (approximately 40,000 individuals) are interested in progressing to some form of higher level learning programme.
- **Apprenticeship and Higher Education Entry** - Providing UCAS points for level 3 Apprenticeships is incredibly difficult. What does this say about the type of provision needed for apprentices and how HEIs/FECs consider Apprenticeship progression to higher education/higher skills programmes?
- **The Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) covers Higher Apprenticeship at levels 4 and 5.**¹ The ‘thinking’ of partners should, however, not be confined to just levels 4 and 5, especially as professional accreditation in most sectors starts at level 6. Level 6 and 7 programmes would not be called ‘Higher Apprenticeship’, but should form part of our discussion.
- **Does Higher Education provide professional accreditation and a license to practice?** There can be a perception that Higher Education is concerned with knowledge rather than knowledge and competence; in contrast, a Higher Apprenticeship is focused on developing and accrediting competence and knowledge. Professional accreditation is fundamental to this debate, a copy of a recent report by PARN (Professional Associations Research Network) on Higher Apprenticeship and Professional Bodies sponsored by the NAS has been circulated to attendees.
- **Next Steps by BIS/NAS - We are approaching the stage where talk and discussion is replaced by action to implement Higher Apprenticeship.** This will involve the provision of 10,000 Higher Apprenticeship places, particularly in SMEs. In June/July publication of a Higher Apprenticeship Prospectus is planned; funding of approximately £25 million will be available for two years for approaches to developing and delivering Higher Apprenticeships. Core to such projects will be:
 - Innovative geographical and/or sectoral partnerships
 - Delivery partnerships that contribute to delivering the 10,000 Higher Apprenticeships announced by Government.

Research and Development Update from UVAC and the LLN National Forum

Points raised included:

- **Higher Level Apprenticeships have a history we can learn from** – Pre 2000 there were many technically-focused engineering apprenticeships (as distinct from ‘craft’) incorporating a higher-level qualification such as an HNC. 2002/3 saw many mainly short-lived graduate apprenticeships involving sector (NTO) and HEI partnerships incorporating occupational

¹ Specifications for Apprenticeships for England (SASE, <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/About-Us/News/~media/Documents/SASE/11-521-Specification-of-apprenticeship-standards-for-england.ashx>),

competencies through National Occupational Standards and an NVQ. Pre SASE Higher Apprenticeships emerged from 2005. The first Higher Apprenticeship framework accredited in engineering technology was developed by SEMTA in 2005 and was used by Airbus and Rolls Royce. The 2006 Higher Apprenticeship in IT developed by e-skills UK was used by BT, npower and Vodafone. 2009 saw the introduction of the Higher Apprenticeship in Accountancy with a route to professional chartered status, which rapidly became the biggest Higher Apprenticeship in terms of take-up. UVAC reviews of Higher Apprenticeships, available [here](#), confirm they provided substantial benefits to and have 'high status' with learners and to employers.

- ***Is England behind our competitors in the development of Higher Apprenticeship?*** - A range of 'Higher Apprenticeship' models exist in Europe. Comparisons need to be treated with care due to the differences in the characteristics of different programmes, but do pose some interesting questions for policy practice and development in England.

The “higher apprenticeship” policy in Italy – Combining work-based learning with post graduate studies

“The Italian policy for establishing the so called “higher apprenticeship” is a very interesting innovation, where work based learning is combined with, in most of the cases, studies at the university at post graduate level. (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). This policy has as a target “to improve the education level of young people and, at the same time (...) tries to start collaboration between schools/universities and enterprises”.

“The target is thereafter the promotion of skills, competences and knowledge of the working population but also the tightening of the relations between the economic organisations and the teaching organisations, mainly universities, but also vocational schools.

16 of the ‘higher apprenticeship’ programmes lead to a master’s degree and only 1 to a bachelor’s degree.

Patiniotis: Higher-level Apprenticeship Statements and Comments, Peer Review, 30-31 October 2008

France – What Proportion of Apprentices should be Higher Apprentices?

Apprentices in France study for the same qualifications as those in full-time education from EQF Level 3 to Levels 7, 8. There were nearly 100,000 Higher Apprenticeships in 2007/8 (out of approximately 425,000 Apprenticeships).

Of those in apprenticeship at ‘NVQ Level 4’ (55,000), just under a fifth had entered from apprenticeship at a lower level. ²

² For more analysis see Steedman: The State of Apprenticeship in 2010: International Comparisons – Australia, Austria, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland and for further international comparisons Joslin: Implementing Higher Apprenticeships – Learning from Practice, Centre for Work-based Learning, University of Greenwich, London May 2011

- The Specification of Apprenticeship Standards in England (SASE) requirements for Higher Apprenticeship can be summarised as shown at table 1 below. A Foundation degree could act as the qualification for delivering and accrediting the competence, knowledge and personal thinking and learning skills.

Table 1: SASE specification for Higher Apprenticeships at level 4 and 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a competence-based element at Level 4/5 • a knowledge-based element at Level 4/5 • Functional/Key Skills at Level 2 or Level 3 • Employment Rights and Responsibilities • Personal Learning and Thinking Skills

- The following SASE Higher Apprenticeship frameworks are currently available:

CURRENT HA FRAMEWORK	ISSUING AUTHORITY
IT, Software, Web & Telecoms Professionals, Level 4	e-skills UK
Improve Proficiency Apprenticeship in Food and Drink, Level 4	Improve
Accounting, Level 4	Financial Skills Partnership (Formerly the Financial Services Skills Council)
Providing Financial Advice, Level 4	Financial Skills Partnership (Formerly the Financial Services Skills Council)
Business & Administration, Level 4	Council for Administration
Contact Centre Operations, Level 4	Council for Administration
Management, Level 5	Council for Administration

Source: Apprenticeships Online, <http://www.apprenticeshipframeworksonline.semta.org.uk/frameworkslibrary/index.cfm#current>, accessed 6.5.11

- The following SASE Higher Apprenticeship frameworks are in development:

HA FRAMEWORK IN DEVELOPMENT	ISSUING AUTHORITY
Business	Energy & Utility Skills
Construction	Construction Skills
Engineering Technology	SEMTA
Health (potential pathways in Acute Care, Rehabilitation and Maternity Support)	Skills for Health
Life Science	Cogent
Optical Retail	Skillsmart Retail
Building Services Engineering	Summit Skills
International Logistics & Transport	Skills for Logistics
Technical/Management Skills	Institute of the Motor Industry

Source: Higher Apprenticeship Briefing – Kevin Buckley, Birmingham Black Country LLN and Staffordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin LLN 2011

- The LLN National Forum has argued that Higher Apprenticeships are the missing link in the apprenticeship family, the component that provides for apprenticeships parity of esteem with academic routes.³ Core to ensuring parity of esteem is the opportunity to include a Foundation degree in the Higher Apprenticeship framework as the qualification for delivering the competence, knowledge and personal learning and thinking skills. Inclusion of a Foundation degree ensures progression opportunities are outlined and available to Honours degrees and professional qualifications and avoids the creation of a glass ceiling at level 4 and 5. Working with Construction Skills and UVAC, the LLN National Forum is supporting the development of a Higher Apprenticeship in Construction Operations Management. The Higher Apprenticeship knowledge, competence and personal learning and thinking skills will be delivered and accredited through Foundation degrees, jointly developed, but separately validated. The specification for the Higher Apprenticeship and Foundation degrees is being developed by an advisory and working group led by the LLN National Forum and UVAC with Construction Skills, Construction Industry Council, HE, FE and professional body representation. The approach adopted is based on employer demand, identified by Construction Skills, for a Higher Apprenticeship, delivered predominately through a Foundation degree that was developed and delivered to a national and consistent standard. Foundation degrees which meet the specification required will be 'approved' by the Construction Skills Standards and Qualifications Group. The LLN National Forum is planning the production of a toolkit/guide to the approach adopted.

³ Developing Higher Apprenticeships in England, Lifelong Learning Networks National Forum Policy Paper, Graeme Hall, Hugh Joslin and Jill Ward, May 2010

3. UVAC Analysis of Discussion Groups and Plenary Feedback – Core Issues – The following issues were raised by delegates in workshop and plenary sessions:

3.1 *University, HE, Apprenticeship and work-based learning - A problem of perception?* There is a problem in the public perception about what higher education is and what universities deliver. Too often higher education and university is perceived as for young people with 'A' levels who study full time, away from home for a three year honours degree. Full-time provision for young people is an important part of higher education provision, but university and HE provision is about far more. Developing occupational competence and delivering part-time learning programmes for adults in employment that are employer led and enhance the skills of those in the workforce and that provide opportunities for social mobility throughout life is an important role for the HE and FE sectors. Indeed, for some universities and for FECs delivering higher education provision, this is their current modus operandi and accordingly Higher Apprenticeship is a natural development and extension of their current offering.

Action Point 1 – BIS should ensure that the important role HEIs and FECs play in supporting work-based learning, the development of occupational competence and delivering programmes for adults in employment that are employer led and develop the skills of the workforce and support social mobility, is emphasised in the forthcoming HE White Paper.

Action Point 2 – BIS and the NAS should ensure the role of HE and FE and the potential for Foundation degrees and other HE qualifications to deliver the content of Higher Apprenticeships is fully reflected in the forthcoming Apprenticeship Prospectus and the HE White Paper.

Action Point 3 – UVAC (with partner LLNs) should collect case studies to outline and promote the role and potential of HEIs and FECs in the delivery of work-based programmes that could act as useful models for the development and delivery of Higher Apprenticeship.

3.2 *Higher Apprenticeship and Foundation degrees – the difference?* A range of 'differences' were identified by presenters and delegates:

'A Foundation degree is learner driven whereas a Higher Apprenticeship is employer driven.'

'A Higher Apprenticeship is designed to provide the added value of a 'license to practice' in the sector, a Foundation degree does not.'

'A Foundation degree is a qualification developed (in consultation with employers) and awarded by an HEI, a Higher Apprenticeship is a learning framework licensed in accordance with legislation by a SSC.'

'Foundation degrees vary in content by the awarding HEI.'

'Apprentices MUST have employed status – Foundation degrees can be delivered full or part-time.'

Perhaps a useful summary is that where appropriately designed, delivered and assessed, a Foundation degree could be a highly effective delivery vehicle for delivering the knowledge AND competence and personal learning and thinking skills of a Higher Apprenticeship. Many

existing Foundation degrees, although very valid and valuable, do not necessarily do this. (The two remaining components of a Higher Apprenticeship - Functional Skills and Employment Rights and Responsibilities - will often already have been achieved or can be supported through existing learning packages.) Integrating a Foundation degree into a Higher Apprenticeship could be beneficial because:

- *For the Individual* - A Foundation degree has progression (to honours degree) built into its delivery, this could help avoid the creation of a glass ceiling at level 4 and 5 for Higher Apprentices
- *For the employer* – A Foundation degree provides a delivery vehicle for a Higher Apprenticeship, it can link into the workforce development and consultancy services HEIs/FECs provide and could help attract recruits by positioning Apprenticeship as a high quality offering that opens up rather than closes down routes to Higher Education/Higher Level learning
- *For the HEI/FEC* – Contributing to the delivery of a Higher Apprenticeship is one way to link higher education provision into defined employer needs and the skills requirements of a sector, as defined by an SSC. Demonstrating that a Foundation degree can deliver a Higher Apprenticeship can be used as a marketing tool with employers. Fundamentally, involvement in Higher Apprenticeship potentially supports HEIs and FECs in approaches to widening participation and enhancing social mobility for level 3 apprentices in particular and adults in the workforce in general
- *For the State* – Integrating a Foundation degree with Higher Apprenticeship will help overcome the vocational/academic divide, widen participation and social mobility and support the HE/FE sector to further develop into the market for workforce development, raising the skills levels of the existing workforce and business performance.

Higher Apprenticeship frameworks and Foundation degrees should be developed in tandem, working with employer networks, SSCs and professional bodies. Existing Foundation degrees should not simply be 'dropped into' emerging Higher Apprenticeship frameworks; Foundation degrees will need to be developed or customised to meet Higher Apprenticeship framework requirements. Similarly, in the development of Higher Apprenticeship frameworks, consideration should be given to delivery approaches and how Foundation degrees (and other HE qualifications) can support the delivery of knowledge and competency requirements.

Action Point 4: UVAC and the LLN National Forum should outline how and why Foundation degrees (and other HE qualifications) can be used as a delivery vehicle for Higher Apprenticeship frameworks.

3.3 ***With the development of Higher Apprenticeships at levels 4 and 5, a 'glass ceiling' must not replace the glass ceiling which has existed for Apprenticeship at level 3.*** Despite many excellent projects, the work of LLNs, Aimhigher, SSCs and individual HEIs and FECs, progression rates for apprentices at level 3 to higher level learning programmes have been very low. There are arguments that many apprentices are happy to remain at level 3, that there may be limited career progression opportunities and that some employers want to retain craft level ex apprentices in craft level roles. The pyramid of progression was

highlighted where in many industries there would be a requirement for larger numbers of apprentices at level 2 and 3 and fewer at level 4 and 5. Matching individual aspiration and the availability of employment progression opportunities, particularly in SMEs, may also be a particular challenge. Regardless of the validity or otherwise of these arguments, it is fundamentally important that apprentices have the opportunity (like their counterparts studying for A levels) to maximise their future potential and fulfil their aspirations. Higher Apprenticeship could act as the missing link in providing progression for many apprentices at level 3 to higher level learning programmes. There must, however, be progression opportunities from Higher Apprenticeship at level 4 and 5 to level 6 and beyond with appropriate information, advice and guidance. This will call for higher education and professional bodies to be fully involved in the development of Higher Apprenticeship, progression routes from Higher Apprenticeships and level 6 learning programmes that meet the needs of Higher Apprentices and their employers and lead to professional status. Apprenticeship and Higher Apprenticeship can be an end in their own right and they may not be primarily regarded as programmes to support progression, BUT progression must be possible and available from every Apprenticeship to the next level of learning.

Action Point 5 - A specification that can be customised on a sector basis should be developed outlining requirements for easily identifiable careers and progression maps featuring routes into, through and progression out of Higher Apprenticeship to higher education and professional qualifications.

- 3.4 Progression that benefits employers should be explicitly built into Level 3 Apprenticeship and Higher Apprenticeship** – Progression from level 3 Apprenticeship to and through Higher Level Apprenticeship MUST be based on delivering the business objectives of an employer. ‘Large’ qualifications requiring a very long-term commitment can initially be very off putting to both employers and employees. What is needed is a highly flexible staged approach to progression with flexible start and stop off points linked to credit accumulation and transfer and the ongoing needs of a business and career aspirations of an employee.
- 3.5 A product and delivery model for Higher Apprenticeship** – Employer and learner needs will vary. The needs, requirements and resources of SMEs will be very different to large organisations and there will be differences between sectors. Larger organisations will have more opportunities for career progression than SMEs. When working with SMEs this will mean that the design and delivery of Higher Apprenticeships will need to be VERY flexible, incentives may also be required. A ‘57 variety’ approach will pay dividends where ALL partners can contribute to the development and delivery of Higher Apprenticeship; this will include HEIs, FECs, professional bodies and private providers. A ‘good’ framework will incorporate substantial flexibility. QCF qualifications will be of value, as will Higher Education qualifications, and HE thinking should not be restricted to just Foundation degrees, but also to APEL (which could reduce costs), HE credit, certificates and diplomas, honours and post graduate degrees. Employers and individual learners can decide the package which is most appropriate for their needs. The Higher Apprenticeship will be the important component – the qualification to deliver the content may be of less importance to the employer, although not necessarily the learner. The delivery model for HE/FE will however be very different to traditional provision and focus on the development of the workforce in the workplace, in particular:

- Start and completion dates will need to be based on employer and learner needs and not traditional academic years and terms
- A focus on work-based learning, blended learning and use of APEL will be required
- Assessment will include a substantial focus on work-based and blended learning.

Action Point 6 – Different approaches to the design and delivery of Higher Apprenticeships need to be explored, evaluated and published. Existing good practice on how HE and FE can support higher level work-based learning in general and potentially Higher Apprenticeship development and delivery should be identified and disseminated.

3.6 The funding model for the future development and delivery of Higher Apprenticeship – How the funding model operates will in large part determine the success or otherwise of Higher Apprenticeship. Higher Apprenticeship is a very different product to traditional higher education programmes – how will student fees be incorporated into the delivery model? Who will pay for training and who will pay for off the job learning? How will Skills Funding Agency and HEFCE funding regimes relate to the funding of different or alternative components of a Higher Apprenticeship? How will employers pay the 50% of the cost of the Higher Apprenticeship they are required to pay and who will this be paid to? What contribution will individual learners pay in line with student fees vis-à-vis the cost of QCF qualifications? Will HEIs charge ‘around £9,000 pa’ (full-time equivalent) for the higher education component of Higher Apprenticeships, if they do will they be priced out of the market by QCF awarding bodies, HNDs and private providers? How could APEL be used to reduce costs and provide a cost effective product? **Employers will shop around for the best and most cost effective provision. Higher Apprenticeship will not necessarily be a cheaper form of higher education provision, but it is a different form of provision that will require a different funding methodology.**

Action Point 7 – A funding model(s) for Higher Apprenticeship delivery based on Foundation degrees/other HE qualifications and credit should be developed by the HE and FE sectors working in partnership with BIS, NAS, SFA and HEFCE. This model should outline employer and individual contributions and relate fees to the delivery, costing and charging approach for HE workforce development programmes which differ substantially from ‘traditional’ HE programmes designed and delivered for both full and part-time learners.

Action Point 8 - BIS should recognise in the HE White Paper that higher level work-based learning programmes in general and Higher Apprenticeship in particular are very different to, but of equal value to ‘traditional’ HE programmes and require a different funding methodology.

3.7 A ‘Community of Practice’ should be developed for those developing and delivering Higher Apprenticeship provision – Individual partner organisations and individuals need to be able to share experience, problems, solutions and approaches to the development and delivery of Higher Apprenticeship. Examples of good practice already exist (UVAC and LLNs/the LLN National Forum have identified several). A forum and related facilities are needed to share experience, good practice and to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Action Point 9 – UVAC and the LLN National Forum should discuss with BIS, NAS, MEG and other partners the potential for establishing a community of practice. The potential for a practitioner focused conference(s) on Higher Apprenticeship should also be raised.

3.8 Other Issues and Summation

Other points and issues raised included:

Professional bodies are key partners in the development of Higher Apprenticeship.

Innovative partnerships involving HEIs, FECs, SSCs, professional bodies, private providers and QCF awarding organisations will be fundamental to the success of Higher Apprenticeship.

As part of the 'Big Society' BIS should consider how volunteering could be incorporated into a Higher Apprenticeship. Currently, apprentices must have employed status, but could there be a case for individuals working as volunteers being deemed to be eligible for Higher Apprenticeship?

Where do University Technical Colleges (UTCs) fit with the Higher Apprenticeship agenda?

What is the eligibility for a Higher Apprenticeship – how are the needs of level 3 apprentices and adults in the workforce met?

Terminology is important – how should Higher Apprenticeship at level 4 and 5 be differentiated?

In summary - HEIs and FECs working with employers and SSCs (with other partners including professional bodies, private training providers and QCF Awarding Bodies) have a fundamental role to play in the development, delivery and future success of Higher Apprenticeship. Higher Apprenticeship is a learning programme of fundamental importance through which HE and FE can deliver the higher level skills employers and employees require, enhance the skill levels of the workforce and opportunities for social mobility.

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