



Degree Apprenticeships in England: experiences of degree apprentices and employers

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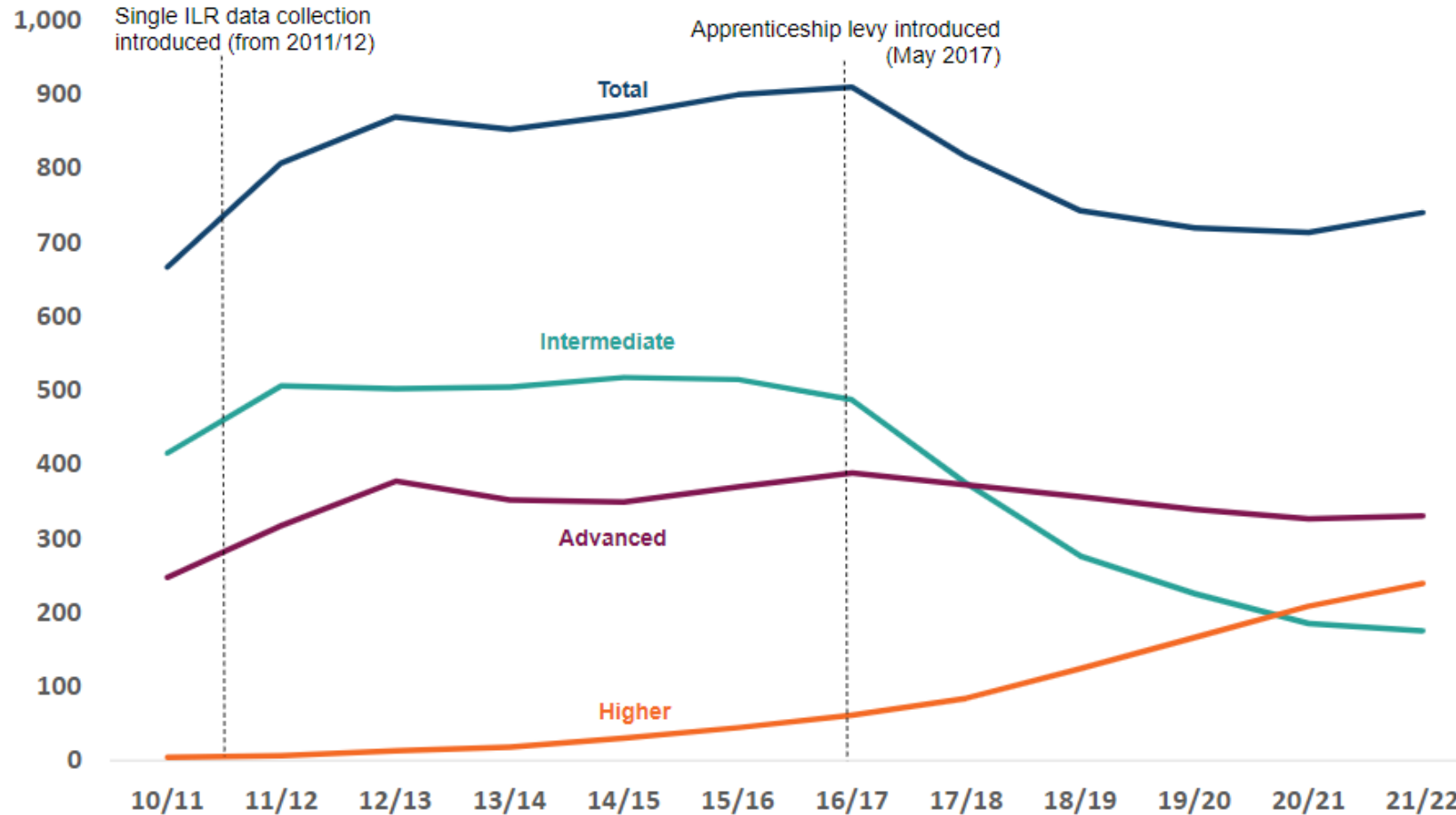


- Institute of Apprenticeship (and Technical Education) 2017;
- New apprenticeship standards - developed by employers, organic – with a sell by date of no more than two years;
- Independent end point assessment;
- Length of apprenticeship: minimum 1 year (e.g. engineering is 3 years);
- Funding changes & Levy (end of voluntarist approach) 2017/18;
- Introduction of T-levels (16-18 year olds) – first awarded 2022;
- Introduction of Degree Apprenticeships 2015-16.

Apprenticeships statistics – what does it tell us?

All age apprenticeship participation by level

Participation (1,000s)



What are Degree Apprenticeships?

Launched in 2015/16

Funded through employers and the government (employers have 'personal' account)

Apprentice is employed for duration of apprenticeships and must spend at least 20% of normal working hours on off-the-job training.

Work towards a full Bachelors or Masters degree - Level 6 and Level 7 (RQF)

At least around 87 universities (as of 2020/21) offer DAs across around 17 sectors

'Employers are in the driving seat' model.

Curriculum developed by training providers (majority HEIs) based on standards developed by 'trailblazer' employer groups

Primarily **targeted** at 18 to 19-year-olds as an alternative route to gaining a degree. However, also suitable for existing employees and more **widely taken up** aged 25+.

Aims and Methodology

Broader research aims:

1. To investigate how DAs are perceived and experienced by various stakeholders; their motivations for engaging with DAs, and the challenges and opportunities moving forward.
2. The extent to which DAs are supporting widening participation into higher learning and contribute to social mobility.

Methods:

- Semi-structured interviews with policy makers, universities, apprentices, employers and other relevant sector bodies.
- Almost 100 interviews conducted
- Thematic analysis using Nvivo
- Report to publish early 2024

Degree Apprenticeships – a variety of experiences

- A broad range of sectors, for example:
 - Healthcare
 - Digital
 - Manufacturing
- Profiles:
 - Existing employees
 - Junior
 - Senior
 - School leavers
 - Career changers

- The ways in which DAs are seen by colleagues (students vs employees);
- The extent to which DAs are given sufficient independent study time (work/study balance) varies;
- The extent to which employers and training providers cooperate

Raises the question: How do employers understand the notion of 'apprenticeship'?

I self-imposed a day release. So I used to work every Friday. Every Friday was my study day. So that's how I did it. And that worked for me' (Ox E01).

I can just let my manager know, like "oh, you know, next week I want to take Wednesday off for my study day instead of Friday", and she's like "okay that's fine" you know? There's like a lot of like freedom with that (Apprentice 12).

- Variability in the quality of the education and training provision: e.g. Cybersecurity module vs outdated (irrelevant) theory;
- Tailored modules for DA versus using existing modules for both UG and DAs;
- Some DAs overall experiences are positive: design, delivery, content and support.

when it comes to stuff like the cybersecurity module, it's stuff that's completely brand new to me and stuff that I can share with others in the workplace. So actually, it allows me to talk with my senior developer about stuff that, you know, maybe we need to look out for or stuff that is going to come up in the next few weeks, or a few months. (Apprentice 23)

I didn't particularly enjoy like classroom learning, so I knew that university wouldn't be a suitable route for me (Apprentice 09).

- **However**, examples of unsatisfactory content, limited information and insufficient and inconsistent support exist.

All of our learning is online in like sort of like textbook format, so it's literally just text. So it's like a study guide that we just click through, make notes on, and that's sort of it. It isn't very good, if I'm being honest, in terms of like it's very hard to learn that way, we are teaching ourselves the entire time (Edge E11).

There was a lot of like, there was information on what your apprenticeship is, and like obviously because I applied to it, so I obviously wanted to do all that stuff, but I didn't quite understand how it all like fitted together or like what it meant...I guess I would've preferred to have more information on the day-to-day life of what your apprenticeship would look like (Apprentice 12).

How are employers experiencing DA's?

- Several large and small employers noted that it required considerable effort to engage with providers to ensure they were coordinating work and learning activities;
- Employers value the combination of academic and practical/vocational skills
- Employers had a preference for degree apprentice graduates rather than university graduates
- Through off-the-job learning DA's bring in fresh perspectives to the workplace

So a graduate, even a graduate who's done industrial placement or summer internships, has a lot of learning to do to catch up to where a person's who's been on a degree apprenticeship would have been compared to a, if you're a software engineer, if you went to [name of university], or wherever you went to, and you did placement with us, you know, there's still a lot to learn (Employer (Large 05)

One of the strengths of the model is that you do combine that, those vocational and behavioural skills, as well as the undergraduate knowledge component (Employer (Large) 02)

How are employers experiencing DA's?

- Employers who invest in degree apprenticeships find degree apprentices enhance their workforce by developing a forward thinking workforce
- One of the strengths of the model is that you do combine that, those vocational and behavioural skills, as well as the undergraduate knowledge component' (Employer (Large) 02) .

The benefits are meeting the needs in the workplace in terms of workforce. In the longer term, I fail to see any other way of achieving that in terms of the numbers that are going to be required. I think many specialties have to learn that in the NHS quite quickly (Employer (Large) 02).

The benefit we get from those range of people is the enthusiasm, the buy-in, the sheer energy that some of these people bring into the business (Employer SME 07).

Summary

- Programmes provide a stable pathway to career progression and upward mobility within industries
- Many individuals opt for degree apprenticeships due to their preference for hands-on learning and real-world application of knowledge
- Inconsistent collaboration between universities and employers
- Employer investment in the future workforce
- Range of experiences DAs have - challenges



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Thank you