

Degree Apprenticeships

November 2020



The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people. Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

An electronic copy of this document can be found on the Senedd website: **www.senedd.wales/SeneddEIS**

Copies of this document can also be obtained in accessible formats including Braille, large print, audio or hard copy from:

**Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN**

Tel: **0300 200 6565**

Email: **SeneddEIS@senedd.wales**

Twitter: **[@SeneddEIS](https://twitter.com/SeneddEIS)**

© Senedd Commission Copyright 2020

The text of this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading or derogatory context. The material must be acknowledged as copyright of the Senedd Commission and the title of the document specified.

Welsh Parliament

Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Degree Apprenticeships

November 2020



About the Committee

The Committee was established on 28 June 2016. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddEIS

Committee Chair:



Russell George MS
Welsh Conservatives

Current Committee membership:



Hefin David MS
Welsh Labour



Suzy Davies MS
Welsh Conservatives



Vikki Howells MS
Welsh Labour



Helen Mary Jones MS
Plaid Cymru



Joyce Watson MS
Welsh Labour

Mohammad Asghar MS (known as Oscar) was a Member of the Committee during this inquiry and sadly passed away on 16 June 2020.



Mohammad Asghar MS
Welsh Conservatives

Contents

Chair’s foreword	5
Recommendations	6
1. Background	8
Summary.....	8
Terms of reference:.....	8
Evidence-gathering	9
2. The Degree Apprenticeships Pilot	10
What is a degree apprenticeship?.....	10
Apprenticeship frameworks.....	10
The Pilot Cohorts.....	11
Differences between Degree Apprenticeships and other Apprenticeships...11	
Overlap between Higher and Degree-level Apprenticeships and potential for competition.....	11
Differentiating Degree Apprenticeships from Part-time Degrees.....	12
3. Frameworks	15
Issuing Authorities.....	15
A Systemic Lack of Capacity to Develop and Update Frameworks.....	15
Developing a Framework Standard.....	17
4. Broadening the Degree Apprenticeship Offer	18
5. Clear Progression Routes and Greater Flexibility	19
6. Regional coherence versus meeting employer demand	21
Employer Engagement.....	21
7. Funding	23
Delays in Welsh Government Confirming Funding.....	23
No level playing field for apprenticeship providers.....	25
Cost of Degree Apprenticeships - is the funding model sustainable?	26
The Activity Costs Model.....	27

Consideration of Other Costs.....	28
8. Recruitment and Widening Access	30
9. Learner Engagement and Student Voice	35
10. Promotion and Marketing of Opportunities	36
11. Quality Assurance and certification.....	38
Annex A: List of oral evidence sessions	41
Annex B: List of written evidence	42
Additional information.....	43

Chair's foreword

The Committee examined the progress of Welsh Government's degree apprenticeships pilot, which began in academic year 2018/2019, and explored its future potential.

The Covid-19 pandemic prevented us from meeting with Ministers to discuss our findings. But it's important we share what providers, employers and degree apprentices told us, and Welsh Government then shares its intentions for degree apprenticeships as part of Covid recovery plans.

Stimulating demand and supply of skills needed for economic recovery is a critical goal for Welsh Government, and its **"Covid Commitment to Employability and Skills"** recognises that degree apprenticeships are part of this. The Committee's view is that wider access to a range of degree apprenticeships will be an important intervention in the economic recovery, including by giving people work experience during a recession.

Degree apprentices say it's an important career pathway, or route for progression in an existing field, and a way to gain that all-important on-the-job experience. Despite some teething problems, the experience of those involved in the pilot seemed overwhelmingly positive, with significant pent-up demand for a wider apprenticeship offer at Level 6 and above. The pilot is limited to two areas - digital, and engineering and advanced manufacturing - so opportunities for higher level progression in health and social care or business and management are currently lacking. As well as widening the range of career pathways offered, the Committee was concerned about a lack of diversity in the initial cohorts - we want to see greater efforts to widen access to under-represented groups.

There are also issues for Welsh Government to resolve around the development of frameworks; adopting a sustainable, value-for-money funding model; ensuring degree apprenticeships are not treated as part-time degrees; and effective marketing of opportunities. Evidence points to the benefits of degree apprenticeships forming part of a single flexible and responsive Apprenticeship Programme, where learners can move up or down between levels to fulfil their personal potential. We look forward to the Government's response to our findings.

Russell George MS, Chair, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Welsh Government should develop a degree apprenticeship framework Standard that requires the developer to set out: how the framework meets the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) expectations for a degree apprenticeship; how the on-the-job training hours are to be evidenced as met; and the criteria the developer sets for a degree programme to be included in the framework (to include those criteria that differentiate the award from a part-time award)..... Page 17

Recommendation 2. Welsh Government should enable, fund and support more formal structures or groups for relevant stakeholders and industry to come together to develop and refresh degree apprenticeship frameworks using their detailed occupational and sector expertise..... Page 17

Recommendation 3. Welsh Government should set out its approach to deciding which future degree apprenticeship frameworks to develop and fund and how it will manage any potential conflict between regional coherence, coherent learner pathways and economic demand..... Page 21

Recommendation 4. Welsh Government, through the Wales Advisory Apprenticeship Board, should consider broadening the range of degree apprenticeships available, including by supporting, funding and enabling the development of degree apprenticeship frameworks that are not delivered using public funding, where there is an appetite from employers for this..... Page 22

Recommendation 5. Welsh Government should clarify how its original £20 million funding commitment to the 3-year degree apprenticeships pilot will be met; set out whether it will provide HEFCW with additional funding to offset the £5 million the Council have had to divert from other priorities this academic year; set out whether the funding for continuing degree apprentices will need to be found from HEFCW's general grant-in-aid; and indicate its plans and timescales for agreeing funding commitment for future new enrolments on degree apprenticeships. Page 24

Recommendation 6. Welsh Government should justify retaining two different funding models, including a rationale for continuing with the procurement model for awarding contracts to apprenticeship providers; set out how this is compatible with having coherent learning pathways from Level 2 to Level 6 and how the

procurement of the new apprenticeship provision will address this; and give assurances about the reliability and efficiency of the contractual approach, including that lessons have been learned from the discontinued Job Support Wales procurement..... Page 26

Recommendation 7. Welsh Government should provide clarity to the Committee on the costs of degree and non-degree apprenticeships in similar subject areas..... Page 28

Recommendation 8. Welsh Government should develop and utilise a costing model that is consistent for all apprenticeship provision from foundation to degree apprenticeships and which reflects variations in the costs of delivery across different levels and subjects..... Page 29

Recommendation 9. Welsh Government must develop or commission a strategy for widening access to degree apprenticeships for under-represented groups.
..... Page 33

Recommendation 10. Welsh Government should set out how it will a) address concerns about ensuring degree apprenticeships fully consider the Welsh language and bilingualism, and b) collect adequate data about degree apprenticeships completed in the medium of Welsh..... Page 33

Recommendation 11. Welsh Government should develop a strategy for promoting degree apprenticeships that includes outreach to teachers and schools on the opportunities offered by degree apprenticeships, and also ensure that careers information and guidance includes degree apprenticeships..... Page 37

Recommendation 12. Welsh Government should introduce a degree apprenticeships certificate, issued by Apprenticeship Certification Wales, which would ensure that claims to a degree apprenticeship have met all the on and off-the-job training and academic requirements. It should complement the institution's own degree certificate..... Page 40

1. Background

In 2018 the Committee reported on Apprenticeships in Wales, and the impact of introducing the Apprenticeship Levy. Since then Welsh Government has begun piloting Degree Apprenticeships up to Level 6. This inquiry examined the operation of the pilot, and the future direction and potential of Degree Apprenticeships.

Summary

1. Welsh Government first funded degree apprenticeships from academic year 2018/19. It has committed £20 million to a three-year pilot, meaning recruitment has continued in 2019/20 and should continue for 2020/21. In 2018/19 there were 155 degree apprentices from around 60 employers accessing the first year of degree apprenticeships in Wales, and for 2019/20 the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) allocated 585 funded new places. Recruitment figures for 2020/21 are not yet available. HEFCW monitors the pilot programme.
2. Degree apprentices are enrolled onto a degree apprenticeship “framework” which comprises a package of on-the-job training integrated with studying for a degree. There are currently two frameworks
 - Digital, and
 - Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing.
3. There are no public plans for more frameworks.

Terms of reference:

4. The Committee agreed to explore, discuss and seek information on the following aspects of degree apprenticeships:
 - The rationale for degree apprenticeships
 - The process and criteria for approving proposals from providers to deliver degree apprenticeships
 - Demand from employers and learners, both for the current frameworks or any demand for additional frameworks, and how it is being managed

- The recruitment of degree apprentices and the personal characteristics of the 2018/19 cohort and the 2019/20 cohort so far to evaluate how they reflect groups under-represented in higher education and wider Welsh Government equality ambitions, including gender balance
- Employer engagement and the profile of employers accessing the degree apprenticeship programme including, if possible, the geographic spread
- The degree apprenticeship funding model, the overall funding level and the funding commitment needed to 'teach-out' the three-year pilot apprentices
- Early views from employers, educational providers and learners on how well degree apprenticeships are working and lessons from their introduction
- Views on Welsh Government's overall approach to degree apprenticeships, their rolling out, and their impact on, and relationship with sub-degree apprentices
- Views on the future direction and potential of degree apprenticeships.

Evidence-gathering

5. The Committee received 24 responses to its consultation from a range of organisations in the further and higher education sectors and from employers - the list of written evidence is at annex B. Oral evidence was taken at meetings on 27 February and 12 March. The Ministers for Education, and Economy, Transport and North Wales were then due to attend Committee on 22 April 2020 but the Covid-19 pandemic prevented this. Oral evidence sessions are listed at Annex A. The Committee visited the Office of National Statistics Data Science Campus in Newport on 4 March to meet with degree apprentices. The Senedd's Citizen Engagement team also met with a range of employers, education providers and degree apprentices across Wales, and shared its findings with Members. The anonymised feedback from apprentices themselves has strongly informed this report, and the Committee is extremely grateful to all those who gave their time to assist the inquiry.

2. The Degree Apprenticeships Pilot

What is a degree apprenticeship?

6. In Wales an apprenticeship is a paid job that incorporates formal and structured work-based learning that is done on and off the job. In a degree apprenticeship the work-based learning is done at the level of an undergraduate degree which is developed specifically for the degree apprenticeship and awarded by a university.

7. The Quality Assurance Agency (the QAA), which assures the quality of higher education in Wales, says degree apprenticeships must be “first and foremost a job which requires work-integrated learning. The workplace becomes a site for the development and generation of knowledge, understanding, skills and professional behaviours rather than just a site for their application”. This means that apprenticeships should be more than simply having a job whilst studying a part-time qualification – the on and off-the-job training must be a unified package and learning must happen on the job too.

Apprenticeship frameworks

8. To achieve this unified package, apprenticeships are delivered via “frameworks”. In Wales, these frameworks must comply with the ‘Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales’ (SASW), and include both occupational competency, and technical knowledge qualifications (achieved through an undergraduate degree).

9. Once developed, apprenticeship frameworks are approved and signed off by an “issuing authority”. Prior to 2020 this was often a Sector Skills Council. From 2020 Welsh Government became the issuing authority for apprenticeship frameworks.

10. For the pilot, Welsh Government commissioned and had developed two degree apprenticeship frameworks:

- **Digital** Degree Apprenticeship (approved by an issuing body called Instructus); and
- **Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing** Degree Apprenticeship (approved by an issuing body called SEMTA, now called Enginuity).

The Pilot Cohorts

11. The first cohort of degree apprentices were recruited in academic year 2018/19, a second cohort in 2019/20, and third and so far final pilot cohort recruited in 2020/21. Some 155 apprentices were recruited in 2018/19 and HEFCW committed to fund an additional 585 new apprentices in 2019/20 (310 on the digital degree apprenticeship and 275 on engineering and advanced manufacturing).

Differences between Degree Apprenticeships and other Apprenticeships

12. In Wales only the eight universities and the Open University can award undergraduate degrees, meaning universities must be involved in developing and delivering degree apprenticeships. This means degree apprentices are enrolled at university (even if they spend some time doing off-the-job training at a college or other specialist training body). At the same time as studying for the degree, the apprentices are required to conduct 500 hours of on-the-job training.

13. Non-degree apprentices in Wales receive an apprenticeship certificate to demonstrate they have completed a framework. At present degree apprentices will not receive such a certificate, they will instead receive their degree certificate from the university.

14. Degree apprentices are expected to complete their framework in no less than 3 years with HEFCW normally expecting completion within 5 years. Degree apprentices pay no fees, with HEFCW funding each apprenticeship up to £27,000 pro-rated over the length of the apprenticeship and paid directly to the apprentice's university. This level of funding is equivalent to the tuition fees charged to full-time undergraduates for a 3-year degree.

Overlap between Higher and Degree-level Apprenticeships and potential for competition

15. As the first and second years of a Higher Apprenticeship and Degree Apprenticeship are at the same level of challenge (Levels 4 and 5 of the CQFW), prospective apprentices could choose to study a Higher Apprenticeship and then top-up to a full Degree Apprenticeship by doing year three. HEFCW data shows that in the first half of 2019/20, 70 degree apprentices had started in Year 2, and 35 in year 3.¹ Likewise, they could decide to not undertake a Higher

¹ Written evidence

Apprenticeship and opt for a Degree Apprenticeship instead. Anecdotal evidence from NTFW pointed to Higher Apprentices having been targeted by universities to start on the second year of a Degree Apprenticeship. Colegau Cymru said:

“some Further Education institutions report already seeing arbitrary competition between the network of Degree apprenticeship providers (HEIs) and the WBL network where the emergence of Degree apprenticeships risk duplicating and competing with existing Higher apprenticeship programmes.”²

16. At the same time, some respondents argued that degree apprenticeships provide a work-based progression pathway for those who wish to gain a degree, giving learners more choice.

17. Professor Julie Lydon of Universities Wales did not subscribe to the view that competition was being created, She said that “there’s space for us to have significant higher degree-level work sitting alongside the current higher level apprenticeships, and them complementing each other and working together.”³ Professor Lydon pointed to the need for collaboration and to “keep routes open” to meet learner’s needs, but that the sector was unable to meet the demand out there. HEFCW also said that the different funding models for higher and degree apprenticeships had implications for providers, and better alignment would also help meet the needs of employers and apprentices.⁴ Dr David Blaney of HEFCW said:

“We didn’t want degree apprenticeships to be another source of friction between FE and HE providers—we wanted them to work together. So, that’s why we built it into our requirements. But I think Julie’s right: there’s massive demand out there. So, at the moment, this is not a large range of providers chasing a small pot; there’s plenty there if we can get an established mainstreamed approach to it.”⁵

Differentiating Degree Apprenticeships from Part-time Degrees

18. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) says that apprenticeships must first be constituted as jobs which require work-integrated training and where the workplace itself is a place of learning. Liaison and links between universities and

² Written evidence

³ Paragraph 86, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

⁴ Paragraph 97, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

⁵ Paragraph 94, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

employers must therefore be consistent, robust and an integral part of the apprenticeship. Frameworks usually set out the number of hours of on-the-job training that must be undertaken and that the qualifications must impart technical occupational competence.

19. The Committee probed the extent to which degree apprenticeships really are different from part-time degrees with educational providers, employers, and degree apprentices themselves. The Committee found mixed evidence.

20. During the Committee’s visit to the Office of National Statistics (ONS), the body explained that it was clear about the difference between the two. Alison Adams, Head of Talent at the Data Science Campus, said that having undertaken part time degrees herself it was a very different experience, and that it was a “better route” at Bachelors degree level. For ONS as an employer the benefits were working alongside the provider to co-design the degree, the links with the work projects, and the fact that learning was embedded back in the workplace. This allowed the degree to be linked directly to the workplace, rather than the work and what was being studied feeling disjointed.

21. However, not all degree apprentices the Committee engaged with during the inquiry held the same view as that of ONS apprentices about two-way co-design and embedding learning in the workplace. Evidence was gathered separately by the Citizen Engagement team during visits to a number of providers. They found that a few apprentices felt that what they were learning at university wasn’t yet linking to what they were doing or learning at work. A few other degree apprentices also stated that they received little training in work that deliberately linked with the course. Some felt that the scheme could be improved by linking up the learning between the University and the employer:

“The degree feeding into the job and the training from the employer I think that’s super important, because even though we’re learning things in Uni, putting it into context on the job is a completely different ball game, so yeah they could definitely improve on those sides of things.”⁶

22. Ben Kinross of the National Society of Apprentices also told the Committee that feedback from apprentices in England and Scotland pointed to a risk that employers there were not taking the educational aspects of degree

⁶ Evidence gathered by the Citizen Engagement team (anonymised responses)

apprenticeship seriously enough, and not all apprentices were getting their off-the-job-training.⁷

23. It is clear there is a mixed picture regarding the cohesiveness between developing knowledge and learning on the job and off the job. It is important for Welsh Government to carefully evaluate the role of employers, the extent of integration and co-design of courses, and identify any areas where the degree apprenticeship is not sufficiently integrated or adding value. It is important to understand how widespread the less encouraging experiences of the apprentices are within the degree apprenticeship pilot.

24. Affordability emerged as another key issue for apprentices and as a key difference between degree apprenticeships and part-time degrees. Several of the degree apprentices the Committee heard from said that they would have been unable or unwilling to take this route into higher education without the financial support offered by degree apprenticeships, and financial commitments were a factor in the decision and ability to undertake degree-level study: “I have a mortgage and a wife”, “I’m older, I need financial stability”. Another commented that it provided a better balance of working, earning and learning.

25. When asked what they would have done if a degree apprenticeship was not open to them, some apprentices said they would have used student finance, taken the Open University route, or pursued free courses or non-degree certification to continue working and studying. However, others said they would continue in the job they were in, even if they were unfulfilled, and saw this as limiting their chances of progression.

26. Peter Fullerton, Deputy Director of the Data Science Campus at ONS, said that the traditional graduate route may not be open or appeal to the people coming into apprenticeships – it is another pathway.

⁷ Paragraphs 82-91, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

3. Frameworks

Issuing Authorities

27. At the time the inquiry was conducted, bodies acting as Issuing Authorities could both develop the framework and issue (approve) it. Welsh Government was concerned that this meant “impartiality cannot always be demonstrated and there is potential for vested interest which could impact on quality.”⁸ Following consultation on changing the system, Welsh Government has now become the issuing authority – creating a separation between framework development and approval.

A Systemic Lack of Capacity to Develop and Update Frameworks

28. The other driver for the Welsh Government’s consultation on “The Role of the Issuing Authority for Apprenticeship Frameworks”⁹ was that Sector Skills Councils would normally have been commissioned to develop the frameworks, but since losing their role in the English apprenticeship system their capacity has seriously declined. This is a systemic issue having an impact on the whole apprenticeship system in Wales and was raised in the Committee’s October 2019 report on Regional Skills Partnerships.¹⁰ Iestyn Davies of Colleges Wales told the Committee that the erosion of capacity had led to too much reliance on the ‘goodwill’ of employers to provide input to framework development.¹¹

29. HEFCW’s written evidence¹² suggested that the delay in launching the full degree apprenticeship pilot was because of the erosion in sector skills knowledge and reduced capacity. It pointed out that an external consultant had to be commissioned to develop both frameworks after, in its view, the Sector Skills Councils did not adequately engage:

“As a consequence, the Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing (Wales) Framework was not issued until 1 August 2019, year 2 of the pilot project 2019/20. This had an impact on the Higher Education sector’s capacity to respond in a timely manner, and greater reliance on

⁸ <https://gov.wales/role-issuing-authority-apprenticeship-frameworks>

⁹ <https://gov.wales/role-issuing-authority-apprenticeship-frameworks>

¹⁰ <https://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld12798/cr-ld12798%20-e.pdf>

¹¹ Paragraph 207, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

¹² Written evidence

existing relationships with large employers upskilling existing employees in 2018/19.”¹³

30. Airbus called this reliance on an external consultant with no long-term affiliation with Wales “a considerable risk to long term knowledge management.”¹⁴ It said that the demise of the Sector Skills Councils means that: “a credible alternative for development and control of framework development must be found quickly to ensure that the knowledge base needed to develop these frameworks is owned and protected by a Welsh administrative body.”¹⁵ Gavin Jones of Airbus told the Committee that knowledge was not being retained in Wales and there was an opportunity to close that gap.¹⁶

31. Gavin Jones also talked about the good relationship with local providers, and when asked about course design he said that where there had been “small gaps” to address with the content of degree courses, Welsh Government had been “very responsive”.¹⁷

32. In oral evidence, HEFCW said they were confident universities have the skills to develop the frameworks, and that the current “legislative and regulatory machinery of Welsh Government” requiring the Sector Skills Councils to be involved was the issue.¹⁸ Universities Wales stressed that Universities and FE colleges had “a huge amount of experience of working with employers and working with professional bodies”, and that “collectively, subject to approval, we could probably get a more appropriate, speedier, just-in-time type of response that maintains the quality.”¹⁹

33. Universities Wales said there was a question as to whether Welsh Government had “sufficient expertise” to approve frameworks²⁰ and expressed some reservations about Welsh Government taking on the role of issuing authority. Professor Julie Lydon said:

¹³ Written evidence

¹⁴ Written evidence

¹⁵ Written evidence

¹⁶ Paragraph 94, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

¹⁷ Paragraph 164, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

¹⁸ Paragraph 32, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

¹⁹ Paragraph 61, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

²⁰ Paragraph 55, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

“With the greatest of respect, I think the role of Government is to set the expectations. I’m not sure the role of Government is to be involved in delivery.”²¹

34. HEFCW said emerging cluster groups with employers could be developed to create a focus of expertise in the sector. In particular, it would support the developing role of the Wales Apprenticeship Advisory Board (WAAB) as an employer-led Board in apprenticeship policy development, Framework review, priorities and development. HEFCW said it would also be helpful to consider the role of the apprentices in this area.²²

Developing a Framework Standard

35. The Committee recommends that Welsh Government develops a framework standard that addresses concerns raised about framework development, and to ensure frameworks deliver a cohesive and integrated programme of on-the-job and off-the-job learning that is distinctly different from a part-time degree.

Recommendation 1. Welsh Government should develop a degree apprenticeship framework Standard that requires the developer to set out: how the framework meets the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) expectations for a degree apprenticeship; how the on-the-job training hours are to be evidenced as met; and the criteria the developer sets for a degree programme to be included in the framework (to include those criteria that differentiate the award from a part-time award).

Recommendation 2. Welsh Government should enable, fund and support more formal structures or groups for relevant stakeholders and industry to come together to develop and refresh degree apprenticeship frameworks using their detailed occupational and sector expertise.

²¹ Paragraph 49, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

²² Written evidence

4. Broadening the Degree Apprenticeship Offer

36. There was clear and widespread support for a broadening of the range of degree apprenticeships offered. Estyn said it would help “to build credibility of the apprenticeship route”²³ Professor Julie Lydon of Universities Wales said that the HE sector was keen to widen the degree apprenticeships offer: “I think the frustration for all of us is that we want to do more and we want it to be wider.”²⁴

37. Several respondents, including Estyn, HEFCW, Airbus and Universities Wales, pointed to unmet demand for apprenticeships in other areas and that the range of frameworks should be expanded. The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) argued for a leadership and management apprenticeship for example, stating that it would have a strong impact on productivity in Wales.²⁵

38. David Blaney of HEFCW pointed to the “large pent-up demand”²⁶ from people who had completed lower-level apprenticeships who had “nowhere to go at the moment”, and Kieron Rees of Universities Wales illustrated this point further:

“Eighty-seven per cent of those currently studying level 4 and 5 apprenticeships in Wales are studying either health and social care or business and management. So, for 87 per cent of current higher apprentices, there’s nowhere to go.”²⁷

²³ Written evidence

²⁴ Paragraph 24, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

²⁵ Written evidence

²⁶ Paragraph 45, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

²⁷ Paragraph 47, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

5. Clear Progression Routes and Greater Flexibility

39. HEFCW advised that degree apprenticeships should align with the broader apprenticeship programme. It said it was working closely with Welsh Government to achieve that aim, but would “welcome clarity on continuation funding and its methodology to ensure a planned response that makes best use of public funding.”²⁸

40. Evidence pointed to the need for clear progression routes within the Apprenticeships Programme in Wales, with the flexibility to allow apprentices to be able to move up into a degree apprenticeship but also in the other direction if necessary. Professor Julie Lydon of Universities Wales said “I think all of us would expect there to be, if you like, a ladder, so actually everyone understands the ways in which you can move around in terms of your own personal development, and employers can understand where they’d like to go.” Matthew Williams, Executive Director of Work Based Learning at Bridgend College, said:

“The danger you’ve got, you see, with somebody who might go straight onto a degree apprenticeship programme who might have been perhaps better to go through the higher apprenticeship ladder is that there’s no natural exit point for that person if they don’t go the full way to a degree apprenticeship, for example.”²⁹

41. Rhys Daniels of the OU (which operates degree apprenticeships in all four nations) also emphasised the importance of clear pathways:

“a really important point for us is that we feel that there should be clear pathways for apprentices from level 2 to level 7: visual pathways, where they can see where they can enter the apprenticeship system and what opportunities they’ve got longer term to build their skills.”³⁰

42. Rhys Daniels expanded on the benefits of greater flexibility within the system:

“...it’s important to bear in mind that industries change ... there should be points at which apprentices can step out and almost take in

²⁸ Written evidence

²⁹ Paragraph 229, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

³⁰ Paragraph 20, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

modules from other apprenticeships as well. It's important to have that system, ... that clear pathway to see what the long-term development opportunities are, but also where it's flexible enough for people to move in between to help their skills."³¹

43. HEFCW noted that the Welsh Government's consultation on a Reformed Post Compulsory Education Training system could offer a mechanism to achieve greater integration and progression for young people. Although consultation on a Draft Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill will go ahead, legislation will not now progress before Senedd elections in 2021. HEFCW has also set expectations that HEFCW-funded institutions should provide opportunities to strengthen pathways from lower level apprenticeships to Degree Apprenticeships.

³¹ Paragraph 20, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

6. Regional coherence versus meeting employer demand

44. HEFCW's written evidence also stressed the need to resolve potential conflicts in the policy steer it was given for apprenticeship provision to be demand-led by employers, versus the requirement from Welsh Government for HEFCW to have regard for regional coherence and geographical considerations. HEFCW said that prioritising employer demands over regional coherence limited the capacity for HE and FE to collaborate to develop progression routes, and the capacity to influence the geographical spread of provision. It said that "a change in policy steer on core-funded activity will need to be considered, and its impact on franchise and consortia arrangements."³²

Recommendation 3. Welsh Government should set out its approach to deciding which future degree apprenticeship frameworks to develop and fund and how it will manage any potential conflict between regional coherence, coherent learner pathways and economic demand.

Employer Engagement

45. Evidence from the business sector showed a desire to engage with future strategy for degree apprenticeships. Newport Wafer Fab³³ and the ONS emphasised their value as part of career progression pathways in their sector, and CITB Wales³⁴ called for consultation on how they could best benefit the construction sector. The Federation of Small Businesses Wales said it would like to see "much greater employment engagement."³⁵ Rhys Daniels of the OU said there was "a big collaboration piece that could be done in Wales" at regional and national level between employers and different types of providers, that there was a lot of existing expertise in employer engagement and it was important not to "reinvent the wheel."³⁶ He supported the formation of employer working groups to try to influence the future of apprenticeships in Wales and feed into the Regional Skills Partnerships.³⁷

³² Written evidence

³³ Written evidence

³⁴ Written evidence

³⁵ Written evidence

³⁶ Paragraph 19, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

³⁷ Paragraph 20, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

46. Milly Blenkin of GoCompare supported greater engagement in consortia, pointing to important unmet skill gaps in sectors such as fintech:

“I’d really welcome a consortium, actually, of employers looking at the different frameworks on offer, because I think there’s so much benefit added then. Ultimately, they just need to reflect the skills gap in order to make it beneficial for the Welsh economy, for employers and ultimately for the career progression of the learners involved. It’s a lovely thing to be able to offer individuals, but, unless the gap in the market is there, ultimately there’s no point.

“I’d just echo that I sit on an employers’ board for financial services at Cardiff and Vale College. The fintech scene in south Wales is growing constantly—Monzo and Starling Bank joining us now as well. It’s a meet-up to talk about financial services. The skills gap in tech, in cyber and in data comes up every single month without fail. So, I think, yes, as long as it’s industry led, that’s the approach that should be taken.”

Recommendation 4. Welsh Government, through the Wales Advisory Apprenticeship Board, should consider broadening the range of degree apprenticeships available, including by supporting, funding and enabling the development of degree apprenticeship frameworks that are not delivered using public funding, where there is an appetite from employers for this.

7. Funding

Delays in Welsh Government Confirming Funding

47. HEFCW and other higher education stakeholders highlighted negative impacts stemming from the delay in Welsh Government confirming the full funding for the pilot and providing HEFCW with policy steers. Negative impacts included not having sufficient time to adequately promote the apprenticeships to learners and employers, and employers not having sufficient time to programme the apprenticeships into their learning and development budgets and forecasts. Professor Julie Lydon of Universities Wales told the Committee that the time frames were “challenging”³⁸, and HEFCW’s written evidence explained the impact:

“The two-year lead in to degree apprenticeships and the delayed start had a negative impact on the programme’s reputation initially. HEFCW’s interest in progressing the Apprenticeship agenda in Wales and delivering against its Remit Letter (28 March 2018) was constrained by the timing of the Welsh Government policy steer and the funding, that was not confirmed until February 2019, in HEFCW’s Remit Letter. Further, HEFCW did not receive clarification from Welsh Government until 2 March 2019 on whether the pilot budget of £20m was to cover continuation funding of apprentices who had started in the pilot phase into the academic year 2021/22 and beyond as this would impact on the number of apprenticeships available in the pilot phase.”³⁹

48. The lack of any commitment to future funding beyond Year 3 was also highlighted as an issue. At the time of our inquiry there was no public commitment to continue the pilot beyond academic year 2020/21, and Welsh Government’s evaluation of the pilot was not due to report until April 2021. HEFCW said it would be helpful to agree an additional year of pilot funding for 2021/22 in advance of Welsh Government’s evaluation “to enable decisions to be made and to mitigate the risk of a potential break in the recruitment of new degree apprentices.” This would give employers confidence in the stability of the programme to plan ahead

49. Dr David Blaney of HEFCW told the Committee at the time that resolving the funding issue would have a positive impact for the future involvement of SMEs:

³⁸ Paragraph 24, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

³⁹ Written evidence

“there were quite a few SMEs, actually, in this initial pilot phase, but again it’s much harder for them, typically, unless there’s already a relationship between the providers and the SME. It’s much harder for SMEs to get up to speed in a very short time frame. So, if we were able to mainstream this and have longer term certainty about the funding for this sort of provision, I think it would be easier to be able to get at SMEs.”⁴⁰

50. Many stakeholders raised this matter of ensuring that employers have time to plan and engage with the programme, and that stability and longer-term funding is required. Welsh Government has since confirmed financial allocations for 2020/21,⁴¹ and the Committee also notes that HEFCW has recently requested monitoring data from institutions offering degree apprenticeships for the 2020/21 cohort over three reference periods, with a final deadline of August 2021. This includes providers giving an analysis of “the impact of Covid-19 on retention of continuing apprentices 2020/21 from 2018/19 and 2019/20, and planned recruitment of new apprentices in 2020/21.” HEFCW’s circular notes that “This is to identify challenges within the sector, and inform our response.”⁴² The need for stability and forward planning points to the importance of early decision-making on future provision and funding by the next Welsh Government.

51. The original funding commitment for the degree apprenticeships pilot was £20 million over three academic years, with £8 million having been spent in the first two years. However, for the final academic year HEFCW has so far received only £4 million from Welsh Government and has needed to allocate another £5 million from within its own budget for a total spend of £9 million (which represents a shortfall of £3 million from the original £20 million commitment, and the need for HEFCW to reduce funding for its other priorities).

Recommendation 5. Welsh Government should clarify how its original £20 million funding commitment to the 3-year degree apprenticeships pilot will be met; set out whether it will provide HEFCW with additional funding to offset the £5 million the Council have had to divert from other priorities this academic year; set out whether the funding for continuing degree apprentices will need to be found from HEFCW’s general grant-in-aid; and indicate its plans and

⁴⁰ Paragraph 30, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

⁴¹ https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/W20-20HE-HEFCW-Funding-allocations-2020_21.pdf

⁴² https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/W20-28HE-Degree-Apprenticeships-2020_21-Monitoring-Report.pdf

timescales for agreeing funding commitment for future new enrolments on degree apprenticeships.

No level playing field for apprenticeship providers

52. The National Training Federation for Wales⁴³ and Colleges Wales⁴⁴ raised concerns about the difference between the funding model used for degree apprenticeships, where HEFCW administers its own approval process for providers, and the competitive procurement process used to award contracts to providers of non-degree apprenticeships. NTfW said there was “a great deal of annoyance” among its members that the same level of robust contracting did not need to be followed, and Colleges Wales said there was “no satisfactory explanation” for the difference. Stakeholders argue that there is no “level playing field” for apprenticeship providers in the higher education sectors and that the HEFCW process appears less rigorous, although HEFCW refutes this, and said that as yet numbers have not exceeded the funding available, precluding the need for a competitive process.

53. In oral evidence David Blaney said that for future delivery HEFCW would rather use their ‘mainstream processes’ of funding than the procurement model preferred by Welsh Government and used for lower level apprenticeships. He challenged the Welsh Government argument that procurement gave the opportunity to control what they bought: “I don’t think you need to procure to be able to determine what it is that you’re actually putting public money into; you can do that through funding.”⁴⁵ He said it was still possible to deal with any delivery problems, and that the HEFCW funding model was more cost effective:

“...if institutions don’t deliver what we’ve funded them for, we take the money back afterwards. We have well-established monitoring and audit machinery to do that, and that’s a lot more cost-effective than a procurement process that has a massive administrative overhead. So, we would rather not do that. This bidding process was kind of halfway between the two, but if we were going to do this in a more expanded way then we would want to mainstream into our normal processes, which is much more efficient.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Written evidence

⁴⁴ Written evidence

⁴⁵ Paragraph 21, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

⁴⁶ Paragraph 19, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

54. On 12 February 2020 the Committee scrutinised the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales and Welsh Government officials about repeated problems with procurement exercises for the Working Wales programme of employability support. The problems caused by those previous challenges to procurement raise a question about whether this is still the best approach for awarding apprenticeship provider contracts in the future.

Recommendation 6. Welsh Government should justify retaining two different funding models, including a rationale for continuing with the procurement model for awarding contracts to apprenticeship providers; set out how this is compatible with having coherent learning pathways from Level 2 to Level 6 and how the procurement of the new apprenticeship provision will address this; and give assurances about the reliability and efficiency of the contractual approach, including that lessons have been learned from the discontinued Job Support Wales procurement.

Cost of Degree Apprenticeships - is the funding model sustainable?

55. Funding and costs of degree apprenticeships emerged as a significant issue, but the Committee did not get much clarity on the relative costs of degree and non-degree apprenticeships from the evidence gathered, and due to the pandemic had no opportunity to question the Minister on this point. Broadly speaking, the higher education sector argued that the flat £27,000 fee provided by HEFCW for each apprenticeship (equivalent to the tuition fees charged for a traditional undergraduate degree) reflects the costs of delivery. With regard to the current degree apprenticeship frameworks offered, Universities Wales said:

“The current framework funding levels for degree apprenticeships adequately reflect the cost of delivery and, in value for money terms, compare favourably to the per credit cost of many apprenticeships that result in a level 4 or 5 in engineering.”⁴⁷

56. However, other respondents such as NTfW and Airbus argue that they are significantly more expensive than Higher Apprenticeships. NTfW said: “In comparison to a Higher Apprenticeship (which costs on average a total £7,500), Degree Apprenticeships are much more expensive (at £27,000)”⁴⁸, and Airbus said: “structured negotiations are needed with universities to challenge the 9k flat cost”⁴⁹, referring here to the cost per year over a traditional 3 year undergraduate

⁴⁷ Written evidence

⁴⁸ Written evidence

⁴⁹ Written evidence

degree. NTfW expanded on this in their oral evidence to the Committee, arguing that degree apprenticeships should be costed using the Activity Costs Model already used for all other apprenticeships at Levels 2-5.

57. When the Committee examined the question of whether the flat rate of £27,000 offered value for money, Bethan Owens of HEFCW said that although it was the right approach for the pilot, given the set-up costs involved, “the principle of looking at banding would be the right one for a long-term sustainable model.”⁵⁰ She pointed out that some degree apprenticeships could end up costing more than £27,000.

58. Professor Julie Lydon of Universities Wales told the Committee that £27,000 “has broad comparability with the level of public investment at an average in England”, and pointed out that whereas employers in England could put apprenticeship levy money into supporting training costs, Welsh employers could not do that.⁵¹

The Activity Costs Model

59. NTfW explained that an Activity Costs Model is used for non-degree apprenticeship funding calculations, with the body claiming that it aims to establish a fair funding model for a variety of delivery methods for the same apprenticeship framework, i.e. providers may decide to deliver it in a variety of ways, but all will receive the same level of funding. Funding is delivered by Welsh Government in consultation with providers, based on analysis of Funding Surveys submitted by providers.

60. The Funding Survey looks at actual hours associated with the cost of initial assessments; teaching hours; internal and external assessment; internal and external moderation; and Essential Skills Wales (ESW) delivery. NTfW said that the range of hours will differ by provider depending on delivery methodology, but fair funding will be based within a range, and not simply taking the mean of hours. A ‘Credit Equivalent Unit’ (CEU) will be assigned a financial value, e.g. 10 notional learning hours will equate to 1 CEU, assigned a financial value, currently £23.47. The example provided by NTfW illustrates how costs of frameworks can vary between levels within the same sector:

⁵⁰ Paragraph 183, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

⁵¹ Paragraph 184, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

Framework	CEUs	Total Value
Apprenticeship (L3) Engineering Manufacture (Craft and Technician)	718.2	£16,856
Higher Apprenticeship (L4) Data Analytics	405.5	£9,494

61. NTfW said that anecdotally, a version of the Higher Apprenticeship in Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (one of the sector frameworks for the current Degree Apprenticeships pilot) which includes the delivery of a HNC qualification and lasts for four years is valued at circa £20,000, and that this appears to be the framework which attracts the most funding.⁵²

Recommendation 7. Welsh Government should provide clarity to the Committee on the costs of degree and non-degree apprenticeships in similar subject areas.

Consideration of Other Costs

62. NTfW also pointed out that there are other costs associated with delivering non-degree apprenticeships that are not included in the Activity Costs Model, which “includes, but is not limited to, Awarding Body costs (less registration fees), delivering Safeguarding activities, the Prevent Duty, Welsh Government compliance audits, the Education Workforce Council registration costs of practitioners, data security and digital delivery costs and other Welsh Government requirements.”⁵³ These latter requirements were not detailed in evidence.

63. HEFCW said it would welcome a decision on a sustainable funding mechanism for Degree Apprenticeships that takes into account “affordability and the relationship to other HE provision, in particular part time provision, and fee levels and funding support.”

64. The view from the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) is that the funding for any expanded range of frameworks should come from existing higher education resourcing. Jeff Protheroe of NTfW highlighted the challenge for Welsh Government of balancing costs with demand, with a greater provision of higher level, higher cost apprenticeships meaning less funds for lower level, lower cost apprenticeships...”so, if you deliver more higher level, then the opportunities for people to progress to that level are taken away.”⁵⁴ He said that in order to “square that circle”, Welsh Government needed to identify value for money and where it

⁵² Written evidence

⁵³ Written evidence

⁵⁴ Paragraph 345, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

would get the greatest return on its investment, and that it was “only right, then, that all forms of apprenticeships are funded along the same model.”⁵⁵

Recommendation 8. Welsh Government should develop and utilise a costing model that is consistent for all apprenticeship provision from foundation to degree apprenticeships and which reflects variations in the costs of delivery across different levels and subjects.

⁵⁵ Paragraph 346, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

8. Recruitment and Widening Access

65. Almost all respondents to consultation acknowledged the challenges inherent in widening access to the pilot degree apprenticeships, but consistently pointed out two important considerations with regard to the pilot. Firstly that the choice of frameworks meant that the pilot was structurally biased toward creating a gender imbalance, because of the focus on traditionally male-dominated sectors, and secondly that employers largely control the recruitment of degree apprentices in the same way that they control their wider recruitment.

66. However, NTfW argued that non-degree providers have challenging targets to meet in relation to equality and diversity within their contracts. HEFCW recommended not setting targets based on personal characteristics, noting that the majority of apprentices recruited to date were existing staff, and also that Equality and Human Rights Commission suggest that typically employees are reluctant to declare disabilities to their employer. Universities Wales also argued that the gender balance is an improvement on those recruited to the same subjects via traditional routes. Colegau Cymru said that it was not clear what, if any, specific initiatives were undertaken to try to achieve any element of gender balance, and “if any such initiatives were undertaken, they have not worked well.”⁵⁶ It found the fact that only 30 of 145 apprentices were female to be “unsurprising” in these circumstances. Colegau Cymru called for Welsh Government to review the impact of equality and diversity initiatives in the work-based learning provider network.

67. Rob Simkins, then President of the National Union of Students Wales, said that ensuring parity of access to student support services was vital to efforts to widen access.⁵⁷ He also said targets were needed in any further roll-out of degree apprenticeships:

“...there needs to be some sort of target or quota to make it more intersectional, because, at the moment, the demographics are not fantastic in this respect. So, anything that we can be doing that’s deliberately targeting those groups is beneficial.”⁵⁸

68. HEFCW provided the inquiry with previously unpublished statistics for the personal characteristics of those involved in the pilot, and for employers. The

⁵⁶ Written evidence

⁵⁷ Paragraph 111, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

⁵⁸ Paragraph 33, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

headline figures for the 380 new and continuing apprentices for academic year 2019/20 include:

- 58% enrolled on the Digital Framework and 42% on the Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Framework, and 155 apprentices enrolled on the Software Engineering pathway (36% of the total);
- 20% of degree apprentices are Welsh speakers;
- 20% are aged 21 and under;
- 17% are female;
- 7% declared a disability;
- 3% are from black and minority ethnic groups;
- 39% of employers are in the manufacturing sector;
- 20% of employers are SMEs; and
- 295 degree apprentices are existing employees (78%) and 85 are new employees (22%).

69. The Committee acknowledges that some equality imbalances in the degree apprenticeship pilot may be inherent in the employment sectors of the two pilot frameworks, although they also saw an encouraging gender balance for the Data Science apprenticeship cohort at the Office of National Statistics. Widening the degree apprenticeship offer to sectors which traditionally attract more women, such as health and social care for example, might have some immediate effect on overall gender indicators, but would not resolve deep-seated gender imbalances in some employment sectors..

70. Oral evidence to the Committee highlighted the importance of addressing gender balance at a much earlier point of intervention, in schools, and by having the right advice and guidance available to support efforts to widen access. Dr David Blaney of HEFCW said: “We have to get the independent advice and guidance machinery in Wales properly resourced and able to do this.”⁵⁹

71. Dr Blaney also noted that although it was monitoring data on protected characteristics as part of the pilot, widening access to people with protected characteristics had not been incentivised as part of it. The Committee was

⁵⁹ Paragraph 80, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

reassured that a more secure policy position and mainstreamed funding for a degree apprenticeships programme in future would mean being able to apply funding incentives to widen access.⁶⁰

72. Airbus said that widening access in the engineering sector was very challenging, and it was having to put “an incredible amount of effort...and funding into raising awareness.”⁶¹ Gavin Jones of Airbus pointed to the work of the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership to promote STEM in schools and provide STEM resources, and stressed the need for coordinated activity:

“whatever wonderful activities we’ve got, they tend to be uncoordinated. Whilst as good as they are, it’s almost like chucking gravel into a huge lake rather than putting a big boulder in there and creating a wave; lots of good activity but it’s not co-ordinated.”⁶²

73. Milly Blenkin of GoCompare said that early sign-off of funding for the degree apprentices would be very helpful in efforts to widen access. Of their 12 degree apprentices 5 were female, and they were trained as STEM ambassadors who could then go to careers fairs and workshops to promote STEM and tech careers.⁶³ She also said educating teachers about degree apprenticeships was vital, as many teachers she met at careers fairs were unaware of this opportunity and the benefits for their pupils.

74. Cerith Rhys Jones of the OU said a broader range of frameworks and clear pathways would help widen access:

“if you widen the number of frameworks that are available and also ensure that people can see a clear pathway from a low level to a higher level, and see how that teaching and learning is being mapped across those, that’s going to assist in increasing the access to degree apprenticeships.”⁶⁴

75. Estyn’s oral evidence to the Committee also noted the importance of having enough role models from under-represented groups to encourage uptake, and for

⁶⁰ Paragraph 66, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 27 February 2020

⁶¹ Paragraph 209, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

⁶² Paragraph 217, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

⁶³ Paragraph 213, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

⁶⁴ Paragraph 21, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

example to address barriers in some communities where apprenticeships are seen as less valuable than a more traditional academic route.⁶⁵

76. Evidence from Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol⁶⁶ and the Welsh Language Commissioner⁶⁷ pointed to the lack of Welsh-medium provision and need for more data. This is a general issue for the apprenticeship programme which the Commissioner said was likely to be relevant to degree apprenticeships. The Commissioner said that beyond the 15% of Welsh speakers studying degree apprenticeships, there was insufficient information about the extent to which they were completing the apprenticeships through the medium of Welsh, and therefore maintaining and developing their Welsh language skills. Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (CCC) said that although HEFCW was asking questions of providers about Welsh-medium provision, the outcomes were “disappointing (if not very disappointing).” CCC noted that in addition to the important strategic questions about the future of degree apprenticeships, there were also “obvious questions that need to be addressed in order to ensure that these schemes fully consider the Welsh language and bilingualism in the future.”⁶⁸

77. The Commissioner pointed to Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol’s Welsh-medium Action Plan, which outlines the need to map current Welsh-medium provision and identify areas where new frameworks ought to be developed. Welsh Government’s own ‘Cymraeg 2050’ action plan for 2019-20⁶⁹ points to the CCC action plan as the key to improving provision, but the Commissioner said it was “unclear what impact such commitments will have on the number who study for apprenticeships through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, and what effect, if any, it will have on degree apprenticeships.”⁷⁰

Recommendation 9. Welsh Government must develop or commission a strategy for widening access to degree apprenticeships for under-represented groups.

Recommendation 10. Welsh Government should set out how it will a) address concerns about ensuring degree apprenticeships fully consider the Welsh

⁶⁵ Paragraph 314, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

⁶⁶ Written evidence

⁶⁷ Written evidence

⁶⁸ Written evidence

⁶⁹ <https://gov.wales/cymraeg-2050-welsh-language-strategy-action-plan-2019-2020>

⁷⁰ Written evidence

language and bilingualism, and b) collect adequate data about degree apprenticeships completed in the medium of Welsh.

9. Learner Engagement and Student Voice

78. Ben Kinross of the National Society of Apprentices (NSOA) pointed to good practice in parts of the UK and other European countries in ensuring apprentices had a voice in the same way as other learners, and that institutions should fund and resource student unions to do that.⁷¹ Rob Simkins of NUS Wales said that the NSOA was now a member of the NUS ‘family’, and that things were ‘travelling in the right direction’ as far as organisations working together to ensure the student voice was heard. Rhys Davies of the Open University also told the Committee that it was actively looking at how to gain feedback from students and have a greater student voice in the delivery of online modules.⁷²

⁷¹ Paragraph 51, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

⁷² Paragraph 55, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

10. Promotion and Marketing of Opportunities

79. Estyn said that degree apprenticeships were not widely advertised “so few people outside of employers and providers delivering the programmes have an awareness and understanding of them.” It said that there had been a “missed opportunity” to re-launch the apprenticeship offer in its entirety, including the degree programme, and that this “was also a missed opportunity to clearly show the entry and progression routes available to learners”⁷³, although Estyn also acknowledged that the narrow range of degree apprenticeships available did not help in marketing the degree apprenticeship route.⁷⁴ Estyn recommended that recruitment is used pro-actively to widen participation.

80. HEFCW also noted limited promotion of the Degree Apprenticeships pilot and said that a review of the role and efficacy of Welsh Government’s Business Wales Skills Gateway, which provides information and advice on apprenticeships, and an opportunity for employers to register interest, would be helpful.⁷⁵ HEFCW also noted opportunities to increase engagement might be improved when the Welsh Government’s Apprenticeships Vacancy Service is online: “this could be an opportunity to promote Degree Apprenticeships, and integrate with Careers Wales Apprenticeship Matching Service.”⁷⁶

81. HEFCW noted that Welsh Government “has a well-established communications and marketing apparatus for publicising apprenticeships, and it is important that Degree Apprenticeships are part of this framework.” It wants to see Welsh Government promote them as part of a joined-up approach to promoting apprenticeships generally. HEFCW also suggested it might be beneficial to better integrate Degree Apprenticeships within Welsh Government Apprenticeship Awards: “This could demonstrate an integrated approach to apprenticeship policy planning and highlight excellence in the sector.”⁷⁷

82. HEFCW also said increased participation rates in Worldskills should help to raise the profile and recognition of higher-level skills and support economic growth. It emphasised the importance of Careers Wales in providing advice and guidance in schools.

⁷³ Written evidence

⁷⁴ Written evidence

⁷⁵ Written evidence

⁷⁶ Written evidence

⁷⁷ Written evidence

Recommendation 11. Welsh Government should develop a strategy for promoting degree apprenticeships that includes outreach to teachers and schools on the opportunities offered by degree apprenticeships, and also ensure that careers information and guidance includes degree apprenticeships.

11. Quality Assurance and certification

83. Degree Apprenticeships are quality assured as part of the Quality Assessment Framework for Higher Education in Wales, with reviews commissioned by institutions every six years. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) oversees the quality assurance system. During an institutional review the QAA does not inspect or observe teaching at universities - it is for individual institutions to maintain academic standards via their own machinery and processes. At the same time that HEFCW requires the QAA review to be conducted every six years, it also requires the governing bodies of institutions to submit an annual assurance return to HEFCW, which sets out matters in relation to quality assurance.

84. The most important approach to maintaining higher education standards in the UK is via a system of peer review by external academics, external specialists and students. For example, degree programmes at a university may be reviewed for effectiveness once every five years, with the review normally conducted by a panel of academics which will include a student representative and at least one external senior academic.

85. Evidence from Estyn in particular highlighted the difference between the quality assurance system for Degree Apprenticeships, where universities are essentially quality assuring the academic standards of their own degree apprenticeships, with Higher Apprenticeships, which despite being at the same level as year one and year two of a degree, are subject to inspection by Estyn.

86. The Committee interrogated evidence submitted by Estyn and others in the further education sector about this difference in quality assurance processes. Estyn's written evidence called for "clear and structured work-based activity including visiting learners regularly in their workplaces to undertake on-the-job assessment, and allocation of mentors in the workplace."

87. Estyn also said that "Higher education institutions have expertise in the design and delivery of degree courses but have less experience of liaison with employers and learners in the workplace for the work-based learning element."⁷⁸ Universities Wales felt very strongly that that was not the case, and that through, for example, applied research, they have a great deal of liaison with employers, and, indeed, many university lecturers were previously working in the environment in which they were researching. Estyn was invited to give oral evidence, and on 12

⁷⁸ Written evidence

March Jassa Scott clarified Estyn’s position, saying that they recognised HE institutions track record of working with employers, but that:

“...an apprenticeship is a certain way of delivering something—it’s got a tradition, it’s got a history, and it is very much about that very clear integration. It’s someone who’s employed in a job, and that on and off-the-job training is integrated very tightly within it. So, I think it was just a reflection that that particular exact model of delivery is newer for higher education. That doesn’t mean that they can’t draw on that extensive experience they’ve got of engaging with employers across other areas, but I think it’s also important to learn from that delivery of apprenticeships across the other levels to ensure that that learning, in terms of how we deliver that integrated model of on and off-the-job learning—it comes together. So, that was where we were coming from, really.”⁷⁹

88. Jassa Scott of Estyn said there was scope for “shared thinking” on quality assurance and inspection. Mark Evans, an Estyn Inspector, noted problems in recruiting suitably qualified assessors for higher level apprenticeships, and suggested to the Committee that there could be scope for employers and training providers to “use the existing skills they’ve got within their organisations and rotate those staff around as necessary to undertake training or assessment, not within their own company, but possibly within a geographical area, to keep those costs down and to make sure learners are getting that support that they need.”⁸⁰

89. HEFCW told the Committee that it was working on commissioning “a developmental quality review of Degree Apprenticeships to provide a set of recommendations for future delivery. This will be carried out by the QAA (the Committee understands that Estyn is not involved in this anymore) and will look at how the provision in Wales addresses the QAA Characteristics statement for Higher Education in Apprenticeships.⁸¹ It was expected to report in March 2021.”⁸²

90. HEFCW’s written evidence also said that it expects assurance that apprentices’ learning is being supported, noting that apprentices will only be awarded a qualification from their Higher Education provider, and not an

⁷⁹ Paragraphs 329-330, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

⁸⁰ Paragraph 365, Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 12 March 2020

⁸¹ https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/characteristics-statement-apprenticeships.pdf?sfvrsn=12dac681_8

⁸² Written evidence

apprenticeship certificate. This does not align with apprenticeships at lower levels and HEFCW called for greater clarity.

Recommendation 12. Welsh Government should introduce a degree apprenticeships certificate, issued by Apprenticeship Certification Wales, which would ensure that claims to a degree apprenticeship have met all the on and off-the-job training and academic requirements. It should complement the institution's own degree certificate.

Annex A: List of oral evidence sessions

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Date	Name and organisation
27 February 2020	<p>Dr David Blaney, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales</p> <p>Bethan Owen, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales</p> <p>Professor Julie Lydon OBE, Universities Wales</p> <p>Keiron Rees, Universities Wales</p> <p>Iestyn Davies, Colleges Wales</p> <p>Matthew Williams, Bridgend College</p> <p>Jeff Protheroe, National Training Federation for Wales</p>
12 March 2020	<p>Rob Simkins, National Union of Students Wales</p> <p>Ben Kinross, National Society of Apprentices</p> <p>Cerith Rhys Jones, Open University in Wales</p> <p>Rhys Daniels, Open University</p> <p>Gavin Jones, Airbus</p> <p>Milly Blenkin, GoCo Group</p> <p>Jassa Scott, Estyn</p> <p>Mark Evans, Estyn</p>

Annex B: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All Consultation responses and additional written information can be viewed on the Committee's website.

Reference	Organisation
01	University of South Wales
02	Cardiff Metropolitan University
03	NPTC Group of Colleges
04	University of Wales Trinity St David
05	CMI
06	Coleg Cambria
07	Welsh Language Commissioner
08	Estyn
09	CITB
10	Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (submitted in Welsh only)
11	Swansea University
12	Universities Wales
13	NUS Wales and NSoA Wales
14	Llandrillo Menai and Bangor University
15	BT Group
16	The Open University in Wales
17	FSB Cymru Wales
18	Cardiff University
19	Newport Wafer Fab
20	Colegau Cymru
21	UCU
22	The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
23	National Training Federation for Wales
24	Airbus

25	Further Response from Estyn
26	SEMTA Group (now trading as Enginuity)

Additional information

Title	Date
Note of Visit to Data Science Campus, Office of National Statistics	4 March 2020
Degree Apprenticeships: Engagement Summary	March 2020