

# UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS



TEMPERATURE  
CHECK



## THE CHALLENGE

**DESPITE THE RISE IN POPULARITY  
AND SUPPORT FOR DEGREE  
APPRENTICESHIPS, THEIR  
GROWTH HAS BEEN MODEST  
COMPARED TO THEIR POTENTIAL**



# INTRODUCTION

Skills reform is a key priority for both the government and opposition, as policymakers look to grow the economy, boost productivity, and ensure workers have the skills required to support the jobs of the future.

At present the outlook looks uncertain; the UK has a serious skills gap. There is a heightened awareness of the need for graduates to have a diverse range of skills – something that is recognised by policymakers and employers alike.

**Investment in skills and apprenticeships has become a clear Government priority:** Skills Minister Robert Halfon has long championed apprenticeships and believes that investment in skills is the best route for the Government to take to create economic growth and productivity. Education Secretary Gillian Keegan is a former apprentice herself and is committed to improving the lifelong learning pathway.

As such, the Government is likely to prioritise and expand support for degree apprenticeships as it looks to rebalance the funding and focus of post-18 education, publishing the long-awaited Higher Education Bill and taking forward the recommendations from the Augar Review.

**Equally, Labour's Shadow Education Team want to deliver a "landmark shift in skills provision",** with ambitions to devolve adult education and skills budgets to metro mayors and combined authorities, and to give businesses more flexibility to use skills funding to meet specific employer needs.

**WA commissioned public research to understand the awareness and perception of degree apprenticeships, explore the perceived barriers to undertaking one – and assess what this means for skills providers, as well as existing higher and further education institutions.**

**40%**  
of workers do not have the right qualifications for their roles, according to the OECD

An additional **20%** of workers could be underskilled by 2030, say the ISC

**"I WOULD LIKE TO ENSURE THAT WE ROCKET BOOST DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE"**

**Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP**  
Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, November 2022



# OUR KEY LEARNINGS FROM CONSUMER POLLING

\*consumer polling of 1,000 adults carried out in February 2023, weighted to reflect a nationally representative audience

**1. THERE IS A LACK OF AWARENESS ABOUT DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS**

**2. THERE IS ALSO A PERCEPTIONS GAP ABOUT THEIR PRESTIGE**

**3. AS A RESULT, TAKE UP OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS IS LOW**

**4. THOUGH, THE PUBLIC RECOGNISE THAT THERE ARE BENEFITS TO THESE QUALIFICATIONS**

**5. BUT THEY ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE BARRIERS TOO**



**6. SO MOST SUPPORT INTERVENTION TO MAKE THEM MORE APPEALING**

**7. AND THEY ALSO BELIEVE THEY SHOULD RECEIVE MORE GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

**8. ONCE MORE IS UNDERSTOOD ABOUT DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS, THEY PROVE TO BE A POPULAR OPTION**

# AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

**56%**

**of people have never heard of degree apprenticeships**

There is a lack of awareness about degree apprenticeships

- Degree apprenticeships are a relatively new qualification and, as a result, there is much lower awareness of them as a viable path to a career than more traditional routes
- Only 44% of the public are aware of degree apprenticeships, much below traditional university degrees (81%), standard apprenticeships (78%), NVQs (73%), and BTECs (62%)
- Awareness of degree apprenticeships is slightly higher amongst 18-24 year olds – 51% of which have heard of them – but remains low overall compared to other qualifications

**11%**

**of those surveyed were interested in doing a degree apprenticeship**

**44%**

**of the public view university degrees as more prestigious**

There is also a perceptions gap about their prestige

- Despite level 6 and 7 apprenticeships being the equivalent of university degrees, they are generally viewed as less prestigious
- Some 44% of the public view university degrees as more prestigious than degree apprenticeships
- A third (33%) erroneously believe that university degrees are a higher level of qualification too

**33%**

**think university degrees are a higher level of qualification**

As a result, take up of degree apprenticeships is low

- Only one in ten (11%) we surveyed is interested in completing a degree apprenticeship, while nearly three in four (73%) have not considered this



# BENEFITS AND BARRIERS TO DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

**62%**

view earning a wage  
as the biggest benefit

**57%**

see work experience  
as a key benefit

The public recognise that there are  
benefits to these qualifications

The five most popular benefits are:

1. Earning a wage while studying (62%)
2. Gaining work experience while studying (57%)
3. University fees being paid by employer /  
avoiding student loan debt (48%)
4. Gaining a degree at the end (45%)
5. Graduates are often in employment  
at the end of the placement (43%)

**34%**

don't think enough  
employers offer them

**27%**

don't think enough  
unis offer them

But they understand that  
there are barriers too

The top five barriers recognised are:

1. Not enough employers offer them (34%)
2. Not enough universities offer courses (27%)
3. Not accessible enough to people from low  
income backgrounds (23%)
4. Organisations take advantage of cheap  
labour rather than providing skills relevant  
to the job market (23%)
5. Not seen as equally prestigious  
to a university degree (20%)

**44%**

want more employers  
to back them

**42%**

back higher wages  
for apprentices

So they support intervention  
to make them more appealing

The top five supported measures  
of intervention are:

1. More employers backing them (44%)
2. Higher wages for apprentices (42%)
3. Greater availability of placements at  
a range of different companies (36%)
4. Greater availability of courses at a range  
of different universities (34%)
5. Greater public awareness of courses  
and placements (34%)



**ONCE MORE IS UNDERSTOOD ABOUT  
DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS, THEY  
PROVE TO BE A POPULAR OPTION –  
AN IMPRESSIVE 45% WISH THEY HAD  
DONE A DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP,  
WHILE 65% WOULD ADVISE A YOUNG  
PERSON TO CONSIDER ONE**



# IMPLICATIONS FOR PROVIDERS

Our research shows that degree apprenticeships prove to be a popular and appealing qualification with learners once the benefits of them are understood.

However, there is still a lot of work to do to raise their public profile and ultimately increase the number of degree apprenticeship applicants and starts each year.

To unlock the true potential of degree apprenticeships, universities, providers, employers, and the Government need to work together to overcome these barriers:

- More awareness is needed about them
- More universities and employers need to offer them, in a wider range of subjects

**THIS IS NOT AS STRAIGHTFORWARD AS IT SEEMS, THOUGH, AS UNIVERSITIES AND SKILLS PROVIDERS BOTH WARN OF THE REGULATORY COMPLEXITIES AND BURDENS THAT NEED TO BE SIMPLIFIED IN ORDER FOR THEM TO EXPAND THEIR OFFERINGS.**

There's an opportunity for the Government to address this once it publishes the long-awaited Higher Education Bill.

## FE WEEK

**OfS to create £40m fund to boost degree apprenticeship take-up**

Office for Students confirms fund can be used for existing providers and those delivering degree apprenticeships for the first time



**Decisive action must follow the warm words about degree apprenticeships**

More support and less complex regulation will allow the hybrid qualifications to flourish across more English institutions and sectors



**How we are supporting degree apprenticeships and higher technical education**

Higher Education and Skills Minister Robert Halfon's speech to University UK's conference on degree apprenticeships







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