

Developing Route Maps: Apprenticeship progression to Higher Education

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‘Higher Ambitions’

Everyone, irrespective of background, has a right to a fair chance to gain those advantages [accruing to those with HE]. This is vital not just as a question of social justice and social mobility but also for meeting the economy’s needs for high level skills.” (DBIS 2009)

Two Enduring Policy Narratives

- Economic – discourses of competitiveness, skills, productivity, innovation, employer engagement
- Social – discourse of social mobility, inclusion, widening participation, equal opportunities, diversity

Policy Consensus?

“We aim to widen participation through the expansion of the number of adults at university and by promoting a broader range of course models alongside the three year degree...in order to attract a greater diversity of students, more part-time study, more vocationally-based foundation degrees, more work-based study and more study whilst living at home must be made available.” (Higher Ambitions, BIS, Nov 2009)

David Willetts, Minister of State, Universities and Science

“To me, the only Mickey Mouse degree is one that’s mediocre, or sloppy, or lacking rigour and depth...Diverse provision of high quality can only be a good thing...

We must provide a wide range of routes into further and higher education, including through high-quality apprenticeships.”

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/speeches/david-willetts-keynote-speech> May 2010

Panel of Fair Access to the Professions

“ We believe that the silos that divide vocational and higher education are an impediment to social mobility and must be swept away. The evidence is clear that once at university, those who progress through vocational qualifications perform at similar levels to those who enter through traditional A level qualifications.”

(Unleashing Aspirations 2009)

So – do people with vocational qualifications and/or apprenticeships get access?

- Approx. 45-50% of VQ holders enter HE (90% with A levels)
- There are a million more people with vocational L3s as highest than with academic L3s as highest qualification
- Proportion of 19 yr olds attaining L3 via AA and work-based qualifications is increasing
- But, Gittoes (2009) tracking 37,400 apprenticeship completers found: 6% of L3 and 4% of L2 progressed to HE within 4 years of completing

Advanced Apprenticeship as a Route to HE

Research commissioned by Hants and Isle of Wight LLN aimed:

1. To map and scope the availability and take up of Advanced Apprenticeship across the LLN's curriculum areas
2. To map HE level provision in the LLN partner institutions against Advanced Apprenticeship provision in the curriculum areas.
3. To examine admissions policy, publicity materials and practice in relation to applications from those taking the Advanced Apprenticeship route.

in 7 curriculum areas: Business and Management; Construction; Engineering; Creative Industries; Retail; Childhood, Youth and Community Studies; Health and Social Care

The curriculum areas: sectoral context

- The CAs represent sectors which cover a range of occupations with different traditions in relation to:
- skill formation, apprenticeship
- availability and importance of qualifications
- the role of higher level study and credentials
- labour market entry and career progression

Mapping CAs on to AA Frameworks

- Considerable challenge
- CAs can be seen as an umbrella for a variety of sub-sectors and occupations – and defined from an educational provider perspective
- AA Frameworks developed by the relevant Sector Skills Council to provide specific pathways to occupations, skills and certification
- Frameworks contain a knowledge-based element, a competence-based element and Functional skills (NB new blueprint specification)
- Led to a pragmatic approach to mapping frameworks and CAs against each other

Sector illustration: Engineering

- Extensive provision of MEng, BEng, BSc, some with Foundation year, FdSc, FdEng, HNC, HND
- Entry requirements vary from AAA to HNC (FdEng)
- No specific mention of AA; for Bachelor degrees AA would require BTEC National Certificate, Fd requirements often unclear or cite HNC
- Little information for work based learners
- Some Framework pathways likely to include BTEC NC recognised in UCAS tariff, but most do not include qualifications covered in UCAS tariff

Sector illustration: Business and Management

- Wide range of FdA, BA, HND provision in business and management (various) and Bachelors in accounting
- Entry criteria typically in terms of A levels and UCAS points for Bachelors; Bus and Admin Framework qualifications not in tariff
- Accountancy AA includes AAT NVQ3 which attracts 160 UCAS points but not sufficient for entry to Bachelor degree
- HNC/D, FdA Business courses often mention WBL including AAs

Sector illustration: Health and Social Care

- HE provision included M and BSc entry to wide range of professional programmes, FdA, FdSc, some with pathways to professional programmes, DipHE (ODP)
- Entry requirements varied from A levels (various) to NVQ3 with many other vocational qualifications cited (predominantly through Fd route)
- Although several Fds would be suitable, no specific mention is made of AA in entry criteria or on UCAS website
- Most Framework qualifications not in UCAS tariff, but characteristics of apprentice population (mature with work experience) means that entry requirements often flexible

Conclusions: Challenges for progression

- Recognise that AAs are highly differentiated across and *within* sector frameworks – misleading to talk of AA as if one ‘thing’.
- Progression to HE through the work-based route differs for contextual reasons – skill and career formation pathways and qualification ladders relate to the aimed for job.

To what extent have some sectors been able to retain pathways to and through HE via WBR? To what extent have other sectors been able to create new pathways?

Conclusions cont.

- University response to AA highly variable; relevance of market position to selection strategies but those HEIs with departments with more applied focus more likely to have sustained an interest in applicants from vocational and WB routes;
- AA presents significant challenges for the UCAS tariff. Can it work for the AA if the approach is to give credit to individual qualifications/components? Scope for more holistic approach?
- Tension between standardised qualifications (e.g. A level) and flexible approaches to programme design (Apprenticeship frameworks)
- The context-dependence and variability of AA frameworks make progression to HE challenging but help underpin AA's workplace fitness for purpose. Can different paradigms be reconciled?

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