



# Apprenticeships: Progression to Higher Education (Interim Report)

June 2010

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## Background

1. Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships are aimed at young people aged 16-24 and typically involves someone who is working with an employer and studying for further qualifications with a college of further education. In terms of formal qualification, they lead to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Key Skills qualifications and/or a technical certificate.
2. There has been some debate on the extent to which apprenticeships and vocational courses leading to Level 3 should be seen as routes to higher education. The UCAS tariff does not recognise many of the Level 3 qualifications available to apprentices for direct entry to higher education. Despite being positioned as a Level 3 qualification, many apprenticeship programmes currently fall short of the actual level required for entry into higher education. This raises important questions about the current national qualifications framework. Level 3 appears to be operating on a split level – two levels of qualification within one – the academic and the vocational. The more academic routes i.e. A Level and BTEC National are preferred in comparison to the more practical and vocational routes such as City and Guilds and NVQ.

## Scope of work

3. It must be remembered that this study is an interim exploration of 'Apprenticeships' and further investigation and evaluation will be considered and pursued following on from the findings of this report. One main aim therefore has been considered:
  - To develop and implement an action plan which supports progression into higher education for students undertaking Apprenticeships in the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network region.

## Planning for progression

4. It is anticipated that the Level 3 qualifications associated with the Advanced Apprenticeship will not be sufficient for entry onto a Level 4 Honours Degree programme. Although Advanced Apprenticeship qualifications will be considered and accepted on Foundation Degree programmes and Higher National Diploma/Certificate programmes.
5. Currently (2010-11) only a handful of colleges in the Progress South Central partnership region offer Advanced Apprenticeships in Construction and Built Environment subjects: East Berkshire College, Guildford College of Further and Higher Education and Oxford and Cherwell Valley College. The provision includes the building services engineering crafts and trades: Brickwork, Painting and Decorating, Plumbing and the Wood Occupations: Carpentry and Joinery.
6. By its very nature the provision is vocational – the individual will be looking for a career in building services engineering rather than for it to be solely an alternative route into higher education and university. A majority of the individuals embarking

upon the Advanced Apprenticeship will be motivated by the practical requirements of their course and how to gain employment and remain in employment rather than by a need or desire to go onto the further, higher study e.g. a place at university.

### **Horizon scanning and long-term planning – the current problem of drop out and the future of Raising of Participation Age (RPA)**

7. The Raising of Participation Age (RPA) in 2013 to 17 and to 18 by 2015 will have a profound impact on the provision of further education. This may increase interest in Higher and Advanced Apprenticeship schemes bearing in mind that many individuals leave school at 16 because they do not wish to continue to pursue any form of traditional and formal education and training. However, the world of work requires training if not further formal education – especially in the complex and sophisticated world of today and the future.

8. The problem of transition and progression in further and higher education has attracted interest for decades. At a national level, there is a noticeable progression problem between Level 2 and Level 3 – especially for vocational courses/ qualifications. The Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training in England and Wales was concluded in 2006. The Review noted that compared with other European countries, the United Kingdom has a relatively low participation and retention rate in post-compulsory education and training.

... ‘The number of disaffected young people is a matter of concern. The Nuffield Review has recognised the value of extending the experiences of many young people through attendance at FE Colleges and quality work-based learning.’ (p. 15, Nuffield Review, 2006).

This supports the view that more needs to be done to improve opportunity and provision for the 16 to 18 age group – especially in the light of future ROSLA changes. One solution is the encouragement of provision and employer engagement i.e. Higher and Advanced Apprenticeships in the FE sector.

9. The challenge for post-2015 will be the provision of Level 2 and Level 3 education and training for all 16 to 18 year olds. For example, provision for the Higher and Advanced Diploma and Higher and Advanced Apprenticeships may become even more important and more popular than they are at the present time - the Diploma catering for the more academic student. The Advanced Diploma and Advanced Apprenticeship have not yet come of age, but they are very likely to do so by the end of the next 5 to 10 years.

10. The conclusion at this juncture suggests that it may be a little too soon to speculate and plan for progression for the Advanced Apprenticeship. Progression will also be discipline-specific – different degree programmes will have differing requirements i.e. the UCAS tariff.

### **The nature of Further Education in the future**

11. It is proposed that a further and more considered study should address the individual motivations of individuals who are attracted to the Higher and Advanced Apprenticeship route. It is suspected that only a small proportion of these individuals (16 to 25) will be interested in further and higher education.

12. It is also noted that the age range for students studying in the Further Education sector tends to be more mature i.e. 25+ rather than 18 to 25. For individuals taking on an Advanced Apprenticeship as adults later in life, their needs may be different. These individuals are more likely to be looking for an accelerated progression route whereby they can acquire more assistance (training and education) that will enable them to enter supervisory or management level occupations.

### **Further work – a research proposal**

13. A summary of future work:

- An exploration into employer engagement – an employer responsive FE sector (curriculum development support and funding).
- Review accreditation – the role of professional accrediting bodies.
- A review of what works and what doesn't work - remembering this can be discipline and therefore professional and trade specific – not all professions and trades need apprentices.

- A review of the funding system for apprenticeships – how are employers supported – how could they be encouraged to provide apprenticeship opportunities?
- To review the real barriers to progression – providing additional support, the links between FE and HE and the admissions process.