

It is a great pleasure to introduce you to the contents of this special issue, and we hope that you find these papers and case studies as interesting and informative as we have. Higher and degree apprenticeships are a key area for higher education institutions (HEIs) and in this special issue colleagues share their practice and knowledge. We open with a foreword from Professor Madeleine Atkins CBE, Chief Executive of HEFCE, followed by an informative “viewpoint” from Mandy Crawford-Lee, a UVAC Senior Associate, which really sets the scene for this issue’s papers and case studies.

Our first paper, “Higher technical skills learning from the experiences of English FE colleges and Australian technical and further education institutes” from King, Waters, Widdowson and Saraswat reports the outcomes of a joint study of higher technical skills undertaken by the Mixed Economy Group in England and TAFE Directors Australia. The authors propose that the development of higher technical skills is critical to innovation, productivity and social and economic prosperity, and evidence that demand for these skills is predicted to increase as digitalisation and automation supplant lower skilled jobs.

The paper compares higher education (HE) policy in England and Australia, which is focussed on using applied, work-based or work-integrated models of HE with a specific focus on higher and degree apprenticeships programmes. Both countries have large public vocational education sectors with competency-based training and HE provision and well-developed apprenticeship systems. A major difference is that HE in further education (FE) colleges is well established in England and can include higher and degree apprenticeships. By comparison, HE in Australian TAFE institutes is small and largely unrecognised in their HE policy environment.

Our second paper, Lambert’s, “Are current accountability frameworks appropriate for degree apprenticeships?” offers an analysis of current notions of outcome-based accountability contextualised through the degree apprenticeship programme. The author suggests that although the government have positioned degree apprenticeships as a viable alternative to university, HEIs do still have a pivotal role to play in both their development and delivery. This raises questions around the accountability for their success and this paper considers whether existing outcome-based notions of accountability are appropriate, given the multi-faceted relationship involved in apprenticeship delivery, and are they indeed capable of capturing and maximising upon the value arising from the delivery relationship.

The idea of accountability is a pertinent one as HEIs work through who within their institution will take responsibility for the higher and degree apprenticeships agenda? It does not easily sit in any one area as many business facing units in HEIs are discovering; it is an agenda which crosses recruitment, quality, finance, monitoring and audit, teaching and learning, employer engagement, knowledge transfer and more, and as such requires meaningful collaboration between colleagues; those focussed on processes, structures and systems along with those focussed on academic content and delivery. Developing a cross-institutional approach to this new agenda with unfamiliar funding rules, performance management requirements and a tripartite, employer-learner-university, working relationship is presenting various challenges for HEIs.

The third paper of the special issue from Wall, Perrin and Rowe, “The Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship: trials and tribulations” examines some of these issues. As one of the first degree apprenticeships to be available for delivery the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) has attracted considerable media attention; introduced in 2014, it incorporates a full honours degree and maps to professional standards.

The authors combine desk research with reflections on the experience of developing degree apprenticeships within HEIs, and consider the implications of this upon current and emerging HEI practice and research. These include several practical issues and some suggestions are made to alleviate these issues by developing flexible and collaborative processes, resources and networks. Teesside University (TU) (the journal editor’s institution) is also offering the CMDA from February 2017; based around a completely new degree (BA management practice) which is tailored specifically for part-time work-based students. This will help to fulfil the aims of the CMDA to support the growth of graduate-level managers through excellent business education, work-based learning and professional development.

Responding to talent gaps in the general management population led to the development of the degree apprenticeship discussed above; the next case study demonstrates how this degree apprenticeship provides progression for future managers of Nestlé, offering a fast-track route into a career in business and management. Daley, Coyle and Dwyer’s, “Sheffield Hallam University and Nestle: developing future leaders with the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship – A partnership approach” shares SHU’s experience of delivering a corporate Business and Management Degree, for Nestlé UK and Ireland; a tailored employer-sponsored degree which has evolved and been developed into a degree apprenticeship.

The case study describes the challenges faced, and the partnership approach taken to overcome them; it also explores the impact on the key stakeholders: apprentices, Nestlé and Sheffield Hallam University. The authors provide information, which illustrates how the programme team built upon the original project brief, as well as insight into the on-going evaluation of how the apprenticeship is progressing.

Baines, Gorb and Antcliff offer us a further practitioner case study focussed on Manchester Metropolitan University’s experience of developing and delivering a degree apprenticeship – this time the Digital and Technology Solutions Professional Degree Apprenticeship Standard. In, “Developing your own graduate employees: employer perspectives on the value of a degree apprenticeship”, we see the employers’ views on the value of degree apprenticeships prioritised, less than a year after the first apprentices commenced their studies for a bachelor’s degree in September 2015.

The authors provide an early insight into two employers’ rationales for engaging with this degree apprenticeship and their initial experiences. Degree apprenticeships recast employers as the purchasers of HE and afford them a key role in developing provision tailored to their needs. Implications of this new model for employers, universities and learners are potentially profound and also hard to predict. This case study is taken from the early stages of a three-year research programme.

Staffordshire University (SU) (guest editor’s institution) will also be offering the Digital and Technology Solutions Professional Degree Apprenticeship as part of its response to the developing demand for digital skills. With a newly developed degree meeting the generic knowledge skills and competencies as well as specific pathways from cyber security analyst and data analyst to network engineer and software engineer. A degree meeting the requirements of a number of occupations, presents

learners with the opportunity to develop broad and specific skills as well as gaining occupational competence.

The next paper, Bravenboer's, "Why co-design and delivery is a no-brainer for higher apprenticeships policy" points out that government initiatives aimed at raising skills levels and encouraging employers to invest in their workforce are not new. The author suggests that the initiatives usually fail to bring about the major shift in cultural mind-set, which would be required to make employer investment in professional learning a standard expectation. The ever-changing policy emphasis from "employer involvement" to "demand-led" workforce development to "employer ownership" of skills and "employer design" of apprenticeship standards has been challenging for all parties to navigate.

The paper addresses the complexities of this agenda, with the apprenticeship levy, to be introduced April 2017, explicitly positioned to tackle the unwillingness of UK employers to invest in the higher level skills and workforce development deemed so vital for increased productivity. Paid by those companies with a pay bill exceeding £3 million per year, and predicted to rise over £2 billion, the apprenticeship levy has the potential to place strategic workforce development centre stage.

With apprenticeship frameworks slowly being discontinued, and the new apprenticeship standards now created by expert, employer-led trailblazer groups, the author argues that it makes political sense for employers to be given the means to determine the "standards" that they require in this way, especially as they are expected to pay for the expansion of apprentice numbers. The potential to integrate professional body requirements within higher and degree apprenticeships is also discussed and welcomed. However, the paper identifies a risk that much good previous work undertaken to align higher apprenticeships with university qualifications could be lost if universities are not given the opportunity to collaborate with the employers who are setting the new standards.

Following Bravenboer is Saraswat's paper, "Higher apprenticeships and the new apprenticeship standards: perceived potential and limitations". This study draws upon an exploratory study of English FE colleges, including interviews with significant stakeholders to highlight some of the key drivers of delivery, and the challenges in the expansion of higher apprenticeship provision. The paper also presents the practical challenges encountered in developing higher apprenticeships and outlines some successful instances of higher apprenticeships, which will be useful for those involved in the design and delivery of apprenticeships at FE colleges as well as at other providers.

For the editors of this special issue, the growth of the higher and degree apprenticeship agenda has presented opportunities for their respective institutions, not least the chance to build upon their considerable experience and impressive records for delivering workforce development and facilitating work-based learning. Both institutions are familiar with behaving in a responsive way towards employer demand. For example, although apprenticeship frameworks are slowly being discontinued they are currently still in use and often map very successfully to foundation degrees. Within the health care sector there is a very real need for tailored training at levels 4 and 5. TU have been offering the health (assistant practitioner) level 5 apprenticeship framework during 2015/2016, based around its existing popular foundation degree in health and social care practice. More than 80 apprentices are currently enrolled on this apprenticeship, with a similar-sized cohort expected for the 2016/2017 academic year. Eventually this framework will be replaced with an apprenticeship standard but for the time being it is efficiently answering a very real market need. TU are helping to create

the new standard that will replace this framework whilst guiding existing customers towards generous government funding.

SU views the higher and degree apprenticeship agenda as a significant opportunity for learners to develop higher level skills through a different route. In the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire local enterprise partnership (LEP) region there is a growing demand for higher level skills and a mismatch of skilled workers. SU is working closely with the LEP to deliver higher and degree apprenticeships which address the under representation of workers who are skilled at level 4 and above. A skilled workforce contributes to the attraction of economic investment from businesses setting up and moving to an area and, as a consequence, supports the attraction and retention of students and graduates.

As part of the increasing recognition of the value of higher and degree apprenticeships the HE sector is now collaborating to develop a series of apprenticeship standards for HE itself which support engagement with the agenda and ultimately also enable HEIs to utilise their own apprenticeship levy to develop their HE workforce (many HEIs will be paying the levy post April 2017 and the only way to re-coup any of this new taxation is by employing apprentices, be they new or existing staff). There is now an HE trailblazer group consisting of a wide range of institutions and including membership and professional bodies. The group also includes a cross-section of staff roles as several different HE standards are being proposed. It seems fitting that such innovation is available to those who are also developing and delivering it.

Finally in this editorial, the authors would like to thank all of the reviewers for this issue who so kindly give up their own time to make such a difference to what the authors finally publish. Together with the rest of the reviewers for this year's volume (volume 6, issues 1-4) they have immeasurably enhanced and enriched the material the authors are able to ultimately share with the readers, and they are: Mehmet Ali Dikerdem, Adrian Anderson, Lisa Anderson, Pauline Armsby, Lydia Arnold, Francesca Beddie, Stephen Billett, Darryll Bravenboer, Sara Briscoe, Ruth Brooks, Mike Brown, Peter Bryant, Ciaran Burke, Karen Burrows, Christine Cattermole, Helen Corkill, Sandra Corlett, Carol Costley, John Craig, Norman Crowther, André Diez de Aux, John Dirks, Julie Drake, Christine Eastman, Maria Eliophotou Menon, Geoffrey Elliott, Colm Fearon, Alison Felce, Filippo Ferrari, Annette Fillery-Travis, Kevin Flint, Elaine Fryett, John Fulton, Ruth Helyer, Zac Hickman, Caroline Hood, Bill Jones, Hilary Jones, Martin Kettle, Madeleine King, Karen Knibbs, David Laughton, Eric Lavigne, Stan Lester, David Major, Angela Mazzetti, Ann Minton, Elda Nikolou-Walker, Paula Nottingham, Susan Patrick, Joy Perkins, Andy Price, Chris Procter, Ann Read, Anna Rowe, Gail Sanders, Linda Simon, Helen Smith, Sue Smith, Sue Spence, Renata Szczepanik, Jon Talbot, Ly Tran, Sarah Tudor, Gaetano Venza, Tom Vitale, Tony Wall, Tracey White, John Widdowson, Nick Wilton and Barbara Workman.

Sarah Tudor and Ruth Helyer