

Degree Apprenticeships and the challenges and opportunities for social mobility

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Degree Apprenticeships: What does research tell us already?

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Apprenticeship in Numbers

- Starts 2016/17 – 491,300 (18,100 fewer than 15/16)
- 46% aged 25+, 29% aged 19-24, 25% aged under 19
- 53% at L2, 40% at L3, 7% at L4+
- 86% in service sectors
- 54% female, 46% male
- 10% learning difficulties or disabilities
- 11.3 % 'non-white'

2016/17 starts by level, thousands (%)

- L2 259 (52%)
- L3 196 (40%)
- L4 12
- L5 23
- L6 2
- L7 0 (50 starts)

Higher Level (4-7) starts 7% vast majority on management related frameworks/standards

Concept of apprenticeship

- Apprenticeship as set of institutional arrangements for providing initial vocational education and training (IVET)
- Apprenticeship as a model of learning for occupational expertise
- Concept crosses vocational – academic divide in education systems and job boundaries and hierarchies in workplaces
- As model of learning it applies eg to chefs, electricians, musicians, doctors, barristers, teachers
- Development through engagement in changing social practices to becoming accepted as full member of professional community (of practice)

Mobility central to the concept of apprenticeship

- After completion, an apprentice became a 'journeyman' who could sell their expertise
- Autonomy – not beholden to the 'master' to access market for their services
- Belonging – to community of practice/expertise (the guild) and stake in sustaining and expanding the craft/profession as a whole
- To what extent do contemporary approaches, arrangements and practices scaffold apprentices progression to 'independence' and provide a vehicle for social mobility?

Multi-dimensional model of learning

Four dimensions of apprenticeship model

- Pedagogical dimension
- Occupational dimension
- Locational dimension
- Social dimension
- Concept of the expansive – restrictive continuum (Fuller and Unwin 2003, 2004, 2010, 2014, 2016)
- Approaches to apprenticeship can be more or less expansive

Illustrating the continuum

Expansive

Apps given discretion to make judgements and contribute to decision-making

Participation in different communities of practice is encouraged, boundary crossing facilitated

Restrictive

Discretion limited to key managers
Apps have little involvement in decision-making

Participation restricted to team, boundary crossing discouraged

Illustrating the continuum (cont.)

Expansive

Planned time off-the-job for reflection and deeper learning

Managers given time to support workforce development and facilitate workplace and professional learning

Qualifications with recognised currency for progression in Education and LM

Restrictive

All training on the job and limited to immediate role

Managers restricted to controlling workforce and meeting targets

Achievement restricted to attainment of narrowly defined standard

Learners as apprentices in expansive environments

- The apprenticeship is embedded within the broader business plan of the organization
- The organisation protects the identity of the apprentice as learner and worker throughout the apprenticeship
- The apprenticeship reifies time for disengagement from productive work and for apprentices to cross work boundaries
- The apprenticeship has a clear end point signified by a qualification that marks that a recognised level of expertise has been achieved and that the apprentice can progress to next stage of development

Expansive Apprenticeship

- Peter's works in a company (approx. 700 employees) manufacturing bathroom showers
- He completed a L3 apprenticeship in engineering, acquiring recognised occupational and vocational qualifications (and UCAS points)
- Now working with colleagues on a project to develop a new 'power shower' and sole responsibility for an associated project
- Given opportunity to pursue recognised higher level qualifications (4/5/6) supported by the employer
- At each stage guided by senior colleagues, with progress monitored and facilitated accordingly
- **Apprenticeship has enabled occupational expertise, progression, mobility**

Current model – systemic problems

- Assumption that any job role/workplace provide suitable context for apprenticeship – resulting in considerable inconsistency across sectors and levels.
- Segmentation of apprenticeship by level puts artificial break on progression exacerbated by IfA removing quals from L2/L3 standards except in special circumstances (yet HA/DA promoted as offer recognised qualifications)
- As majority of apprenticeships L2 and as common for apprentices U25 start their training below existing level of attainment, many are treading water

Cont.

- Conversion of existing employees into apprentices, no robust procedure to ensure apprenticeship goes beyond accrediting prior competence
- Funding arrangements do not incentivise/facilitate upward trajectory
- Systemic problems exacerbated by weak demand for advanced and higher level skills across the economy, and particularly in some low paid service sectors
- This acts as a break on the ability of apprenticeship to lever social mobility.

Fuller and Unwin 2017 report for the Sutton Trust

Providing high quality is a challenge

- Apprenticeships on their own cannot be expansive
- Need to be located in workplaces and off the job settings that also have expansive features
- More expansive apprenticeships stretch apprentices so that they can fully develop and demonstrate capabilities and potential
- Requires structure and substantial training and support
- More restrictive apprenticeships move apprentices to being productive workers in narrowly conceived job roles as quickly as possible – task competence prioritised

Conclusions

- DA being promoted to socially advantaged (Times report on private schools) and successful A level students
- For this group a DA is another route to a successful career, consolidating social and economic position
- Analysis raises a serious question about apprenticeships as a vehicle for social mobility and progression if recruitment to DA is inadvertently curtailed for those coming from less advantaged starting points
- The current policy focus and funding privileging of DA is deflecting attention away from developing and investing in L2 and L3 where most apprentices are found, and which represents the pool with most to benefit from provision that delivers social mobility

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- To achieve better quality, we need to build capacity within workplaces, vocational education and training organisations, and government and its agencies so they can create and promote the expansive conditions in which quality apprenticeship thrives.

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