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Economy, Infrastructure and Skills
Committee

Degree Apprenticeships

Evidence from citb Wales



CITB Wales response to EIS Committee Degree apprenticeship call for evidence

Welsh Government has always considered Construction to be one of its priority sectors, as the sector contributes 7% of GDP to the Welsh Economy and is a key part of the foundational economy. Construction is also considered to be a priority sector in all three of Wales' Regional Skills Partnerships, each of which has a detailed plan for construction skills. All three have highlighted a demand for construction higher level apprenticeships including degree apprenticeships in Wales, in their 2018-19 skills plans and in their draft three year skills plans for 2019 - 2022. The Cardiff Capital Regional Skills Partnership asked a question about degree apprenticeships in their annual employer survey in 2019. The number of responses from construction employers was small, but those who answered expressed an interest in degree apprenticeships in construction, site management, quantity surveying, electrical and civil engineering.

Construction degree apprenticeships are likely to be one of the most deliverable subjects in Wales as a number of courses have already been designed, and one was placed on the framework (albeit it was removed soon afterwards to avoid confusion over funding). Cardiff University have also expressed a desire to run an architecture degree apprenticeship learning from the RIBA model in England. Degree apprenticeships need not be designed from scratch, but instead can be created from existing degree course modules, possibly with supplementary modules / short courses. Many in the construction sector would view a degree apprenticeship as a progression pathway from a higher apprenticeship. From a three-year higher apprenticeships currently being delivered, many based on an HND, a degree apprenticeship could be developed that is a two year addition that sees an individual complete a degree and undertake requirements of certain professional institutes and bodies, adding additional industry value to the pathway.

Degree apprenticeships could provide the construction industry with the future skills it needs to modernise. CITB has published a range of recent reports on offsite and digital skills, concluding that modern technologies such as 3D printing and drones can increase productivity, transform efficiency and help attract people to the sector,

but they are not being adopted widely across the sector. Similarly, offsite construction can increase productivity, reduce timescales, reduce carbon emissions and lower build costs compared with traditional construction but the sector currently lacks capability and capacity for offsite construction within its workforce. Without widespread adoption of these 'future skills', construction in Wales risks being marginalised and losing a generation of new talent to other sectors or locations in England.

It is predicted that professional and managerial roles in the construction sector will grow by 15% between 2018 and 2028, driven by the need for greater collaboration between design assembly teams to support offsite. The workforce will need a broader skills base to support more varied work on and off site including smarter data management, knowledge of end-to-end processes and 'logisticians' increasingly needed to work with designers and assembly teams to map complex supply chain projects. Higher level skills, built on practical knowledge will be critical for the successful adoption of digital technologies across large businesses and their supply-chains.

In addition to employer demand and deliverability in the HE and FE sectors, further pressure is added due to comparability with England. In England, degree apprenticeships were launched in 2015/16, are mostly (71%) at level 6, have a good gender balance (43% women) and are mostly (62%) taken by those over 25 years of age. In 2018/2019, 13,587 learners started degree apprenticeships in England. There are 14 construction degree apprenticeships approved for delivery, with the majority only being approved in 2018 or 2019. They include architect, chartered surveyor, civil engineer, quantity surveyor and many other careers. They vary between 36 and 66 months, attract between £18,000 and £27,000 funding and are funded from the apprenticeship levy.

In Wales it would enable the foundational economy to have a good news story of career progression, with jobs close to home for individuals who choose to leave school age 18, after completing A Levels (possibly including the new Built Environment qualification to be launched in Wales in 2022), complete a three year higher apprenticeship and, if they are right for the employer and are able to proceed, at age 21 would be able to embark on a two year degree apprenticeship that raises their future employability and earning potential, but complete a degree in a relevant vocational subject that will stand them in good stead for career progression.

Despite all of this, construction was not selected as one of the pilot subjects for degree apprenticeships to be implemented in 2019 to 2022. On 11 July 2019, CITB Wales met the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams to discuss various issues, including degree apprenticeships. The Minister was clear that there would be no additional subjects added during the pilot period, and if any further degree apprenticeships proceed after pilot evaluation, she made it clear that they would be decided based on employers demand and deliverability. We made our case that both employer demand and deliverability for construction degree apprenticeships are high and the Minister agreed to take this into account.

We also have concerns around the perceived trade-off between level 2 / 3 apprenticeships and higher / degree apprenticeships. A number of Welsh

Government officials we have met, consider degree apprenticeships as competition for existing apprenticeship funding. We have been asked repeatedly, 'are you sure you want to introduce degree apprenticeships costing £27,000 when that would replace 10 level 2 apprenticeships'? We believe degree apprenticeships are significantly different from lower level apprenticeships in terms of their purpose, scope and audience and as such should be funded separately, forming part of Higher Education funding.

As outlined above, an alternative approach would be for the development of a 'step-up' progression model rather than a starting point of £27,000 for degree apprenticeships, with clear, transferable and portable progression options through the levels whether a learner is coming up through academia or vocational routes. Of course, this would require more detailed consideration and consultation.