THE HE PROGRESSION OF ADVANCED APPRENTICES: TRENDS, TRAJECTORIES AND TACTICS

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CONTEXT

- Small percentage of advanced apprentices progress onto higher level study (Chappell. 2011. 4%; HEFCE, 2009. 6%)
- Comparisons with progression rates for those taking other level 3 quals: A levels and BTECs.
- Potentially greater interest from amongst learners for higher-level training (NAS, 2010. 50%)
- Advanced apprenticeship forms a recognised route into higher-level training: professional or occupational pathway (UCAS. 2016)
- Push for ‘greater parity in the progression prospects of those taking vocational qualifications’ (HEFCE, OFFA, Government)
- Those who have taken the occupational route into HE very capable of flourishing and benefiting from HE (BIS. 2015)
- Those taking advanced apprenticeships more likely to come from WP backgrounds (HEFCE. 2009, BIS. 2015).
The Research Project

- Commissioned by REACH: the Leicester and Leicestershire NNCO

- Aims:
  - Insight into numbers pursuing advanced apprenticeships and progressing onto higher-level study
  - Explanations and interpretations
  - Recommendations for supporting progression

- Approach and methods:
  - Quantitative trends - regional and local (published reports, data releases, institutional stats)
  - Qualitative analysis - practitioners (teachers, FE and HE tutors, assessors, managers, employer liaison officers, LA officials) and learners (advanced apprentices and those who gone on to HE); semi-structured interviews and focus groups.
  - Case study approach: three colleges offering AA training and HE provision.
A Wealth of Information Collected
INITIAL FINDINGS: REGIONAL PROGRESSION FIGURES

- East Midlands: 8% in 2010/11 (BIS, 2015). Comparable to other regions (highest regional figure was 10%)

- Over the period 2006/7-2010/11, proportion of advanced apprentices progressing to HE fell from 11 to 8%. Consistent with most regions.

- Comparing with an increase in overall HE participation rates during the same period: from 42% to 46% (HRIPR) (BIS, 2015. Participation Rates in HE).
INITIAL FINDINGS: LOCAL TRENDS

- No readily available progression figures at city and county level

- However, from Government released apprenticeship tables it is possible to identify the numbers achieving their advanced apprenticeships over recent years (and the potential pool of HE applicants).

- Analysis of this data reveals significant growth in numbers achieving an AA. Indeed, growth exceeds increase in those gaining intermediate apprenticeships. Local trends consistent with national ones.
## Apprenticeship Framework Achievements: Leicester and Leicestershire, 2005/06 to 2013/14

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,790</td>
<td>1,890</td>
<td>3,180</td>
<td>2,810</td>
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<td>125%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>1,020</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>1,580</td>
<td>1,630</td>
<td>226%</td>
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<td>Higher</td>
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<td>20</td>
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Source: GOV.UK. 2016b. FE Data Library: Apprenticeships
INITIAL FINDINGS: EVIDENCE FROM LOCAL PRACTITIONERS

- College 1: ‘We don’t have many apprentices that progress...this reflects modest levels of demand. You have to have demand to make provision of courses sustainable’.

- College 2: Trains some 2,500 apprentices but these are mainly at level 2 and 3. Only a ‘very small number’ progress to level 4.

- Assessment:
  - Low progression rates to HE of advanced apprentices is an ‘issue’; ‘unfortunately, few progress at the moment’
  - I don’t think it is a matter of learners not wanting to progress. They do want to...there is an interest’.
INITIAL FINDINGS: THE EXCEPTION

- College 3: programme sponsored by a large construction company
- Recent progression rates on this programme:
  - 88% of cohort who completed AA in 2012/13 started HE level study in 2013/14
  - Comparable figures for 2013/14 and 2014/15 were 78% and 93% respectively
  - Actual numbers comprising each cohort: 24, 27, 30.
- Compares with overall sector figure for 2010/11 of 5% (BIS. 2015).
- Provides valuable case study (within the larger study) in terms of insights into practices facilitating progression:
  - Drawing on views of practitioners and learners (AA and HE level) involved
  - Representing purposive sample.
QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: BASED ON THE ‘LEARNER JOURNEY’

- Findings structured around the ‘learner journey’ - onto and through the advanced apprenticeship and into HE

- Four phases discerned in the learner journey:
  - Route taken prior to applying for advanced apprenticeship (AA)
  - Transition onto AA programme (first contact-first day)
  - Once on the advanced apprenticeship
  - Transition to HE level study

- Objectives:
  - Insights into the experience
  - Identification of existing practices that support transition
  - Recommendations based on existing practices, and practitioner and learner discussions around further improvements.
INITIAL PHASE OF THE JOURNEY

- **Learners: (AA and those who now in HE):**
  - Typically, embarked on A levels or BTECs, some completed, at least one gained a university place
  - Considered most of their peers had taken the same route, although reference to a few starting after completing GCSEs

- **Practitioners (supporting the same learners):**
  - ‘Mixed bag: some straight out of school (5-6), others have done A levels, few started university, some been in work’

- **Practitioners (other case study institutions):**
  - ‘Learners more likely to progress if they have good GCSEs’

- **Research project investigating AS and A level drop-out:**
  - ‘They realise A levels are not the right choice and return to their original idea of an apprenticeship’.

- **Wider picture: 52% of 2006-07 AA cohort took intermediate app (BIS. 2015).**
INITIAL ROUTE TAKEN: ASSESSMENT

- **Learners:**
  - General view: ‘schools were advising but not on apprenticeships’; ‘push you to uni...sixth form... A levels’
  - Common perceptions: ‘apprenticeship is about hairdressing or working in a garage’

- **Practitioners:**
  - ‘At schools, it is academic...the route to go’. Apprenticeship is the poor relation in terms of progression.
  - ‘There is a huge push to do A levels no matter what’.

- **The literature:**
  - ‘Pupils and parents lack good quality information about apprenticeships and this is leading to misconceptions’
  - ‘For an AA, candidates typically need 4 good quality GCSEs inc. English and Maths’ (Burke. 2016).
TRANSITION ONTO THE ADVANCED APPRENTICESHIP

- **Learners:**
  - ‘When we want into the job interview it was like a four year learning plan’
  - ‘It is presented as a career really’

- **Practitioners (supporting these learners):**
  - ‘We talk about what they could have in front of them for the next four years’
  - ‘On recruitment days [we] have HND students there to promote it’
  - ‘Speak to a lot of parents - just as excited to see where their child could go’.

- **How typical is this route (onto HND in college setting)?**
  - Most of tracked cohort (2006/7-10/11) progress onto NHDs, HNCs and Cert and Dips in HE, followed by first degree (BIS. 2015)
  - 52% of AA in 2010/11 ‘progressed to study HE in an FE college’ (BIS. 2015).
ON THE ADVANCED APPRENTICESHIP

Learners:
- CPD unit on programme: ‘learning about the progression route’
- Informed of ‘jobs associated with level 4 and 5’
- Role models on site: ‘now I [have] worked with people as well, I am more confident where I will end up once I have done the HND’

Practitioners (supporting these learners):
- ‘Because they are working in the environment, they see the goal. They see an assistant engineer - that seems to help focus them.’

Practitioners (other case study institutions):
- Initiative being explored: start IAG at the outset - exploring and identifying career goals, with follow-up meetings to monitor progress with these.

The literature:
- Learners would ‘like to have known more about opportunities for progression earlier’ (Dismore. 2012).
**TRANSITION TO HE**

- **Learners:**
  - Working with those who completed the course (who offer guidance and are role models): ‘they encourage you’, ‘know people in high positions who have got this HND’
  - Awareness of the benefits of taking a route that combines ‘employment and learning’: ‘I could have done a degree but back to square one again’
  - Gain membership of professional body as part of the programme and appreciation of what this offers

- **Practitioners (supporting these learners):**
  - Retention Officer: key contact who can refer students to specialist support, who ‘knows all [the] learners, their interests and personalities’.

- **Practitioners (other case study institutions)**
  - Recruitment of ‘Apprenticeship Ambassadors’ inc. those who have ‘gone through hardship and done well’ and now on HE level programmes.
RECOMMENDATIONS: SCHOOL Y9-11

- Early awareness raising IAG on apprenticeship option and occupational route into further and higher education
- Guidance/clarification on the rise in the participation age to 18.
  - This is concerned with extending the period during which a young person should be in some form of training and education, including the option of taking an apprenticeship
- Presentation of the apprenticeship option as a training pathway that can lead to HE and the acquisition of higher-level skills.
  - Accompanying this, the provision of IAG on the employment opportunities associated with a higher-level qualification
- Recognition of importance of GCSEs in accessing AAs
- The establishment of an apprenticeship club
- The deployment of role models/learners who have taken the occupational route and advanced to higher-level skills training and higher-level employment (ideally, from the same school/college).
RECOMMENDATIONS: Y12-13

- Recognition of App’ship Week and use of NAS’s online resources
- Support for learners interested in applying for an AA
- Recognition that the process of gaining an apprenticeship is comparable - time and effort - to gaining an university place, and warrants similar levels of support (in researching vacancies, understanding offers, preparing applications, sitting interviews)
- The hosting of an Apprenticeship Day, with aim of raising awareness of AA and professional/occupational route into higher-level training
- Engagement of alumni who have taken the work-based route onto an AA and into higher-level study
- Engagement of employers who can provide information and insights into careers and training opportunities associated with particular industries and sectors
- Need to address parental concerns about routes an AA can offer into higher-level training and employment.
RECOMMENDATIONS: TRAINING PROVIDERS

▪ Advanced apprenticeship applicants
  o Selection to consider those capable of progressing - academic achievement, motivation, interest in higher-level training
  o Presentation of the AA as, potentially, first part of a training programme leading to higher-level study
  o Collection of case studies of those who have progressed onto higher-level study (inc. route taken, rationale for progression... in their words).

▪ Advanced apprentices
  o Inclusion of a career-planning module (inc. consideration of available local pathways into higher-level study and alignment of qualifications with sector-specific job roles and employment opportunities
  o Peer support from learners at next (HE) level of study
  o Regular progress meetings with learners (Commencing with exploration of career aims, and est. of an action plan. Subsequent meetings assessing progress).
REFLECTIONS

- Sector demand for higher level skills varies:
  - Level 3 for ‘dental nurse’, ‘fully competent technician’ (motor vehicle)

- Costs of training:
  - ‘In the majority of Leicester and Leicestershire we are talking about small to medium sized enterprises [who may not] have the money to invest in training’

- Importance of employer support and readiness to work with training providers:
  - Characteristic of case study programme (partnership approach).
  - Key arguments: ageing workforce, competitive advantage, employee loyalty.

- Data issues
  - Lack of progression data (HESA feedback), do collect data on entry qualifications but this does not include details on those with apprenticeships.
  - HE entry age of many on this route: 19 plus, thus missed from progression figures.
OVER TO YOU

- Does demand/interest in HE amongst advanced apprentices exceed current rates of progression?
- Do the recommendations make sense/resonate, and are they ‘implementable’:
  - What outreach interventions work best in raising HE awareness and aspirations amongst those on the ‘professional pathways’?
  - How can schools be supported in promoting ‘alternative’ (and less well known) routes through FE and into HE?
- What practices are effective in engaging with employers, and what arguments are likely to be most influential in raising employer interest in higher level skills training?
- How should we deal with the data issue: the focus on participation by 18/19 is likely to understate true rates of progression amongst those on ‘alternative pathways’ (19.3% of 2006-07 tracked cohort progressed into HE over the following 7 years. BIS. 2015)?
THANK YOU

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