
DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP: VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

Impact, Policy and Good Practice Guide 2024

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FOREWORD

'Degree Apprenticeships' are my two favourite words in the English language. Whether you want to be a solicitor, space engineer or doctor, we have introduced a new route to climb the ladder of opportunity to a successful and fulfilling career, and all without student finance to repay.

As the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, I have made it my mission to support you to grow these life-changing programmes. They bring together the best of our cutting-edge Higher Education sector and world-leading employers. Since degree-level apprenticeships were introduced in 2014, we have seen year-on-year growth of these sought-after qualifications, with over 222,000 starts in total.

This is an achievement you should rightly feel proud of. But the challenge is now to open up these life-changing opportunities to more people, including those who

wouldn't normally be able to access higher education. We need to maximise the potential of Degree Apprenticeships to transform lives - as well as industry, and ultimately the economy. That is why we are investing £40m to support degree apprenticeship providers to grow and improve access to their programmes, to spread these opportunities to new people and places; alongside our latest £60m investment which includes help for SMEs to take on younger apprentices, by meeting their full training costs.

Our reforms to apprenticeships – which have driven quality up and increased their relevance for employers – have been underpinned by the Apprenticeship Levy. This report identifies that most employers would discontinue degree apprenticeships without the levy, and that almost all consider it to be vital to their financial sustainability.

This report also re-affirms the positive results of Degree Apprenticeship programmes and describes how we can make them even better. It complements the Department for Education's wider work¹ showing that overall, satisfaction with apprenticeships remains high. This comes as no surprise, given the level of collaboration between universities, colleges and industry highlighted here.

I look forward to working with its authors - and everyone involved in delivering Degree Apprenticeships - so we can build on the successes we have seen to date.



The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP

Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships
and Higher Education

¹Apprenticeship evaluation 2021: learner and employer surveys - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Degree apprenticeships have become a shining example of how UK higher education can diversify and innovate, responding to both employer and learner demand. Almost ten years on from the roll-out of the first degree apprenticeships, this report provides a timely and valuable opportunity to better understand their impact, and how they can continue to adapt to meet the skills needs of the future.

Through gathering perspectives from employers, teachers and trainers and degree apprentices themselves, this report gets under the bonnet of these programmes. This provides, for the first time, a detailed understanding of what motivates individuals and businesses to take part in degree apprenticeships and the impact they have on both those undertaking them and those providing them. It also provides evidence of what is needed to ensure these programmes remain high quality and provide opportunities to learners from all backgrounds.

As recent MillionPlus publications have shown, degree apprenticeships have an important role to play in tackling the skills shortages of the country. The evidence that this report provides is therefore critical to growing our understanding. In order for degree apprenticeships to reach their full potential, policymakers should take heed of the insights found in these pages.

Rachel Hewitt
CEO of MillionPlus

QAA's Collaborative Enhancement Projects bring together expert voices from across the higher and further education sectors in England to look at relevant topics and to enhance the quality of the participant institutions' student learning experience. The outputs from these projects aim to benefit the wider QAA membership and higher education sector in general. So a project looking at degree apprenticeships, in an environment where skills acquisition and graduate employment are the primary policy objectives of government, is particularly welcome.

Since 2015, degree apprenticeships have fostered collaboration between higher education providers and employers, responding effectively to employer demand. The growth of this provision has been remarkable, providing a solution to skills shortages, fostering social mobility, and offering apprentices the unique opportunity to earn while they learn. But the delivery of degree apprenticeships is not without challenges. Financial constraints and regulatory burdens pose significant hurdles.

This report brings together a range of data on degree apprenticeships and adds to the research base on this important aspect of skills provision. As such, it enriches the evidence base around degree apprenticeships and is a very welcome addition to QAA's work in this area. I am grateful to the partners in this Collaborative Enhancement Project for producing such a thoughtful contribution to this important conversation.

Vicki Stott
CEO of QAA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Degree Apprenticeships have demonstrably bolstered the economy, fuelled social mobility, and tackled skills shortages². Offering a viable alternative to traditional university education, they equip individuals with the skills and experience necessary to thrive in the modern workforce. This report delves into the impact and lessons learned from Degree Apprenticeships almost a decade after their launch.

While degree apprenticeships continue to gain traction across the UK, their potential to bridge the skills gap and propel economic growth has drawn increasing attention. However, understanding the true impact of degree apprenticeships, identifying underlying challenges, and deciphering the motivations of key stakeholders is absolutely crucial for enabling and optimising the skills revolution. This was the driving force behind our research team's comprehensive national survey, the first of its kind to delve into these critical aspects.

Our research team comprised distinguished academics from 13 diverse institutions spanning public and private universities, both Russell Group and Post-92, alongside research and policy organisations. Recognising their crucial role, we focused on the three frontline groups: employers who offer degree apprenticeships, learners who embark on this enriching journey, and the training providers who bridge the gap between education and industry.

We received an excellent response to our survey including **1,073 degree apprentices** from diverse backgrounds, **148 employers** ranging from niche SMEs to multinational corporates, and **248 teachers and trainers** delivering degree apprenticeships. We also conducted several focus group discussions to tease out qualitative nuances of key themes emerging from survey results. Employing rigorous statistical and analytical techniques, we were able to glean insightful findings with far-reaching, evidence-based implications for both policymakers and those involved in the delivery of degree apprenticeships. This includes:

- True impact of degree apprenticeships on individuals and businesses
- Motivations driving employers, apprentices, and training providers

- Challenges and areas of improvement including access, delivery, and quality barriers

Key findings are as follows:

Impact of the Levy

Employers value the apprenticeship levy as a critical driver for investing in skills and training.

- The apprenticeship levy is considered crucial for programme sustainability (99% agree). Without it, most employers (68%) would discontinue degree apprenticeships.

Productivity and Business Growth

Employers highlight the impact of degree apprenticeships on economic stability, social mobility and workforce resilience and diversification.

- **Performance Enhancement:** Nearly all employers (99%) state that degree apprenticeships positively influence their organisation's performance.
- **Strategic Alignment:** An overwhelming majority (95%) believe that degree apprenticeships contribute to achieving their strategic goals, indicating alignment with the overall organisational direction.
- **Future Growth:** An overwhelming 93% of employers state that degree apprenticeships play a pivotal role in fostering the future growth of their organisations.
- **Talent Attraction:** A substantial majority (89%) view degree apprenticeships as an effective means to attract new talent, stating that these programmes tap into a pool of motivated candidates eager to learn and contribute.
- **Employee Engagement:** Nearly all employers (92%) observe that degree apprenticeships lead to more engaged employees.
- **Staff Retention:** A significant majority (89%) credit degree apprenticeships with improving staff retention.
- **Diversity:** Encouragingly, 84% of respondents recognise that degree apprenticeships contribute to diversifying their workforce.

²Nawaz, R., Edifor, E. E., Holland, S. R., Cao, Q. & Liu, L. S. The impact of Degree Apprenticeships: analysis, insights and policy recommendations. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy* (2022) doi:10.1108/TG-07-2022-0105

Industry-academia Collaboration

Employers and training providers are increasingly working together to maximise the impact of degree apprenticeships.

- A significant majority (77%) of employers and apprentices (66%) report that their degree apprenticeship assessments are contextualised for their work environments.
- 44% of employers have someone in their organisation contributing to the teaching sessions of the apprentices, e.g., as guest lecturers in university. This is highly encouraging as it is over and above the statutory/regulatory requirements.
- While a majority of employers report that their organisational priorities are considered by their training providers when planning teaching and learning, larger employers seem to have more influence on training providers, possibly at the expense of smaller employers.

Quality of Delivery

- 82% of apprentices report that it is facilitating their career progression.
- Overall satisfaction with teaching quality is high (80%).
- Over two-thirds of apprentices believe that their course has been helpful in giving them the knowledge, skills, and behaviours they need to excel at their work. Nearly 80% of apprentices state that they are able to bring their academic knowledge and skills into their workplace.
- Additional academic support for apprentices is deemed important by almost all (97%) training providers, and 55% of providers offer dedicated additional academic support for apprentices which is over and above the academic support offered to their non-apprenticeship learners.
- At least 55% of the academic respondents use different teaching methods for their degree apprentices and never co-teach degree apprentices alongside non-apprentices (i.e., standard undergraduate/postgraduate students).
- Bespoke course systems for apprenticeships are prevalent (95%), but only 44% of training providers offer dedicated training for line managers to ensure they fully understand the academic requirements of degree apprenticeship programmes.
- Sharing good practices across programmes is actively encouraged by 84% of training providers, but external collaboration remains limited (43%).

Areas of Improvement

- Only 5% of apprentices received support for degree apprenticeship applications from schools and colleges; more needs to be done to create awareness of the degree apprenticeship route and provide support to young people to access them.

- Work-life balance management varies, with 60% of apprentices feeling they manage it well and 69% finding employer support helpful.
- Off-the-job needs are not always fully met: 30% of apprentices perceive insufficient off-the-job time and 30% feel employers lack understanding of these requirements.
- Training providers identified several key areas for improvement, including a clearer understanding of the course requirements, flexible learning models to accommodate diverse needs, increased programme size to improve cost-effectiveness, and closer alignment of curriculum with industry demands.
- More needs to be done to integrate degree apprentices within the university environment – Only 19% of apprentices feel highly integrated within the student body of their training provider with over 22% not feeling integrated at all.
- More needs to be done to enhance the perception of degree apprenticeships; nearly half, 47%, of apprentices do not think that degree apprenticeships are held in the same esteem as non-apprenticeship courses and 22% do not agree that their courses are valued within their workplace; 65% of those who strongly disagree are enrolled on the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship. Recognising the importance of student motivation, institutions must provide additional care and support to enhance motivation, especially when degree apprenticeships serve as the sole pathway to certain professions (e.g., Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship).

Other Success Factors

- The two pivotal success factors identified by apprentices are support from employers and support from training providers.
- Work-based academic tutors are the keystone of successful degree apprenticeship delivery. Nearly all training providers (99%) believe it is important for lecturers and work-based academic tutors to work as an integrated team.
- A significant majority (92%) of training providers undertake peer-observations for teaching staff in their institution and have found peer-observations useful. This indicates that degree apprenticeships have sharpened the focus on the quality of teaching in universities.
- 96% of training providers have dedicated apprenticeship departments, while 94% have teams dedicated to supporting teaching practice and pedagogy. However, only 53% have training for delivering degree apprenticeships as a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunity within their institutions.

PROJECT TEAM

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Acknowledgement

The project team expresses its heartfelt thanks to all the students, staff, and employers who provided feedback in the consultations and participated in the subsequent focus group discussions. To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, individual names will not be mentioned in this report. However, the project team remains deeply indebted to all these participants for their invaluable contribution to the project's success.

Funders

This research project was funded by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education via the Collaborative Enhancement Project scheme.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 2015, Degree Apprenticeship has experienced robust and sustained growth³. This expansion is characterised by increases in learner participation, employer partnerships, and training provider engagement⁴. Notably, this growth has been fuelled by ambitious targets set by both policymakers and training providers, recognising the significant contribution of Degree Apprenticeships to both social mobility and economic productivity⁵. Given the demonstrably positive impacts of Degree Apprenticeships in these critical areas, their continued upward trajectory is anticipated⁶.

The rapid expansion of Degree Apprenticeships, coupled with their anticipated sustained growth, prompted an extensive study aimed at distilling crucial lessons and best practices. This report is a seminal contribution to the field of Degree Apprenticeships, encompassing a diverse array of key stakeholders: learners (both undergraduates and postgraduates), employers (ranging from private businesses to public organisations, micro-SMEs, and multinational corporations), and training providers (including institutions from the Russell Group and Post-92 universities, as well as tutors and professional services). As the culmination of this research, the report weaves together a rich tapestry of insights, benefiting all participants within the Degree Apprenticeship ecosystem.

Moving beyond a mere “by-product”, this report translates meticulous research into actionable knowledge. Policymakers shaping Degree Apprenticeship landscapes, training providers nurturing future talent, and employers seeking skilled workforces alike will find invaluable guidance within its pages. Even learners embarking on their Degree Apprenticeship journeys will discover practical support and optimised pathways for success.

Every data point, every distilled lesson, serves as a catalyst for further optimising Degree Apprenticeship implementation and amplifying their potential impact. This report, therefore, stands as an invitation to engage, explore, and propel Degree Apprenticeships towards an even brighter future.

The appendix of this report comprises two key sections: the research methodology and the survey participant profiles. In brief, surveys were used to collect responses from various stakeholders: learners (1073 respondents), training providers (248 respondents), and employers (128 respondents). These survey findings informed the design of semi-structured interviews conducted with all participants. Additionally, the participant profile section offers valuable demographic insights into these distinct groups.



³<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/new-data-shows-profile-of-degree-apprentices/>

⁴<https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/07/14/standards-starts-and-achievements-quality-and-growth-in-the-he-apprenticeship-market/#:~:text=Growth%20is%20being%20driven%20by,constable%2C%20nursing%20and%20social%20work>

⁵Nawaz, R., Edifor, E. E., Holland, S. R., Cao, Q. & Liu, L. S. The impact of Degree Apprenticeships: analysis, insights and policy recommendations. Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy (2022) doi:10.1108/TG-07-2022-0105.

⁶<https://feweek.co.uk/minister-to-demand-universities-set-ambitious-degree-apprenticeship-targets/> (2021)

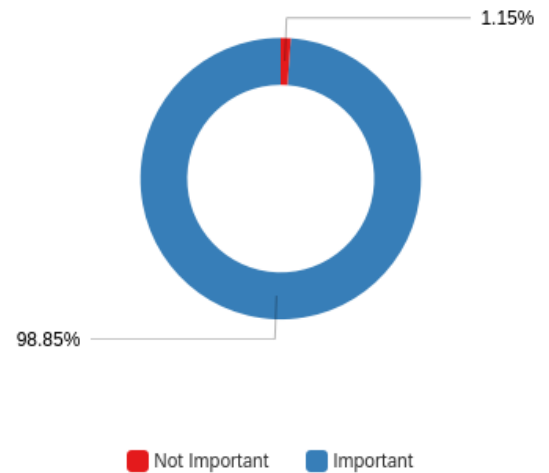
RESULTS

In this chapter, the results from all three key frontline participants are grouped under thematic headings and analysed.

Policy

Question to employers: How important is it that Degree Apprenticeship programmes/courses are funded by the Apprenticeship Levy?

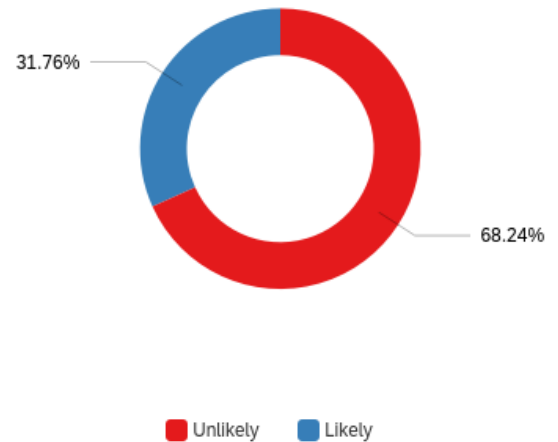
Employer respondents regard the apprenticeship levy as a crucial catalyst for the administration of Degree Apprenticeships. An **overwhelming majority (99%) across various organisational sizes state that funding Degree Apprenticeship programmes through the apprenticeship levy is of utmost importance.**



Question to employers: If the Levy no longer existed, how likely would you be to continue with your involvement with Degree Apprenticeships?

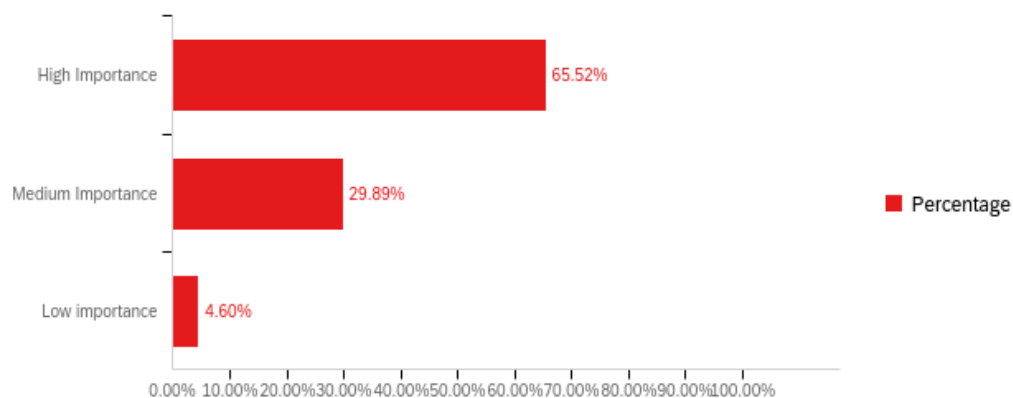
Analysis & Insight:

Two-thirds (68%) of employers indicate that they would discontinue their participation in Degree Apprenticeships if the apprenticeship levy were not available. This trend is particularly pronounced among employers with 100 or fewer employees.



Organisational Performance and Impact

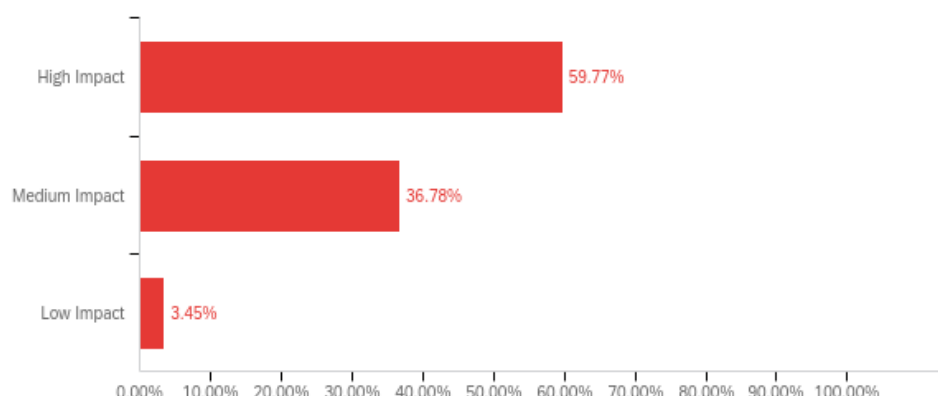
Question to employers: How important are Degree Apprenticeship programmes/courses in supporting sustained improvements in your organisational performance?



Analysis & Insight:

An **overwhelming majority of employers, exceeding 95%, state that Degree Apprenticeships contribute significantly to enhancing organisational performance.** Furthermore, approximately 66% of these employers recognise Degree Apprenticeships as a pivotal factor in achieving organisational success.

Question to employers: To what extent have Degree Apprenticeship learners had a positive impact within the organisation?



Analysis & Insight:

The **overwhelming consensus among employers, with a remarkable 97%, is that Degree Apprenticeships enhance organisational performance and yield positive outcomes.** Of this group, 37% attribute a medium impact, while an impressive 60% recognise a high impact. As anticipated, this impact is gradual and cumulative, with confidence emerging as a critical catalyst. One employer respondent aptly stated,

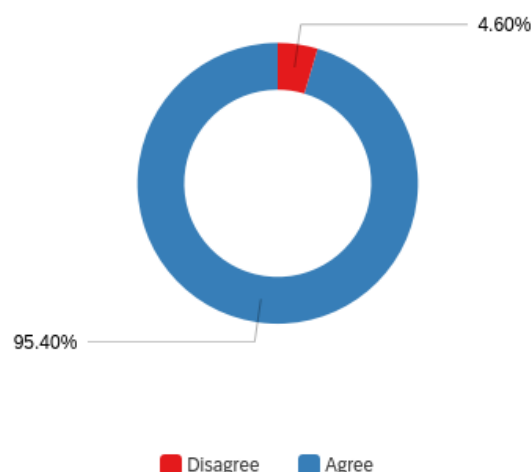
'...the level of impact was seen in the later stages of the apprenticeship and is a lot greater than it was in the early stages... the primary driver behind that is the confidence of our apprentice to apply the skills and knowledge that they've gained'.

Productivity and Growth

Question to employers: To what extent would you agree that Degree Apprenticeships are helping to meet the strategic goals of your organisation?

Analysis & Insight:

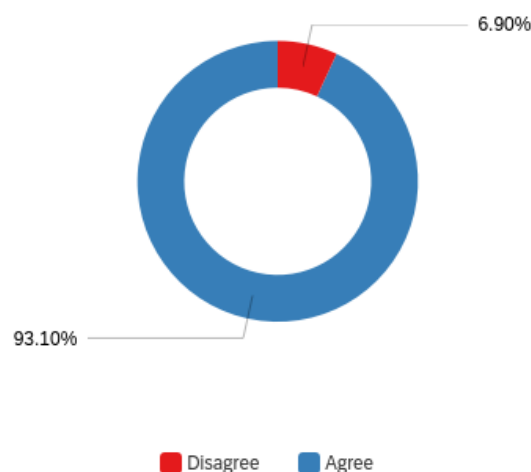
An **overwhelming majority of employer respondents (from both small and large organisations), 95%, state that Degree Apprenticeships significantly contribute to achieving their strategic objectives.** Among those who strongly agree (21%), a notable proportion—just over a fifth (21%)—represent organisations with 100 or fewer employees, while a substantial 68% belong to companies with 1000 or more employees.



Question to employers: To what extent would you agree that Degree Apprenticeships are supporting the future growth of your organisation?

Analysis & Insight:

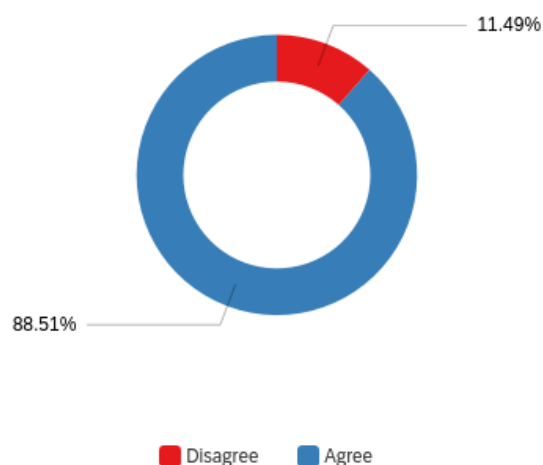
An impressive **93% of employer respondents affirm that Degree Apprenticeships play a pivotal role in fostering the future growth of their organisations.** Among the subset of 30% who strongly agree, a substantial 65% represent companies with 1000 or more employees, while an encouraging 23% belong to organisations with 100 or fewer employees.



Question to employers: To what extent would you agree that Degree Apprenticeships are bringing in new talent to your organisation?

Analysis & Insight:

An overwhelming majority, **89%**, of employers state that **Degree Apprenticeships play a pivotal role in attracting fresh talent to their organisations**. Among the subset of 21% who strongly agree, a significant 56% represent companies with 1000 or more employees, while an encouraging 22% belong to organisations with 100 or fewer employees. **Organisations of all sizes (from micro-SMEs to large multinationals) are relying on Degree Apprenticeships to strengthen their talent pipeline.**

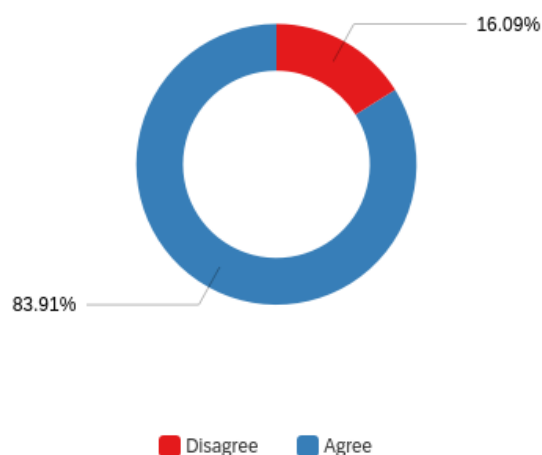


Diversifying Workforce

Question to employers: To what extent would you agree that Degree Apprenticeships are diversifying your workforce?

Analysis & Insight:

A significant majority (84%) of employers reported that **Degree Apprenticeships contribute to workforce diversification**. Encouragingly, over 20% of these respondents represent smaller organisations with 100 or fewer employees. Qualitative data further revealed that employers view Degree Apprenticeships as valuable tools for talent retention and advancement, particularly for individuals from diverse backgrounds. Examples like career progression from Healthcare Support to Nursing Associate were cited. These findings underscore the important role Degree Apprenticeships play in fostering a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

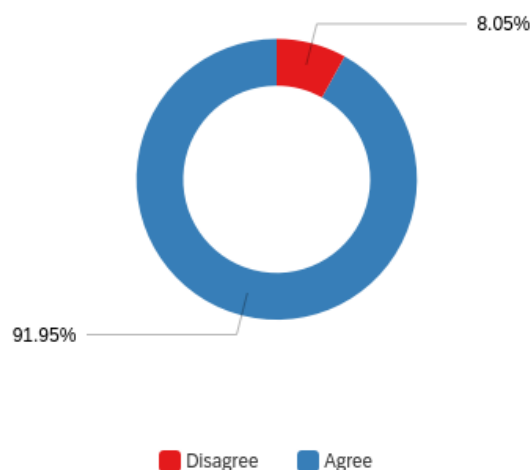


Strengthening Staff Engagement and Retention

Question to employers: To what extent would you agree that Degree Apprenticeships are strengthening your employee engagement?

Analysis & Insight:

An overwhelming **92%** of employer respondents agree that **Degree Apprenticeships are strengthening the engagement of their employees**.



Apprentices highly valued the supportive role of training providers, particularly degree tutors, programme leads, and lecturers. They appreciated the understanding and flexibility shown by instructors who recognised the competing demands on apprentices' time. One quote exemplifies this sentiment:

'having lecturers and module leads who understand that sometimes you're just not going to be able to put their assignment on the top of your priority list and being able to have that conversation with them, and then being able to do whatever they can to make that work.'

Establishing **clear expectations and adaptable structures was another key factor enabling learner success**, according to apprentice feedback. Clearly defined attendance policies, lecture schedules, and assessment methodologies minimised confusion and fostered learner engagement. Recognising the unique work-study balance of apprentices, staff ensured schedules accommodated leave requests and team commitments. One participant emphasised this, stating:

'Everything needs to be planned a lot further ahead than with our full-time students because they need to book their leave and they need to plan around the competing priorities of their team and clinical practice.'

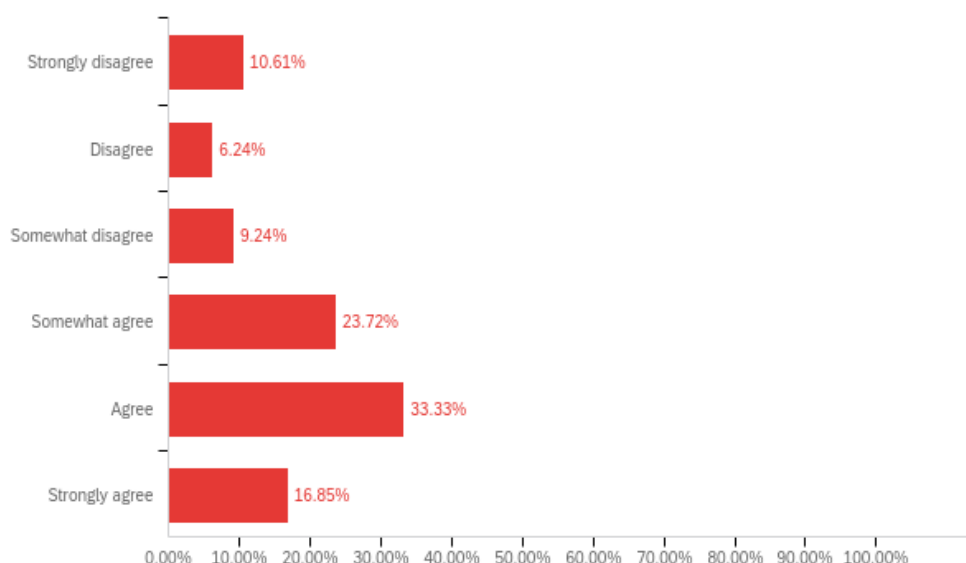
Participants highlighted **several valuable resources available to apprentices**: the availability of online resources was frequently mentioned, including access to online books and journals through systems such as Perlego, the use of Virtual Learning environments (VLEs) to get course information, and digital e-portfolio systems for apprentices to log evidence of their work and record off-the-job hours. These resources have made it easier for learners and programme leads to track progress.

The implementation of structures within the programme also aided in its smooth running:

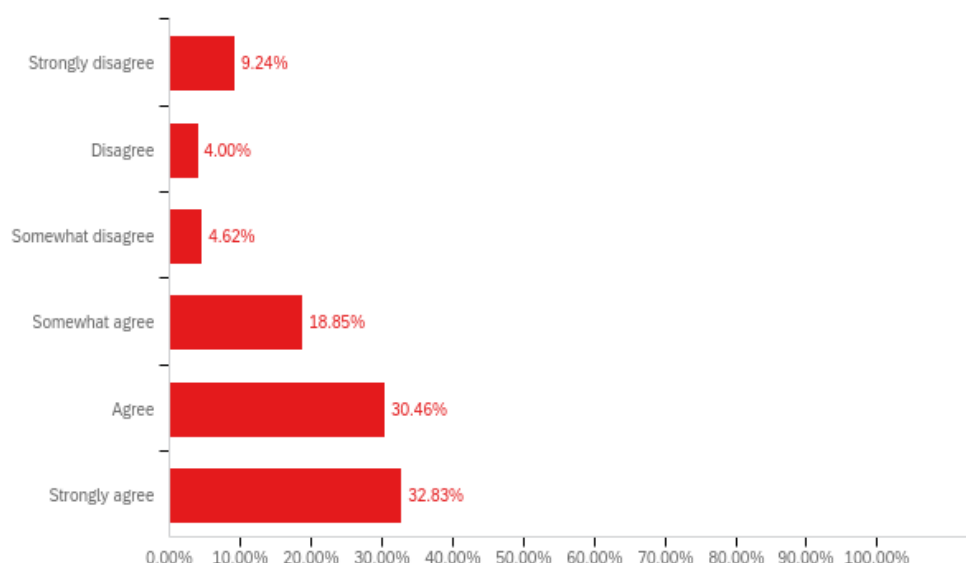
'we've got a template for lecturers to use to really link the KSBs across to the modular learning outcomes, and that's brought the apprenticeship side to life a little bit more. One of the other things that we've done then is put in bespoke portfolio days in the middle of each module and what they do then, again, is bringing to life what they've learned.'

Overall Satisfaction with Programme/Course

Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that your Degree Apprenticeship programme/course is meeting your expectations so far?



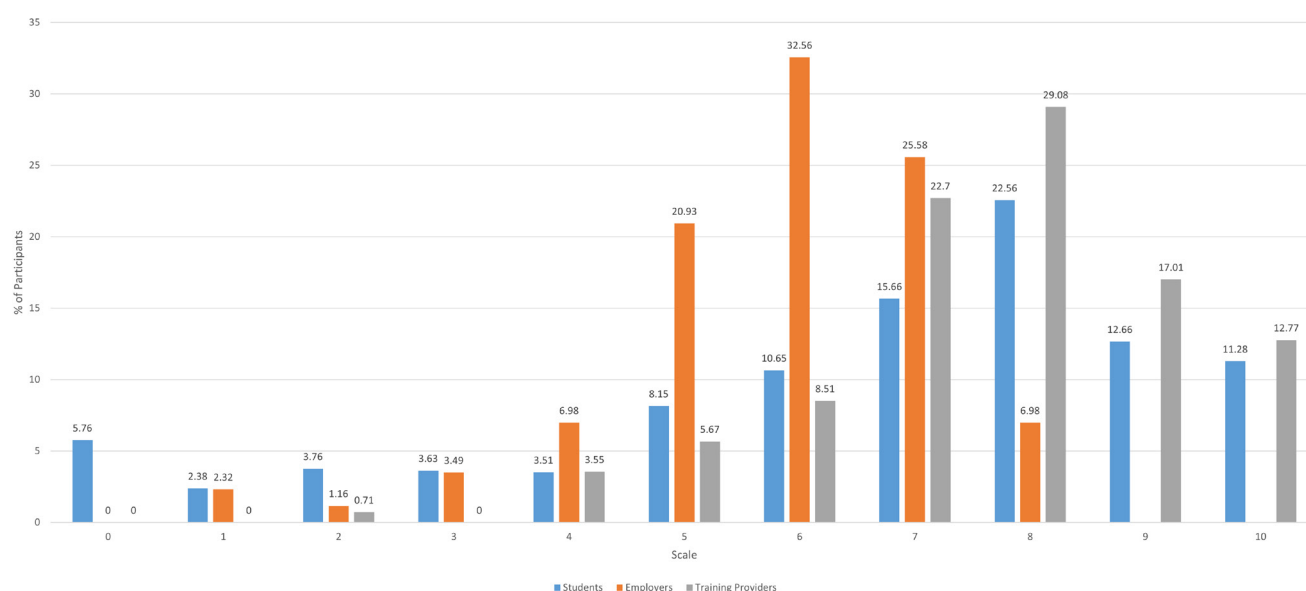
Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that your Degree Apprenticeship is helping you to progress your career?



Analysis & Insight:

The majority (74%) of learners find that their Degree Apprenticeship is meeting their expectations and 82% report that it is facilitating career progression. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that **over half of the respondents who expressed dissatisfaction with their course and its impact on their career were enrolled in the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship**. For these individuals, this specific course represented the sole pathway to their desired career, compelling them to pursue it despite their reservations. Additionally, **those who enrolled with the motivation of "Gaining new skills/change job" held negative opinions regarding the degree apprenticeships meeting their expectations.**

Question to learners, training providers and employers: Overall, using the scale below (0 being not satisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied) how satisfied are you with the delivery of Degree Apprenticeships within your organisation/institution?



Analysis & Insight:

Qualitative data suggests a **high level of satisfaction with Degree Apprenticeship programmes/courses across employers, training providers, and learners**. A notable driver of this satisfaction is the receptivity of training providers to feedback. Apprentices appreciate having multiple channels to voice their opinions, including end-of-unit surveys, module feedback questionnaires, and learner liaison committees. This openness to feedback fosters a sense of engagement and contributes to a positive learning environment.

Another major source of satisfaction with the apprenticeship was its accessibility, facilitated by the Levy funding. This funding model opened doors for individuals like one learner who stated:

'can't afford to go back into a full-time education and so the main part of the apprenticeship, which attracted me was to be able to work, to be able to hold a job and live in whilst being able to progress in my career.'

The comprehensiveness of the training programme emerged as another key area of satisfaction for some apprentices. One learner, new to management, emphasised the value of the course by stating:

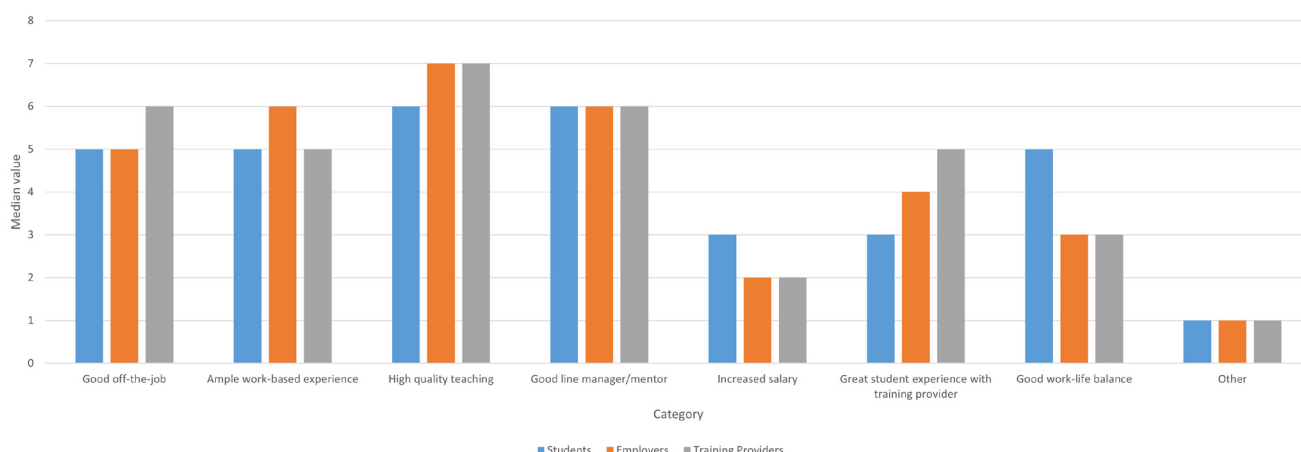
'what we get trained in house isn't a comparison to what this course provides. And I'm very satisfied with what I've learned, especially being new to management, I found this course crucial in getting through difficult situations, in developing myself as a leader. I think without this course, I would have struggled at times... you use your information and you can train others. It's been helpful and it's been actually satisfying, not only to learn from the course, but to provide that education to others and to help those around you succeed using the information that you've gained. I'm very satisfied with the course, the lectures and the overall experience. It's great.'

While overall satisfaction is high, **some apprentices expressed mixed feelings about their course experience.** One learner, for example, stated:

'I sit really in the middle of neither fully satisfied, but I'm not really dissatisfied either. There's a lot of stuff that I love about my apprenticeship. I really enjoy the course content, and I've enjoyed everything that I've learned so far.'

Factors for Apprentices to Thrive

Question to learners, training providers and employers: Rank the following in order of importance (from most important at the top to least important at the bottom) when considering factors necessary for apprentices to thrive (move the options to rank)



Analysis & Insight:

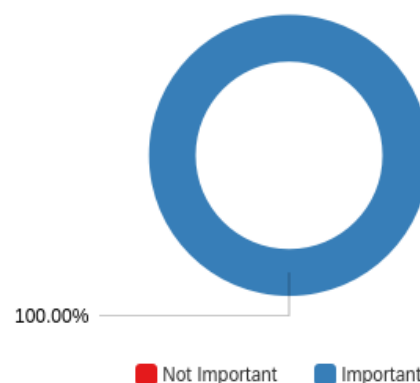
All participants unanimously agree that **high-quality teaching, effective line management/mentoring, robust off-the-job training, and substantial work-based experience are critical factors contributing to the success of their apprenticeships.** Interestingly, salary increases did not emerge as a top priority for many.

Question to employers: How important is it for each of your degree apprentices to have a workplace mentor?

Analysis & Insight:

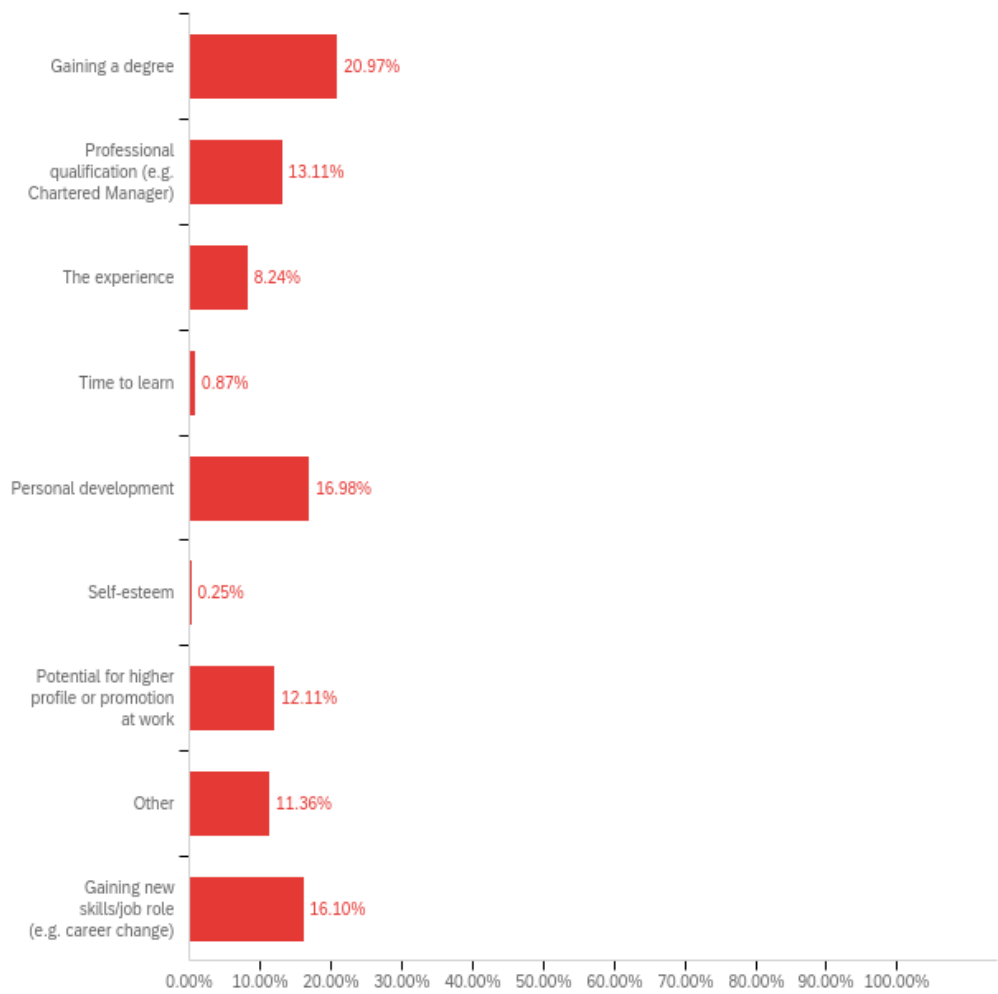
Unsurprisingly, **employers unanimously endorsed the critical role of workplace mentors in supporting apprentices.** Notably, participants emphasised the direct impact of a positive personal relationship between apprentices and their immediate line managers or mentors, with one stating:

'The quality of that relationship [between line manager/mentor and apprentice] is a direct factor in the success'.



Learner Motivation

Question to learners: What was your main motivation for embarking upon a Degree Apprenticeship?

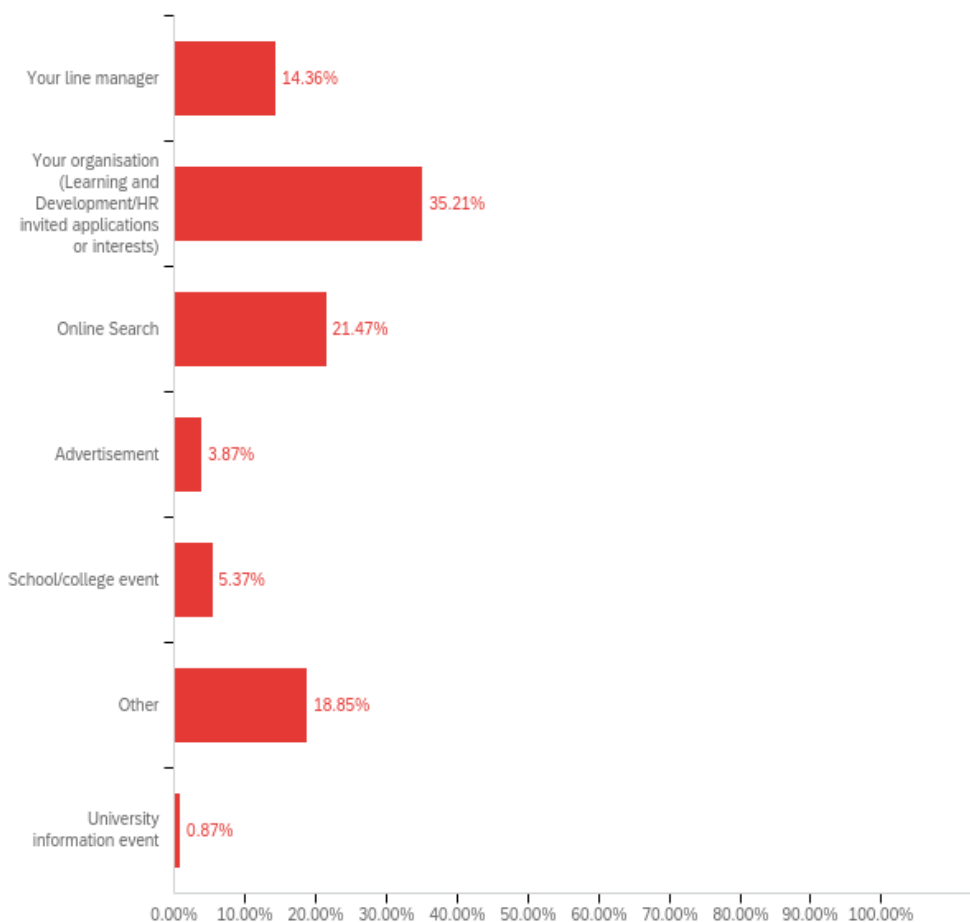


Analysis & Insight:

Approximately **one-third (33%)** of participants enrolled on degree apprentices with the **primary goal of acquiring new skills and qualifications for career advancement or personal development**. This highlights the desire of a significant portion of learners to upskill, switch careers, or pursue personal growth through their participation. Training providers emphasise that apprentices’ motivation plays a pivotal role in the success of apprenticeships. As one provider aptly stated,

‘they need to want to do it and to achieve. They need to want to thrive and develop and be open to new opportunities. But even having that without the support of the manager, they’re not going to get it, so I would say those two are both joined’.

Question to learners: Where did the initial interest in you joining a Degree Apprenticeship programme come from?

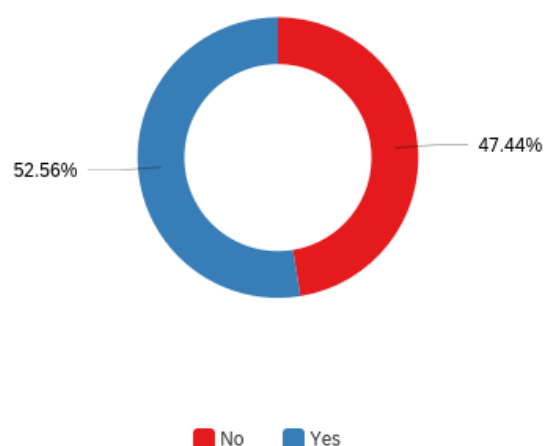


Analysis & Insight:

While **employers sparked the initial interest in Degree Apprenticeships for half of the learners**, surprisingly, only **5% were introduced to them through schools and colleges**. This highlights the need for enhanced awareness-raising efforts within educational institutions.

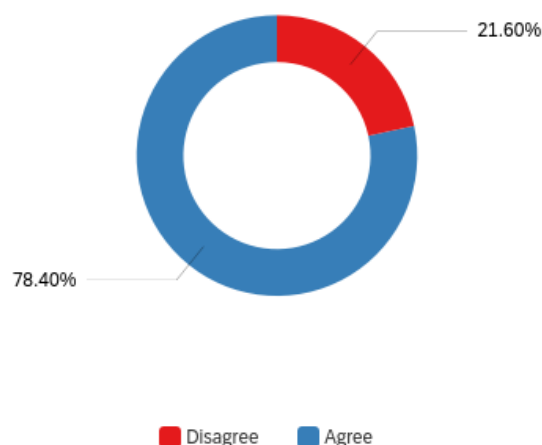
Reputation of Degree Apprenticeships

Question to learners: Do you think the Degree Apprenticeships are held in the same esteem as non-apprenticeship (or full-time degree) programmes/courses?



Analysis & Insight:

Apprentices highlighted several common misconceptions regarding apprenticeships. Firstly, there is a prevailing belief that apprenticeships are primarily tailored for younger adults, particularly those with A-level qualifications. Additionally, some perceive apprenticeships as a pathway for individuals who may not have succeeded in formal education. Interestingly, many learners initially lacked awareness of apprenticeship opportunities and discovered them serendipitously through sources like the staff intranet. One participant aptly expressed,



Some participants mentioned that they learned about Degree Apprenticeships through 'word of mouth' whilst one learner who recently finished college stated that there was a greater promotion of traditional university degrees:

As one apprentice stated, Degree Apprenticeships are not just 'learning on the job and learning from scratch' but also serve as a means to professional development and another expressed:

Recommendations were made for employers to further promote the advantages of apprenticeships in terms of individual career prospects and organisational benefits.

Improving Degree Apprenticeships

Question to employers: In what ways do you think Degree Apprenticeships could be improved in your organisation?



Analysis & Insight:

Employers have pinpointed several critical areas for enhancing Degree Apprenticeships. These include achieving a clearer comprehension of course requirements, implementing flexible learning models to cater to diverse needs, expanding programme size for improved cost-effectiveness, and ensuring closer alignment of the curriculum with industry demands.

Learner Integration

Question to learners: How well integrated do you feel within the student body of your training provider?

Analysis & Insight:

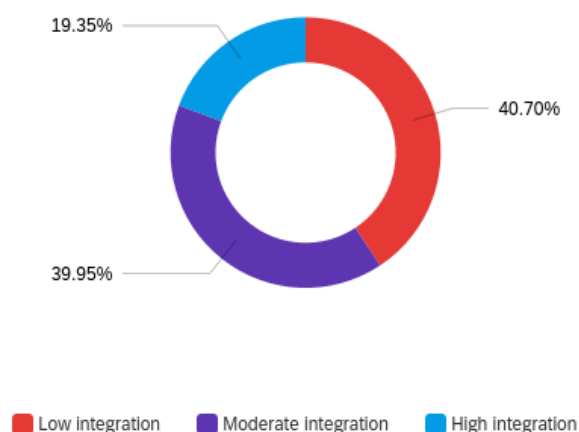
There is a gap in integration among apprentices, with **only 19% reporting feeling highly integrated within their training provider's learner body**. Notably, **over 22% expressed no sense of belonging at all**. Qualitative data highlighted challenges in apprentices forging connections with other learners, as one participant poignantly stated,

'...our jobs and family already take up any extra time that we might have had to offer.'

Apprentices reported limited engagement opportunities, citing events and activities primarily geared towards non-apprenticeship learners. The infrequent campus attendance of some apprentices (attending only a few times per course) further contributed to their sense of disconnection. Additional barriers to participation included travel from outside the city, family commitments, and inconvenient event timings clashing with work and personal schedules. One apprentice clarified,

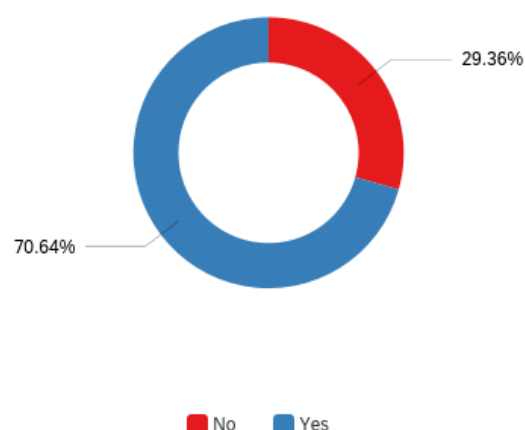
'So it's not a lack of the university trying to encourage us to be parts of societies or joining these events, it is because they're on a weekday that we don't go, we're only there on a Wednesday or if it's there, it's because it's at 07:00 P.M, like you said, people have got childcare commitments and families and life responsibilities.'

While some apprentices acknowledged the limited integration and accepted it due to competing priorities, stating "[...] our jobs and family already take up any extra time that we might have had to offer," others, particularly those in smaller cohorts, reported thriving within their immediate study groups. They described a sense of "community" and "belonging" within their cohorts, although not necessarily feeling fully integrated with the wider learner body.

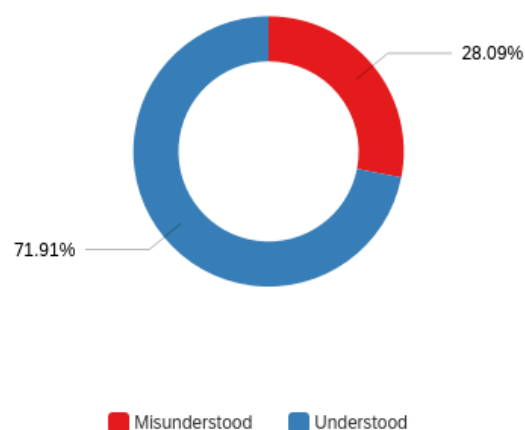


Support with Off-the-job

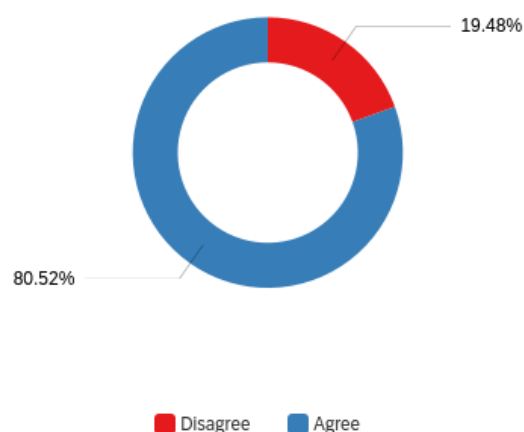
Question to learners: Do you receive sufficient off-the-job time during your apprenticeship programme/course?



Question to learners: How well do you think your employer understands off-the-job requirements and their responsibilities in supporting you to achieve these?



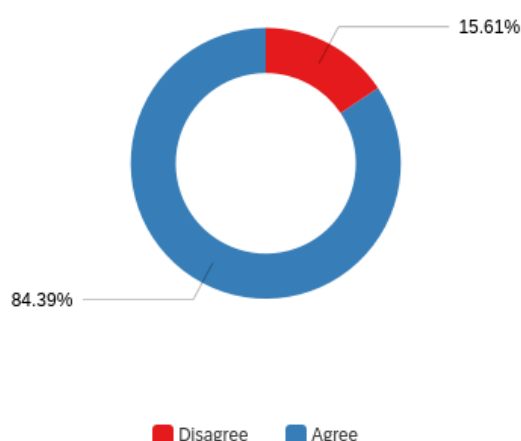
Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that your employer supports you to meet your off-the-job requirements?



Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that your line manager supports you by allowing you sufficient off-the-job time to meet your developmental targets?

Analysis & Insight:

Approximately **30% of learners express dissatisfaction with the adequacy of their off-the-job training**. Similarly, **nearly 30% agree that their employers lack a comprehensive understanding of the off-the-job requirements and responsibilities**. However, a **substantial majority—81% of learners—acknowledge that their employers actively support them in fulfilling their off-the-job obligations**. Additionally, **84% agree that their line managers facilitate sufficient off-the-job time to meet developmental targets**. Further statistical analysis reveals that **those enrolled longer, i.e. two or more years, have a higher rating of employer understanding off-the-job requirements** and their responsibilities. This nuanced situation is also reflected in qualitative findings. One learner aptly captures the discrepancy, stating,



'my line manager is really on board with OTJ and probably provides a lot of air cover for me in order to give me the opportunities to go and do this other stuff. But some, I know some one of my line managers that I had or potentially had was threatening to throw me off the apprenticeship at the start because I hadn't agreed it with him that I wasn't in his team at the time'

Despite other challenges, learners overwhelmingly acknowledge that their training provider has well-defined structures in place to support off-the-job recording. As one learner described,

'[in our institution] we have a very structured approach to the off the job learning skills over and above the academic assignments in terms of the portfolio requirements. So it's very guided in terms of evidence that needs to be required and ways and suggested ways in which you might do that, including tasks, whether it's organising a team-building event or hosting a meeting'

Another common concern among learners is the significant effort required to meticulously record off-the-job activities. As one learner expressed,

'the main issue for me sometimes is having enough time to get things done, whether it's to do with the assignment or whether it's to do with doing the portfolio work, that's really challenging to fit around my day job'

While another learner recounted being told, bluntly,

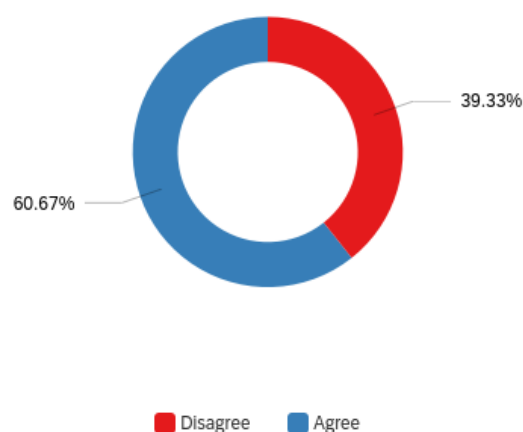
'if you don't do your off the job learning [on the e-portfolio system], if you don't record it weekly, you'll be kicked off your course'

Given the various pressures faced by learners, it is unsurprising that off-the-job recording tends to occupy a lower position on their priority list. As succinctly summarised by one learner:

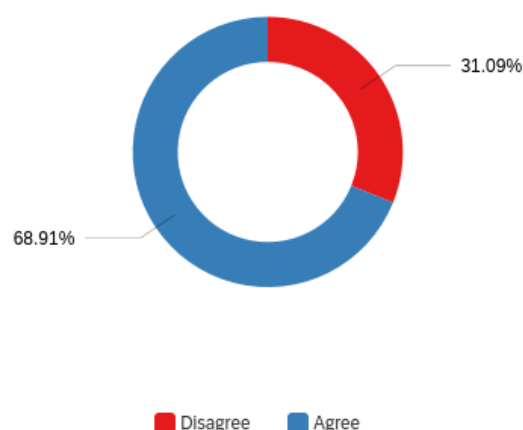
'the list of priorities of being a Degree Apprenticeship, going to lectures, doing my assignments, and doing my day job, Those are my top three priorities. And it wasn't really being understood that [e-portfolio system] has to be lower on my list of priorities in order to keep my sanity'

Work-Life Balance

Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that you have managed your work-life balance well?



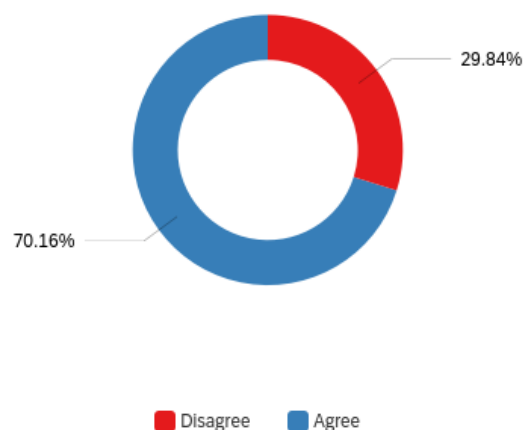
Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that your employer's support with your work-life balance has been helpful?



Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that your training provider supports you in balancing your work commitments and study time?

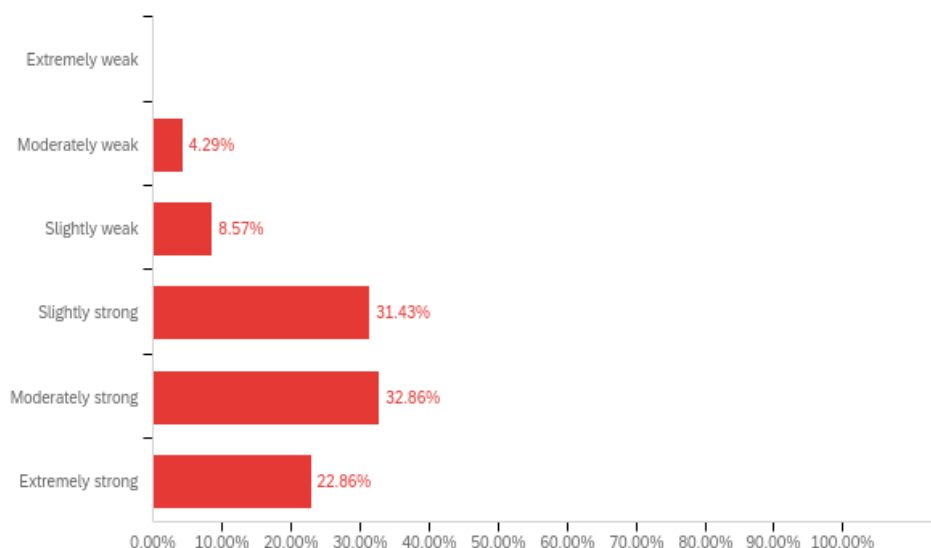
Analysis & Insight:

The multifaceted demands of Degree Apprenticeships present challenges for some, with **40% reporting difficulties in achieving work-life balance**. However, a positive counterpoint emerges: **69% and 70% of learners respectively perceive supportive workplace and training provider environments, indicating efforts to address these challenges.**



Relationships

Question to employers: What would you say your relationship with your training provider is?

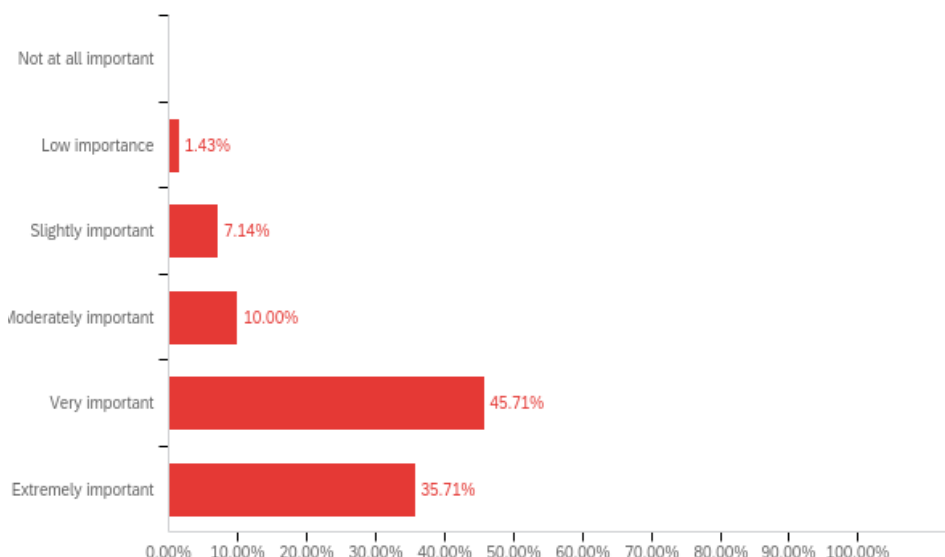


Analysis & Insight:

Encouragingly, **87% of employers maintain a strong relationship with their training providers**. Notably, the majority of employers with the most robust connections employ 1000 or more employees. Participants emphasised the significance of open communication and engagement sessions involving tutors, apprentices, and managers. One employer succinctly described their approach:

'We meet quite regularly; we have tripartite meetings with the students and with the university. We're given lots of information from the university that we can pass on to the students...we work together as a team and it's about, giving that information backwards and forwards to one another because there's quite a lot of work to do with the university'

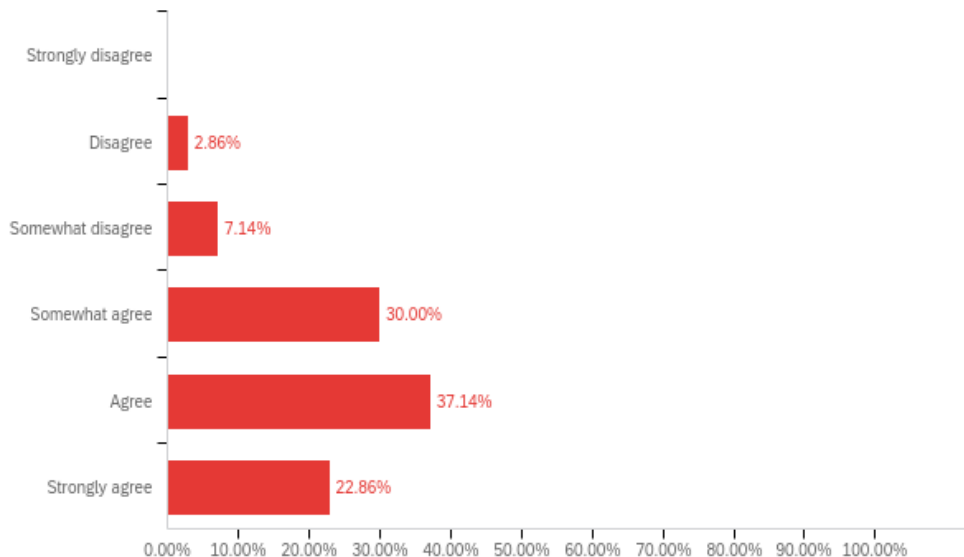
Question to employers: How important is your relationship with your training provider for the progress of your apprentices?



Analysis & Insight:

Across all employer sizes, **there is unanimous agreement on the critical significance of their relationship with training providers for the advancement of Degree Apprenticeships**. Several individuals emphasised that the key factor contributing to apprentices' success lies in having a supportive network and a "cohesive relationship between the apprentice, the university [training provider], and employer". Each stakeholder plays a distinct role in fostering an environment where apprentices can truly thrive.

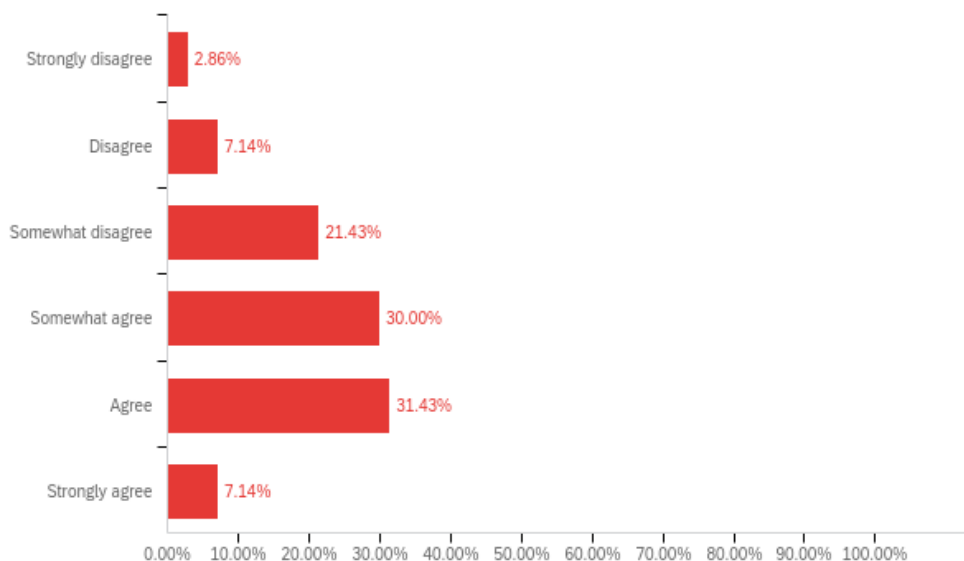
Question to employers: To what extent would you agree that you feel supported by your training provider?



Analysis & Insight:

A resounding **90% of employers expressed strong satisfaction with the support they receive from their training providers.**

Question: To what extent do you feel that your organisational priorities are taken into account by your training provider when planning their teaching and learning aims?



Analysis & Insight:

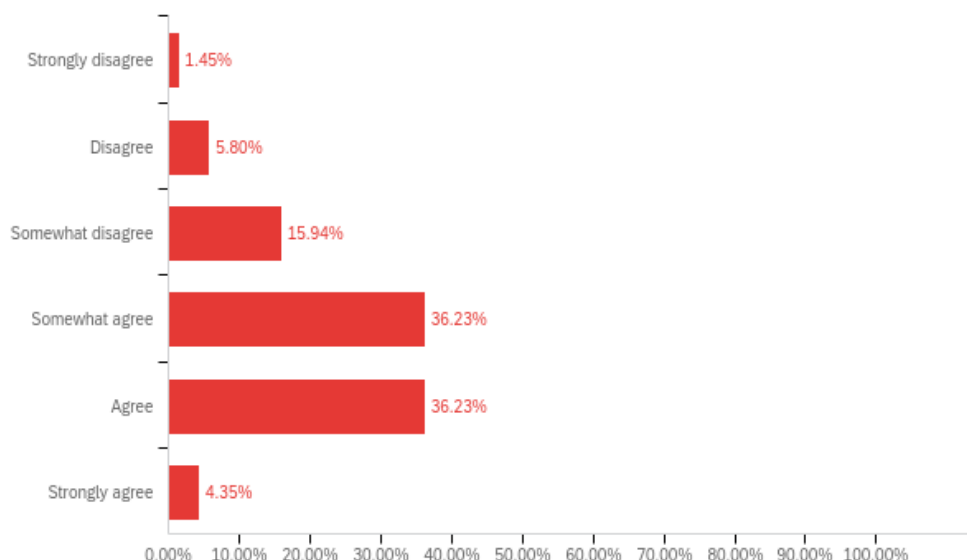
While a **majority of employers (69%) agree that their organisational priorities are taken into account by training providers during the planning of teaching and learning objectives**, there is an interesting disparity based on company size. Specifically, none of the employers with 100 or fewer employees strongly agree with this sentiment. In contrast, 80% of employers with 1000 or more employees strongly agree.

Utilising work-based academic tutors to manage the relationship between the training provider and the employer represents a strategic approach to ensuring effective programme delivery that aligns with work-based demands. As one work-based academic tutor articulated:

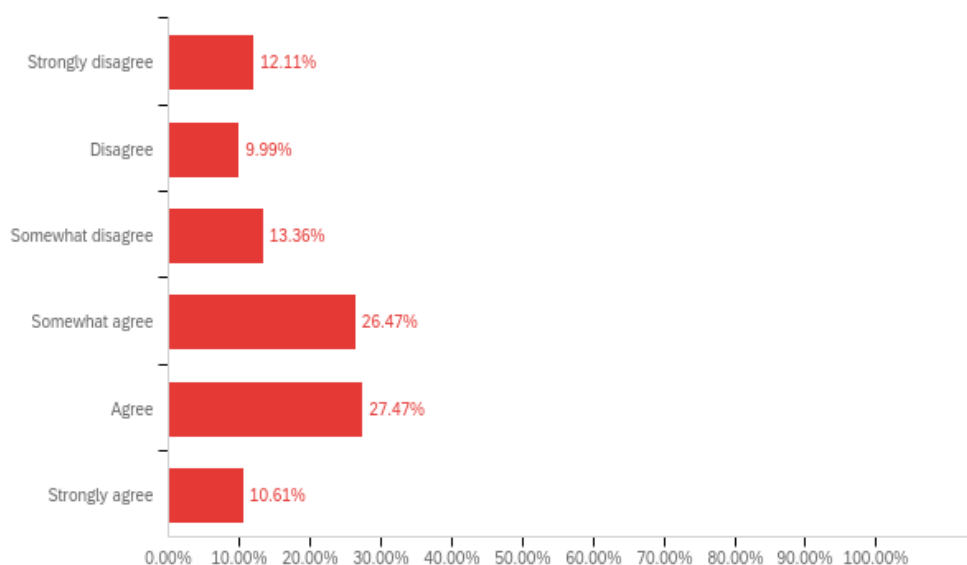
'I've gone down to a company, met with the apprentice concerned and the manager, and then talk through expectations of workload and the highs and lows of it, that it's typically quite bunched and it would be nice from a planning point of view to just assume that it will be equal every week, but it just isn't like that... And it's just getting that understanding going between the apprentice and the mentor that takes a bit of time initially, but once that's set up, then I think we've, had quite a positive result. And most managers understand that and can work around those constraints'.

Assessment and Feedback

Question to employers: To what extent would you agree that your training provider's assignments and activities are planned to fit your workplace context?



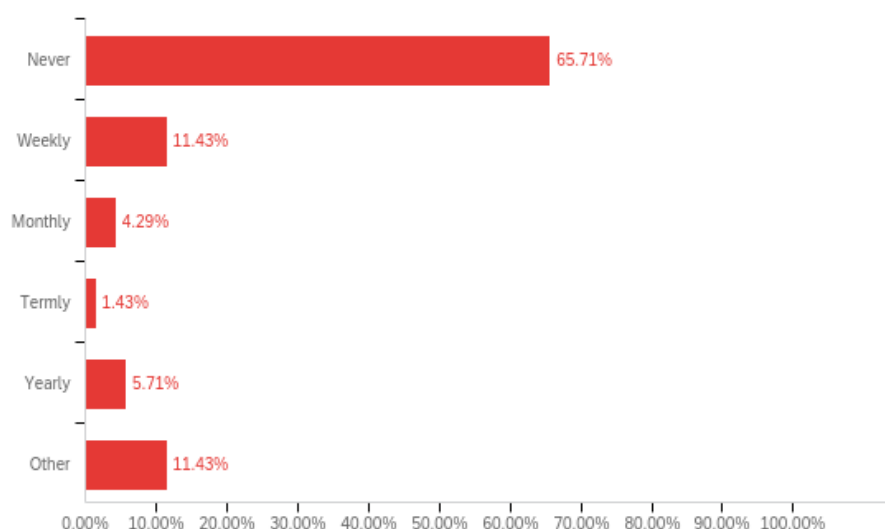
Question to learners: To what extent do you agree that your assignments and activities are planned to fit your workplace context?



Analysis & Insight:

A significant proportion (77%) of employers state that their training provider meticulously plans assignments and activities to align with their workplace context. Slightly fewer learners (66%) share this agreement.

Question to employers: How often do you or anyone in your organisation contribute to the teaching sessions of the apprentices (i.e. guest lectures etc.)

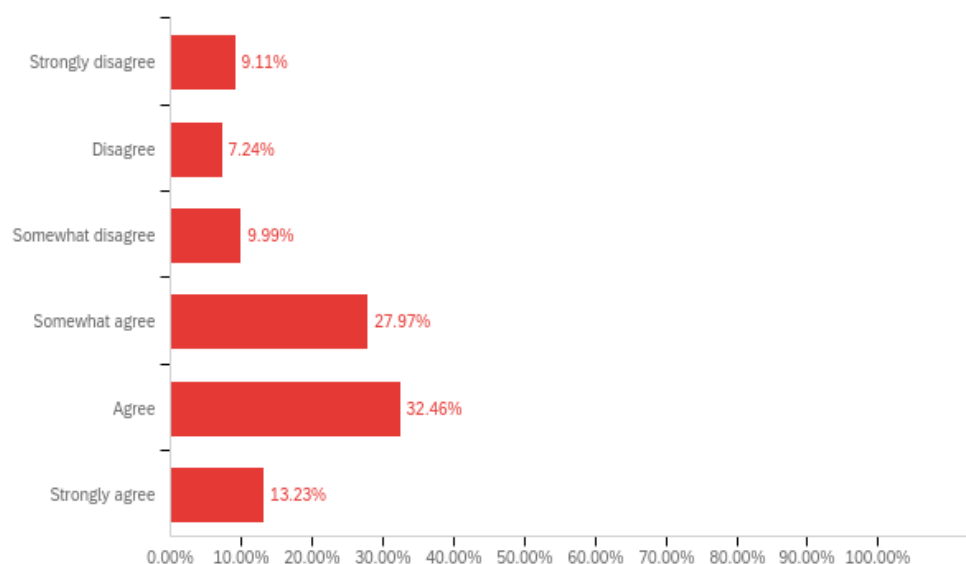


Analysis & Insight:

While **44% of employers currently contribute to teaching sessions through guest lectures or other means**, it's important to note that this involvement spans across organisations of various sizes. Encouragingly, some training providers actively promote deeper employer engagement, as exemplified by one provider's approach:

'co-design, co-development and co-delivery, in terms of the curriculum and how it's delivered' trying to agree what was going to be the best off-the-job day. Not being a Monday or Friday because they're really heavy clinical days, Wednesday is much better, just having agreements like that'.

Question to learners: To what extent do you agree that the *unit/module delivery adequately prepares you for assessments* (e.g. module/unit assessment or End Point Assessment)?

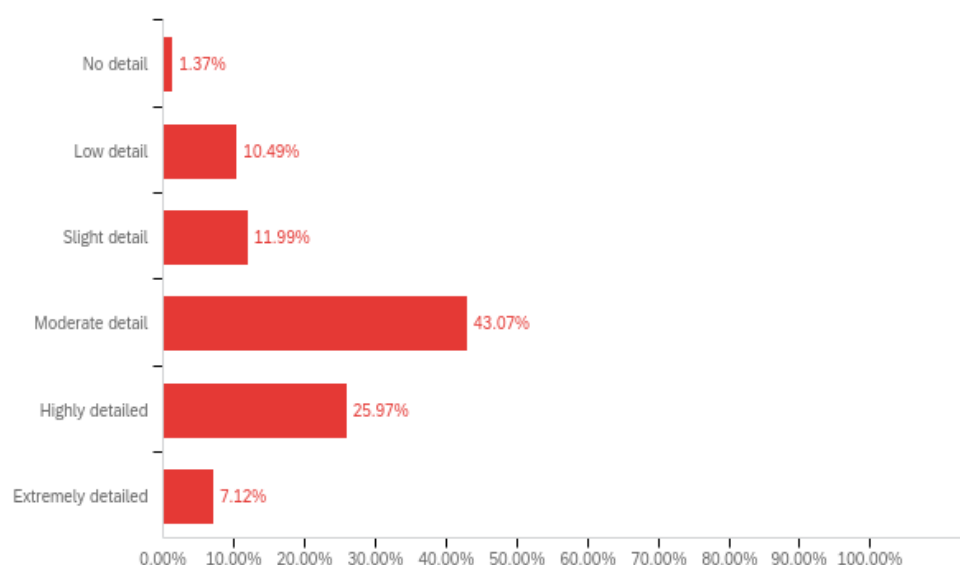


Analysis & Insight:

A significant majority, **74%, of learner participants expressed varying degrees of agreement that the teaching delivery effectively prepares them for assessments**. Most learners find the assignments to be clear and directly relevant to their job roles. As one learner aptly put it,

'the types of assignments (technical reports, presentations, portfolios of different GIS, maps) are quite closely aligned with the kind of things I might be expected to do my day-to-day job. But the topics are maybe a little bit more broad'.

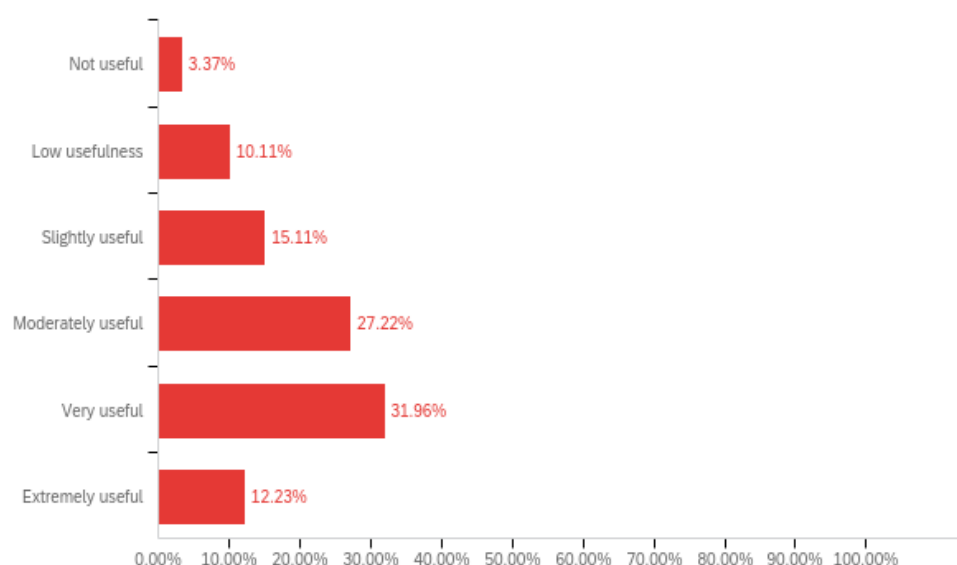
Question to learners: In general (consider all your modules/units - not just one or two), how detailed is the feedback provided to you following an assessment?



Analysis & Insight:

While **nearly all learners (99%) report receiving assessment feedback with some detail**, only **76% find the level of detail to be moderately helpful or more**. This suggests room for improvement in providing specific and actionable feedback that can effectively support learner progress.

Question to learners: In general (consider all your modules/units - not just one or two), how helpful/useful is the assessment feedback that is provided?

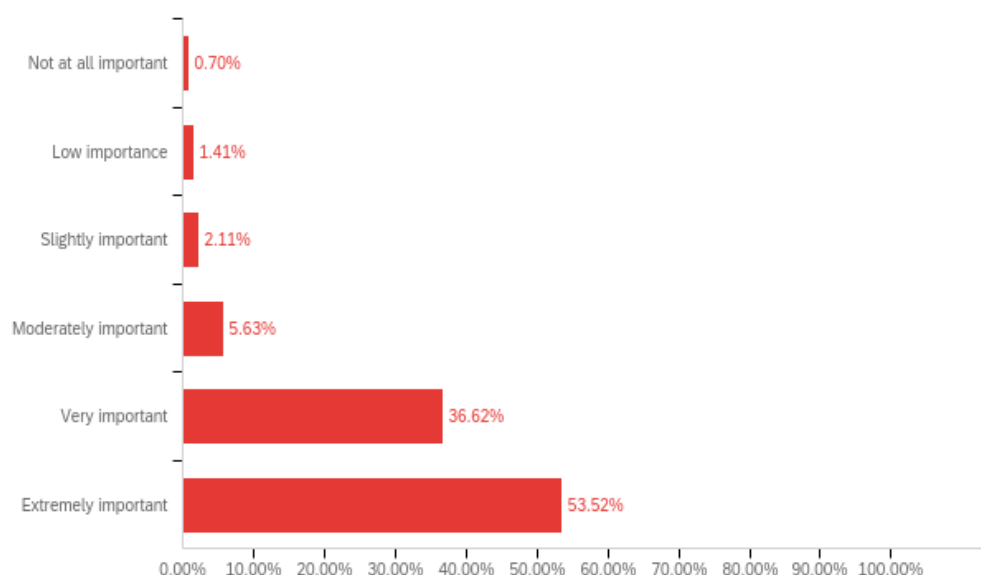


Analysis & Insight:

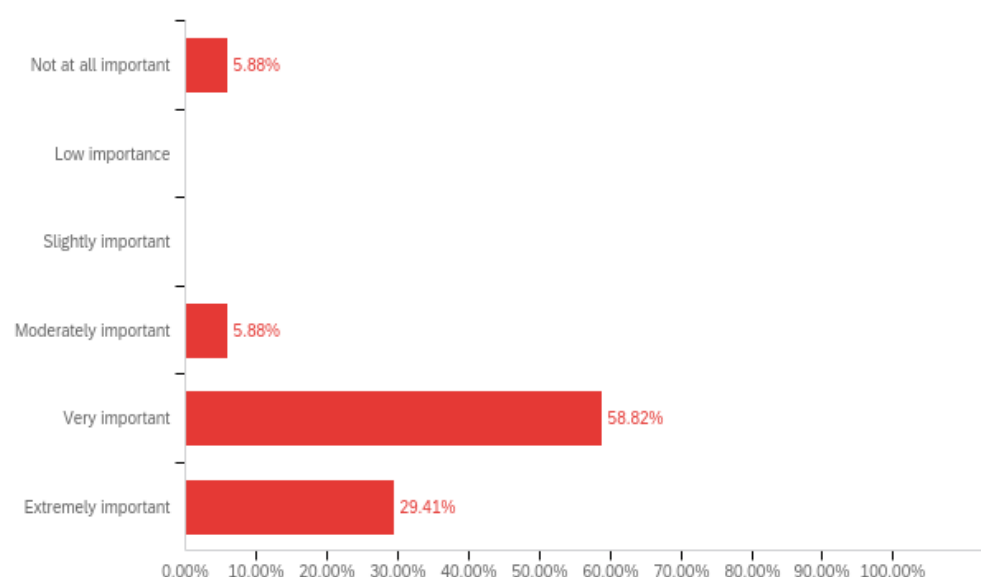
While a **significant majority of learners (97%) find their assessment feedback helpful**, a **potential gap exists in the depth of its perceived usefulness**. Only 71% deem the feedback moderately useful or better, suggesting an opportunity to enhance the level of detail and specific actionable insights provided.

Teamwork

Question to training providers: How important is it for your academic delivery colleagues (e.g. tutors) and work-based delivery colleagues (e.g. skills coaches or personal development tutors) to work as an integrated team?



Question to employer-providers: How important is it for your academic delivery colleagues (e.g. tutors) and work-based delivery colleagues (e.g. skills coaches or personal development tutors) to work as an integrated team?

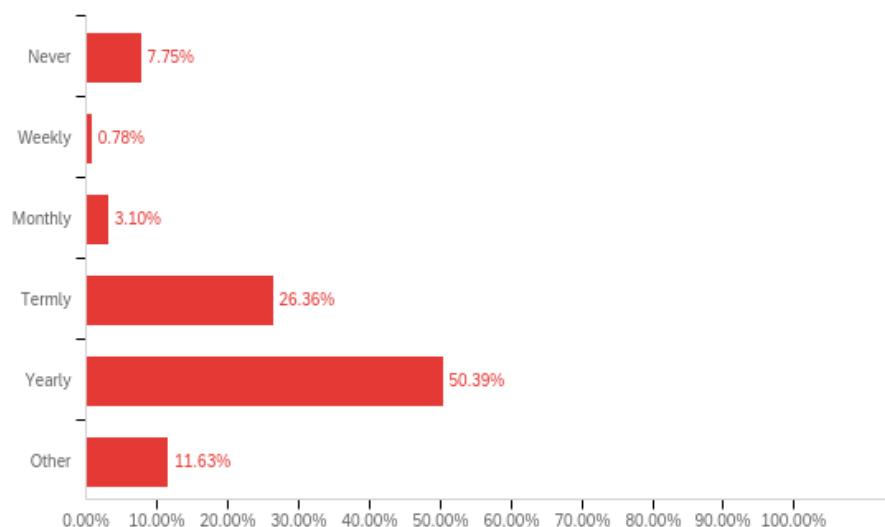


Analysis & Insight:

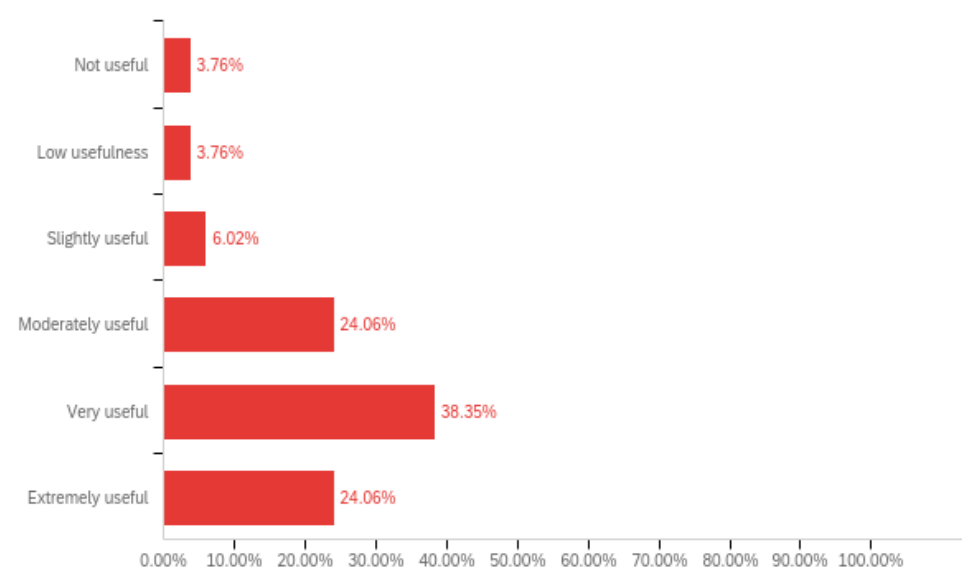
An overwhelming majority of training provider respondents (99%) emphasise the importance of fostering collaboration between academic delivery colleagues and work-based delivery colleagues, advocating for an integrated team approach. Similarly, among employer-provider respondents, a substantial proportion (94%) recognise the significance of cohesive teamwork between their academic delivery colleagues and work-based delivery colleagues.

Peer Observation

Question to training providers: How often does your institution undertake peer observation for teaching staff on the Degree Apprenticeship?



Question to training providers: How useful do you feel it would be to have peer observations among tutors/teachers?

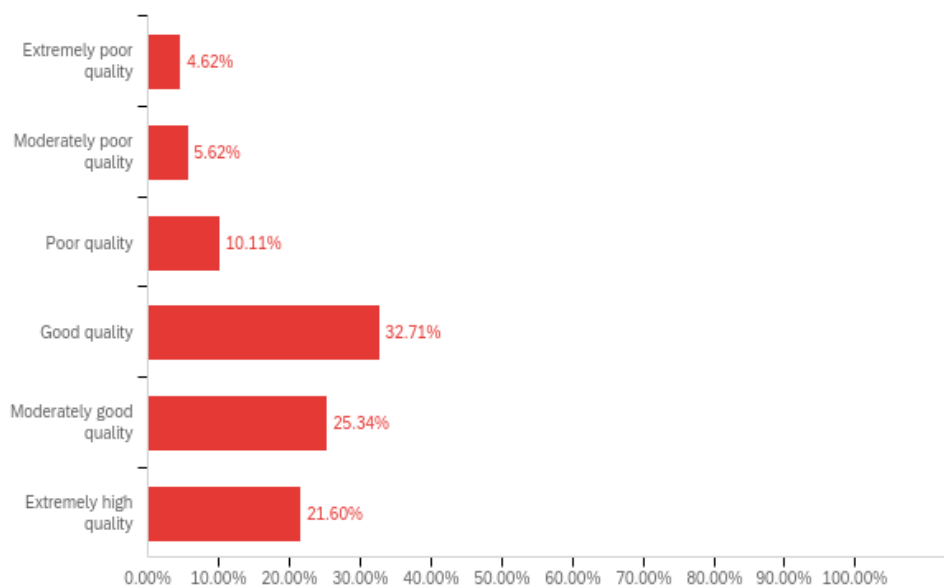


Analysis & Insight:

Ninety-two per cent of training providers implement peer-observation programmes for their teaching staff. Notably, a significant majority (96%) find this practice valuable, with 58% reporting high levels of usefulness. Degree Apprenticeship has sharpened the focus on quality of teaching in Higher Education Institutions.

Standard of Teaching

Question to learners: Overall, how would you rate the standard of teaching at your institution - think of all (not just one or two) your modules/units?

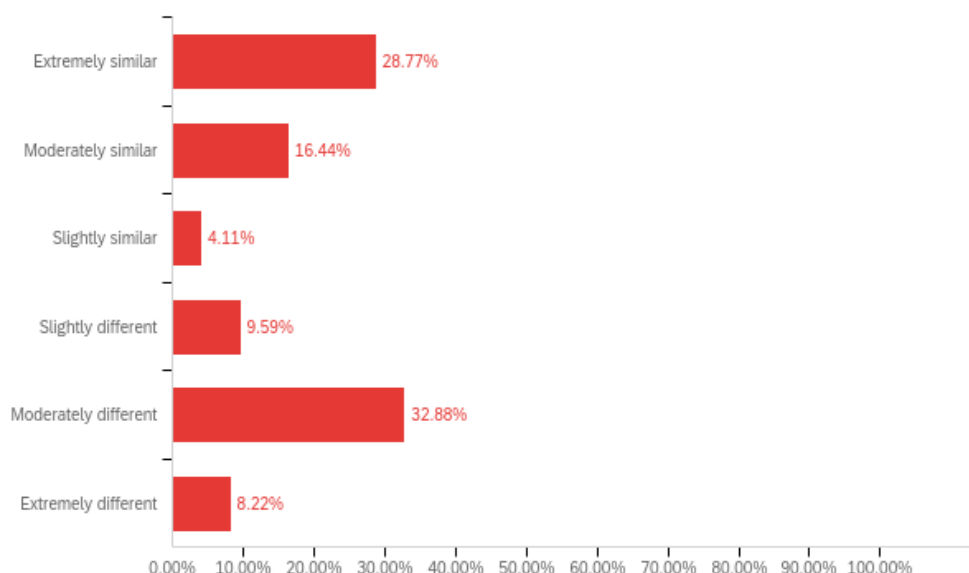


Analysis & Insight:

A substantial majority, 80%, of learners rate the teaching quality at their universities as good, moderately good, or extremely good. Further statistical analysis reveals that learners enrolled for two or more years have a lower rating of overall teaching quality at their institutions. Learners whose motivation for enrolling on their courses was "Gaining new skills /change job" have a poorer rating of overall teaching quality at their institutions.

Comparison with Non-apprenticeships

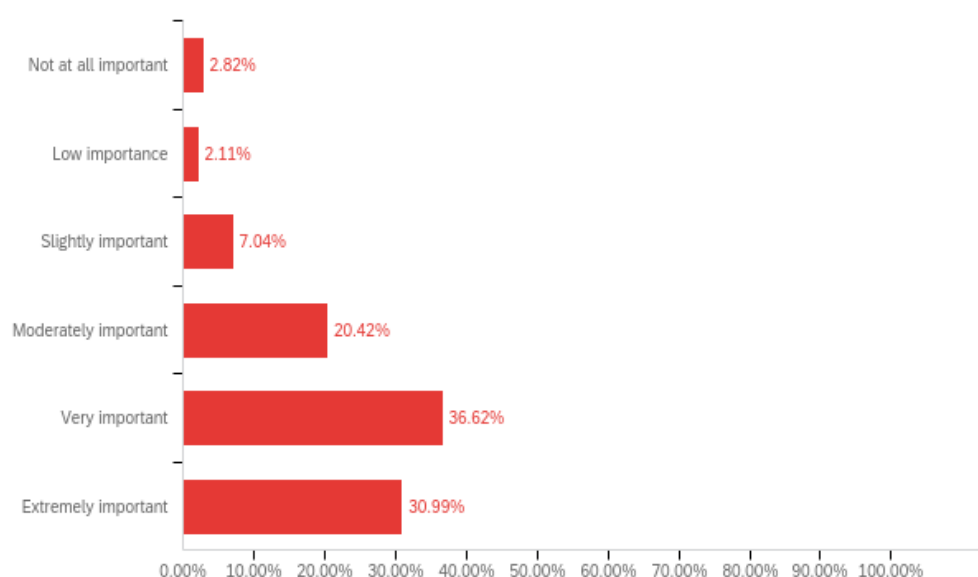
Question to academic staff: How different are the assessments for your degree apprentices from your non-apprenticeship students?



Analysis & Insight:

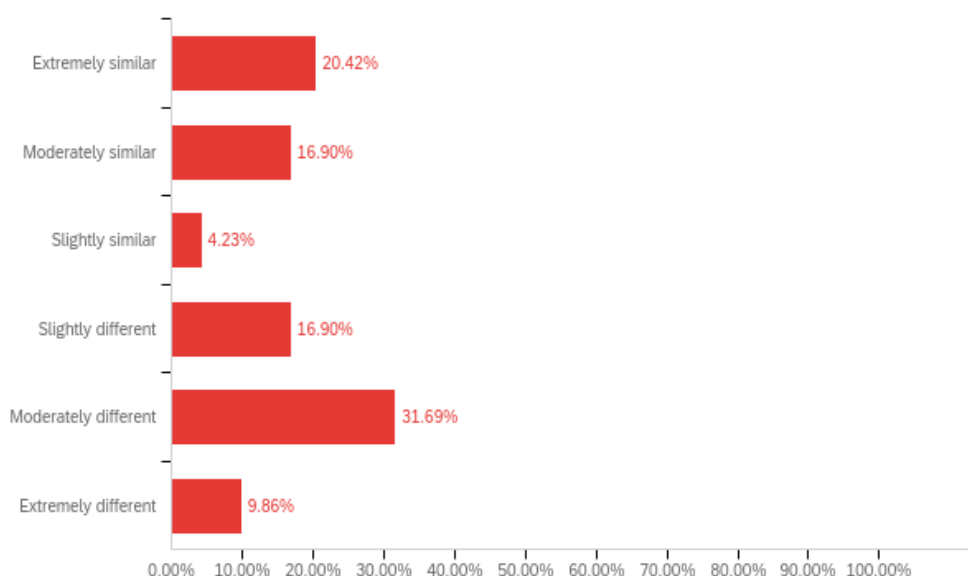
Despite the positive relationship between employer partners and training providers, and the alignment of assessments with workplace requirements, only 51% of institutions utilise distinct assessment methods for degree apprentices and non-apprentices i.e. regular undergraduate/postgraduate.

Question to training providers: How important is it for your degree apprentices to be offered additional academic skills support compared to your non-apprenticeship degree programmes/courses?



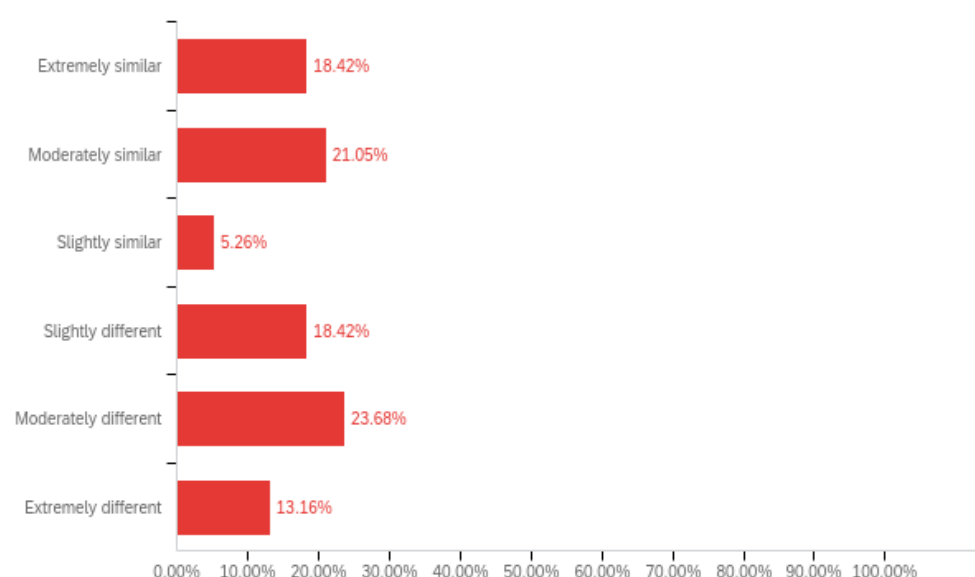
Question to training providers: How are your support mechanisms/structures for Degree Apprenticeship students different from that of your non-apprenticeship students?

Analysis & Insight:

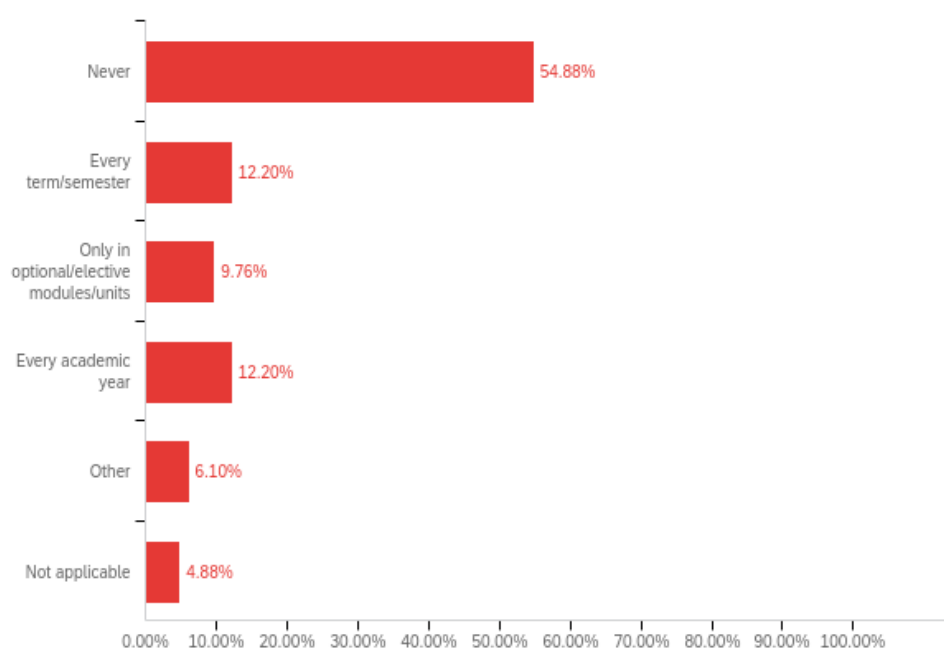


The **overwhelming majority (97%)** of training provider respondents acknowledge the significance of providing additional academic skills support to degree apprentices in comparison to their non-apprenticeship counterparts. However, **only 55% have distinct support mechanisms or structures specifically tailored for degree apprentices**, differing from those offered to non-apprentices.

Question to academic staff: How different are the teaching methods for your Degree Apprenticeship provisions from your non-apprenticeship provisions?



Question to academic staff: How often are your degree apprentices co-taught alongside non-apprenticeship students?

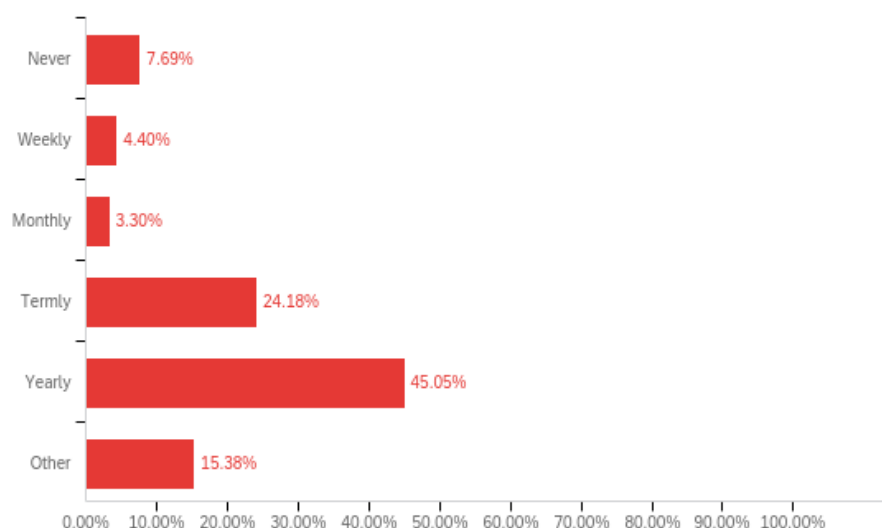


Analysis & Insight:

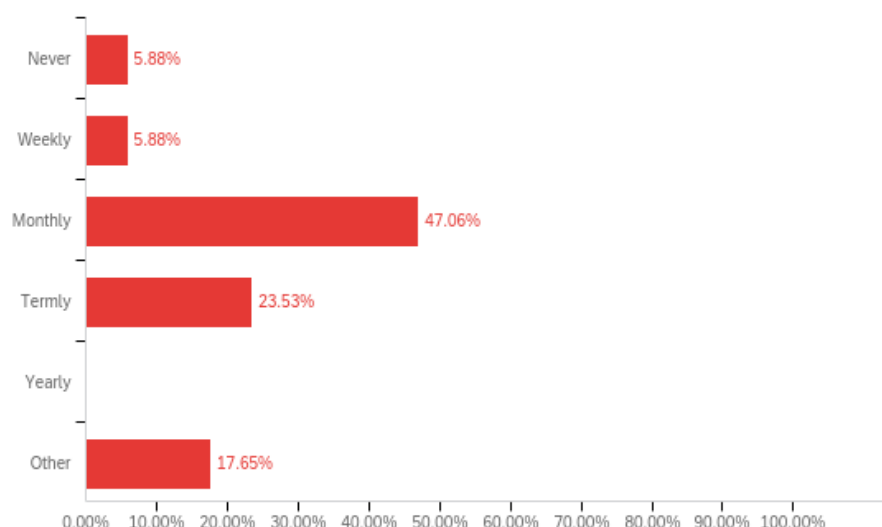
A minimum of **55% of academic respondents employ distinct teaching methods for their Degree Apprenticeship courses**, differentiating them from their non-apprenticeship counterparts. Additionally, **at least 55% refrain from co-teaching degree apprentices alongside non-apprentices**.

Work-Study Alignment

Question to academic staff: How often do you review the alignment of your learning outcomes with the apprenticeship standard's Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs)?



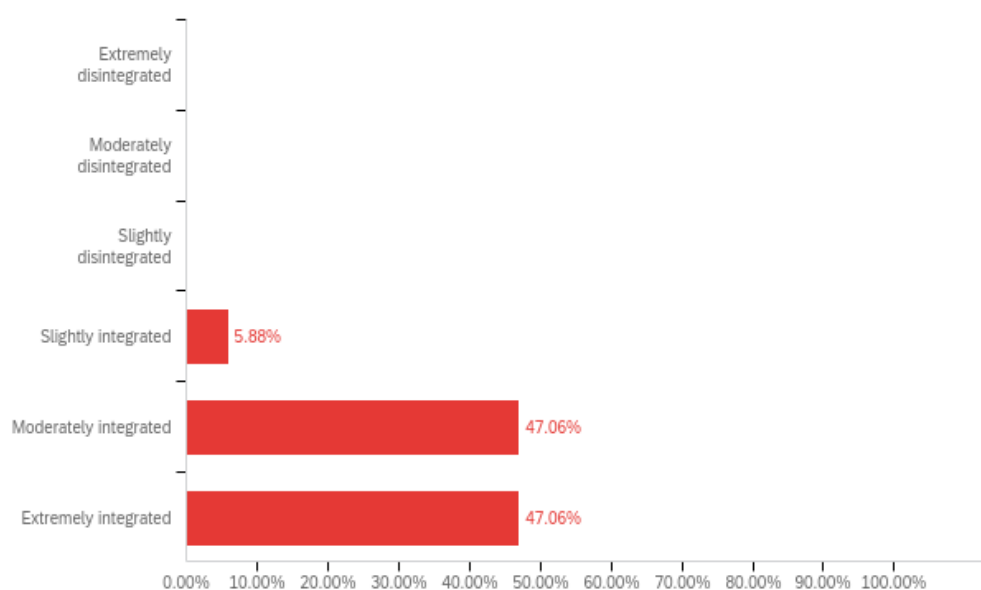
Question to employer-providers: How often do you review the alignment of your learning outcomes with the apprenticeship standard's Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs)?



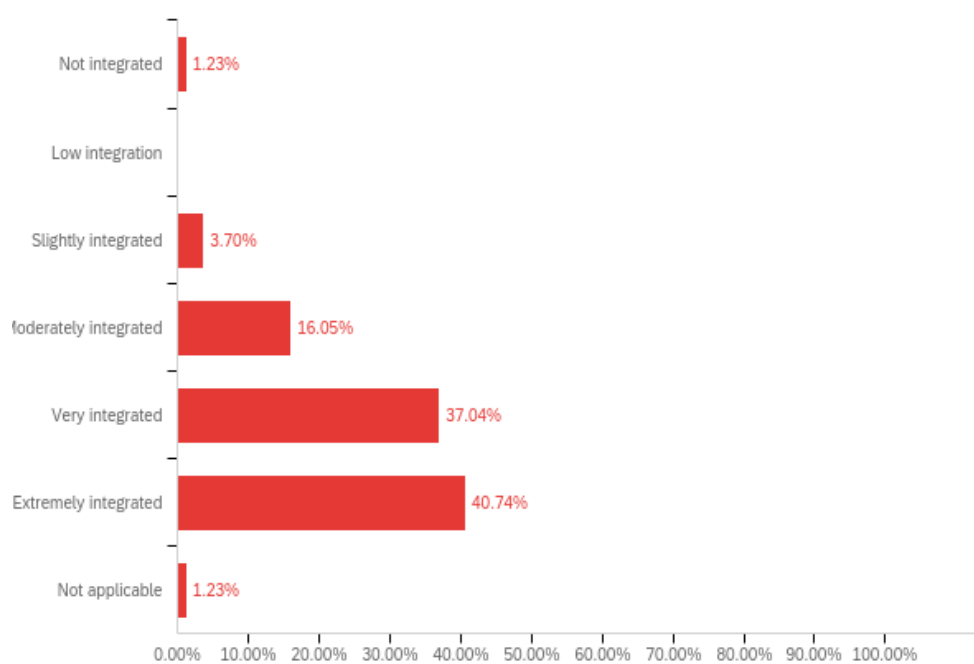
Analysis & Insight:

Most, **92% of academic staff and 94% of employer-providers**, review the alignment of their learning outcomes with the apprenticeship standard's Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs). Surprisingly, 8% of academic staff and 6% of employer-providers have never reviewed the alignment of their learning outcomes with the apprenticeship standard.

Question to employer-providers: To what extent is the assessment of academic skills, work-based skills and knowledge integrated within the programme/course?



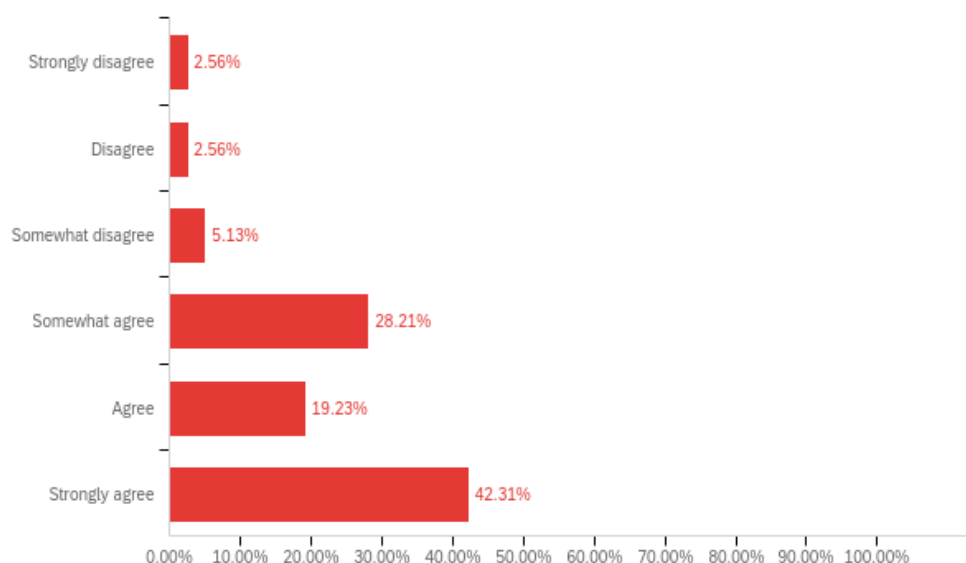
Question to academic staff: To what extent is the assessment of the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviour (KSBs) integrated within the programme/course?



Analysis & Insight:

All, 100%, of employer-providers integrate academic skills, work-based skills and knowledge within the programme/course; nearly all, 99% of academic staff of training providers do so.

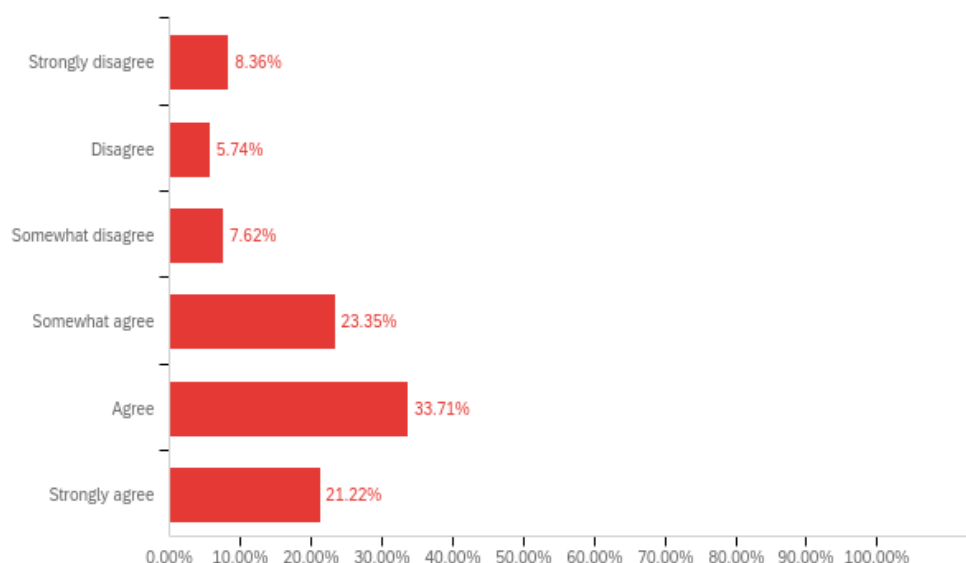
Question to academic staff: To what extent do you agree that your Degree Apprenticeship assessments are related to individual workplace experiences or problems?



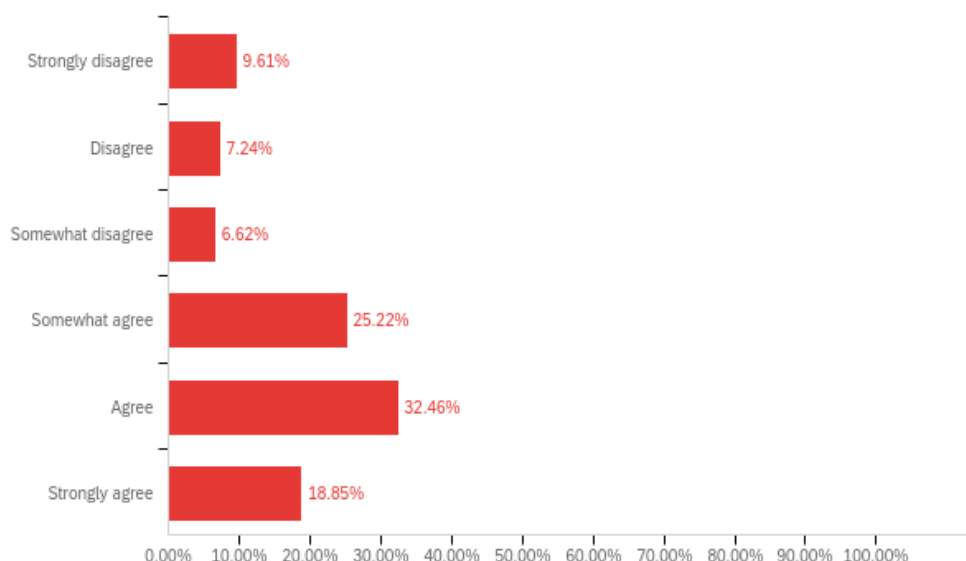
Analysis & Insight:

A majority of academic-only respondents (90%) agree that their assessments are related to individual workplace experiences or problems.

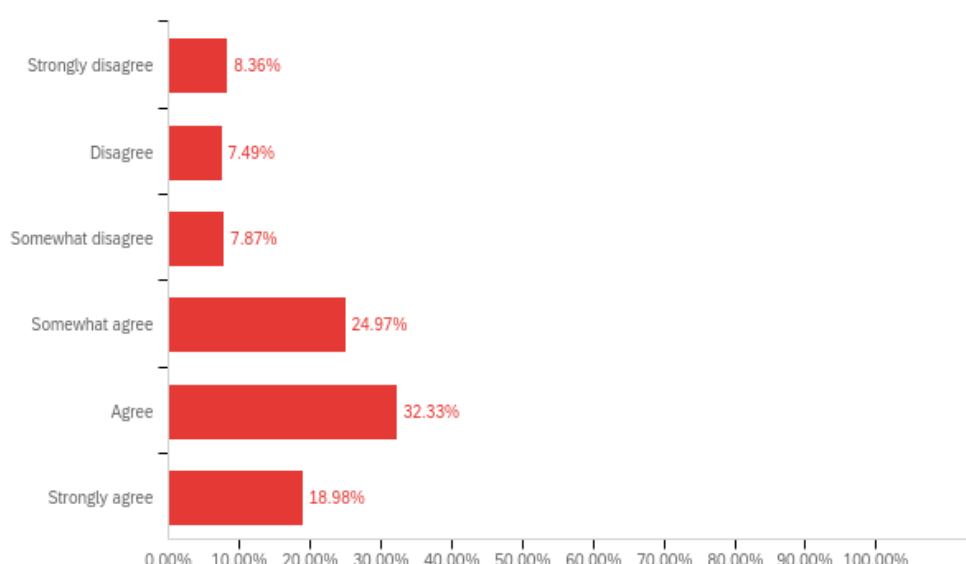
Question to learners: To what extent do you agree that your apprenticeship programme/course has been helpful in giving you the knowledge you need to excel at your work?



Question to learners: To what extent do you agree that your apprenticeship programme/course has been helpful in giving you the skills you need to excel at your work?



Question to learners: To what extent do you agree that your apprenticeship programme/course has been helpful in giving you the professional behaviours you need to excel at your work?



Analysis & Insight:

A significant majority of learners, **78%, 77%, and 76%**, state that their apprenticeship course has effectively equipped them with the requisite knowledge, skills, and behaviours necessary for excellence in their work.

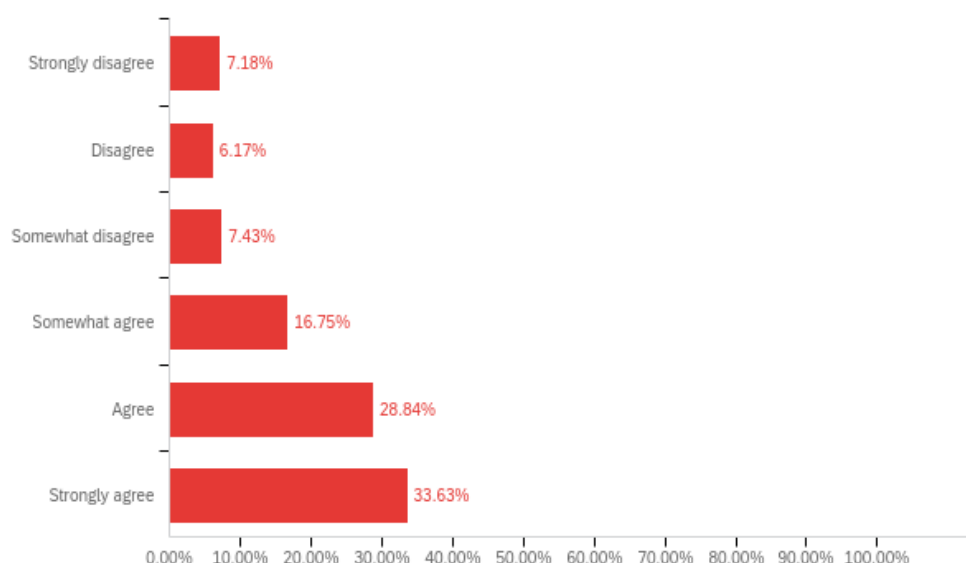
From the qualitative survey, several apprentices emphasised the clarity and relevance of their assignments to their job roles. One participant remarked:

'the types of assignments (technical reports, presentations, portfolios of different GIS, maps) are quite closely aligned with the kind of things I might be expected to do my day-to-day job. But the topics are maybe a little bit more broad'

Apprentices reported being more competent at work as well as developing their personal and professional capabilities in new ways of thinking (i.e. confidence), skills (i.e. leadership), and positively influencing work practices by feeding back their knowledge to their teams. One said,

'I think there's been a few things that I've learned on the course that I've actually put into practice in the workplace as well. Like the different styles of leadership was really key... I think it's really helping strengthen some of my soft skills in the workplace and making me more competent at that, but also the technical things as well.'

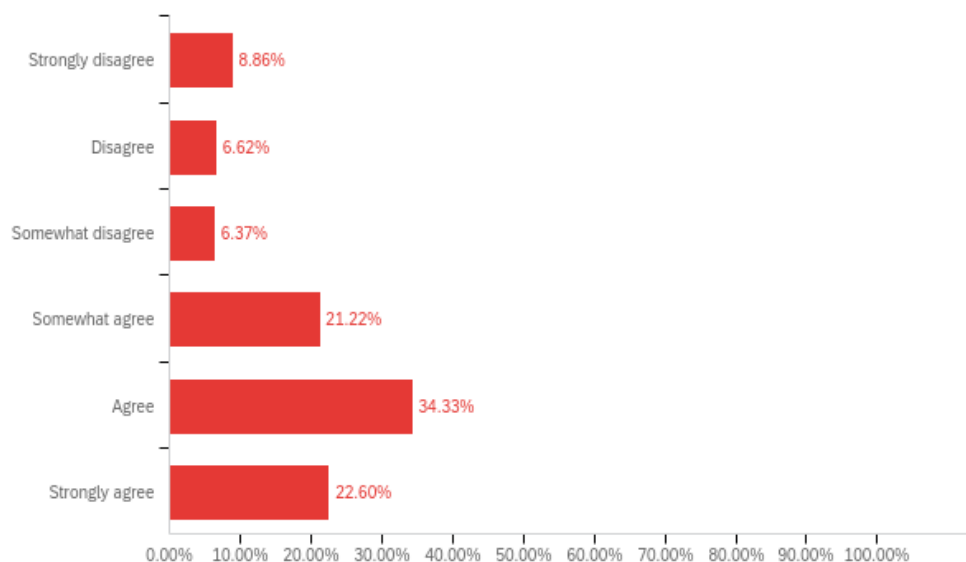
Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that you are able to apply your academic knowledge and skills within your workplace?



Analysis & Insight:

Seventy-nine per cent of learners affirm their ability to apply their academic knowledge and skills in their workplace. Notably, this trend is more pronounced among individuals aged 30 years or older who either agree or strongly agree with this statement.

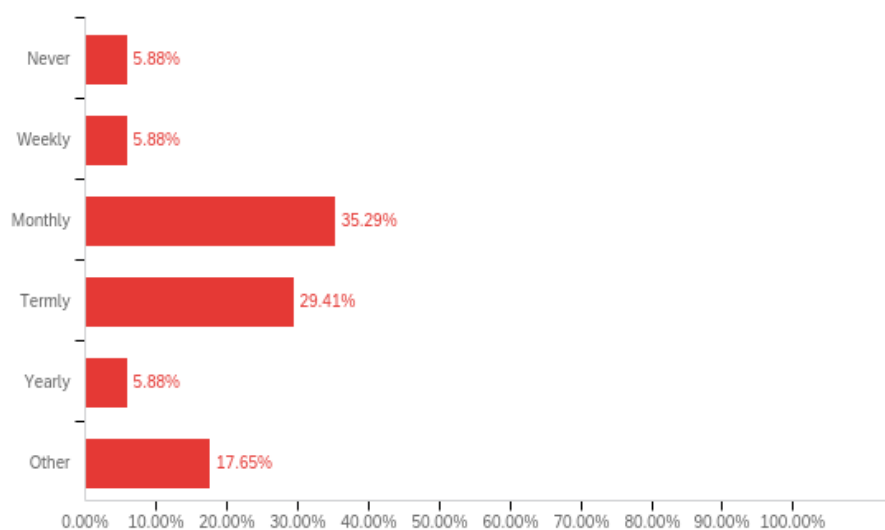
Question to learners: To what extent would you agree that bringing in your academic knowledge and skills into the workplace is improving your confidence at work?



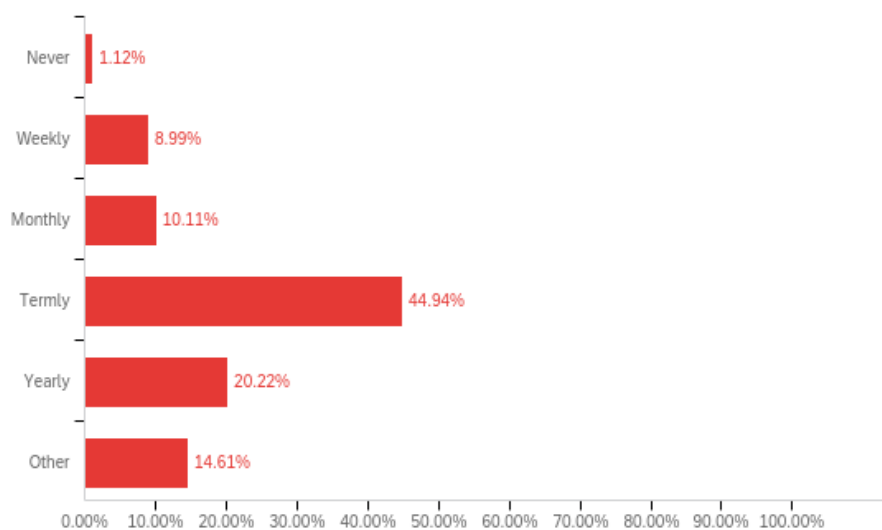
Analysis & Insight:

A significant majority (78%) of learners acknowledge that applying their academic knowledge and skills in the workplace has a positive impact on their confidence. Notably, this sentiment is more pronounced among individuals aged 30 years or older who either agree or strongly agree with this assertion. **Female learners demonstrate a stronger level of agreement compared to their male counterparts.**

Question to employer-provider: How regularly is feedback from tutors, apprentices and/or employers used to inform changes to module/unit content?



Question to academic staff: How regularly is feedback from tutors, apprentices and/or employers used to inform changes to module/unit content?

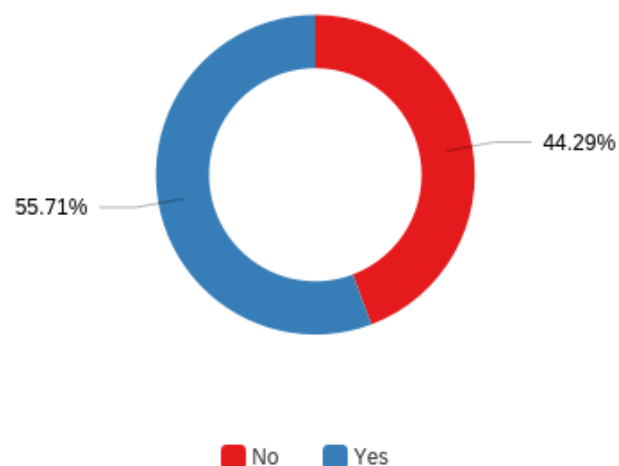


Analysis & Insight:

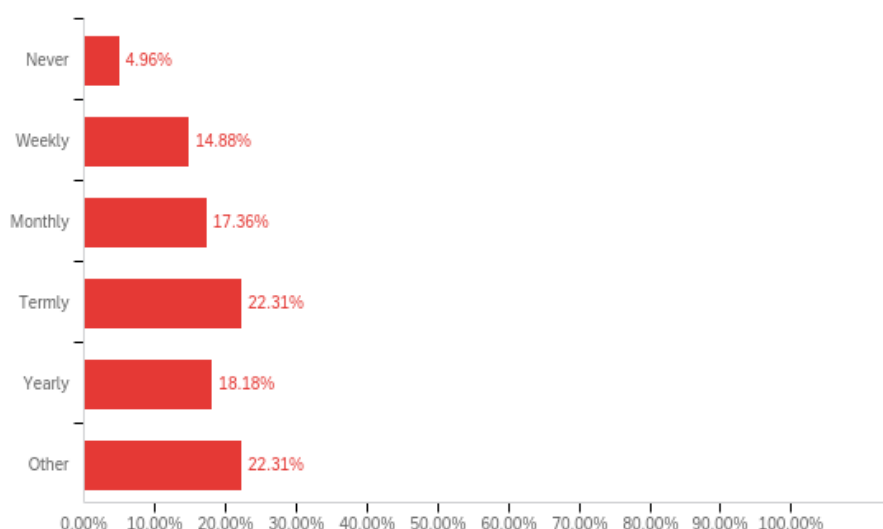
The majority (94%) of employer-providers and 99% of academic staff from other training providers utilise feedback as a valuable resource for informing modifications to their module content.

Tutor and Line Manager Training

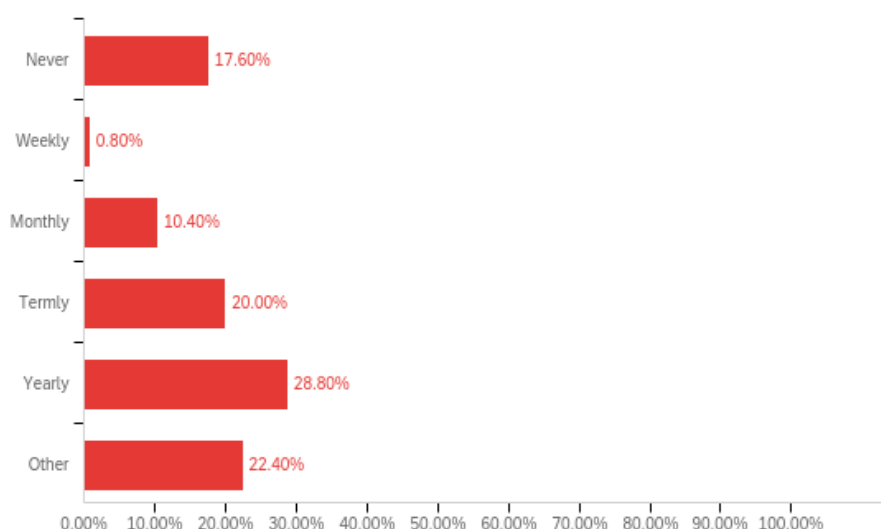
Question employers: Does your training provider provide some form of induction/training for line managers/mentors?



Question to training providers: How often does your university provide bespoke structures/systems to support processes and running of your Degree Apprenticeship programmes/courses?



Question to training providers: How often is an apprenticeship-specific training/induction given to tutors (both new and old)?



Analysis & Insight:

A significant proportion of training providers, 44%, do not provide some form of induction/training for line managers/mentors. Most of them, 95%, agree that their institutions provide bespoke systems for their Degree Apprenticeship course, but, nearly a fifth (18%) have never had an apprenticeship-specific training/induction. 60% provide such training regularly at least once a year while others have other informal or ad-hoc schemes. One employer commented that the induction process for new tutors and visiting lecturers entailed

'having that initial meeting with them, taking them through what they're going to need to teach on the modules... telling them of the challenges, what the apprentices prefer, what they struggle with, what they really need to know in terms of their work-based practise and just generic setup of the course and how the course works.'

Regular support and mentoring was also available to training provider staff as one mentioned,

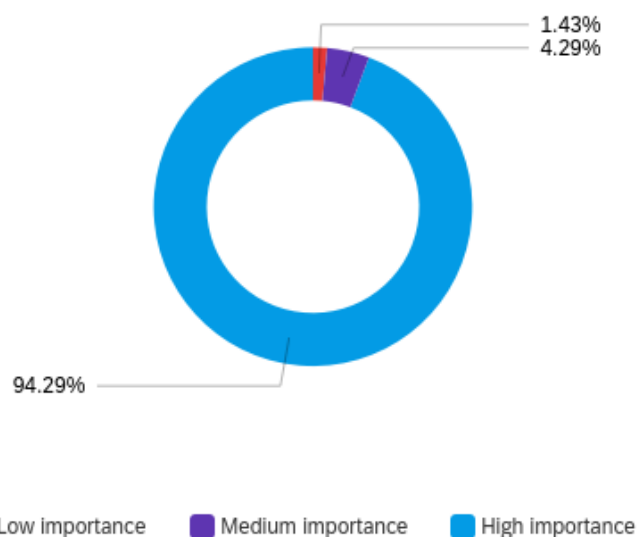
'... we have a weekly operational meeting as well, which is really useful so we can get together and share and have any training that we need...'

Feedback to Employers

Question to employers: How important is it for you to be receiving feedback regarding your apprentices' academic performance?

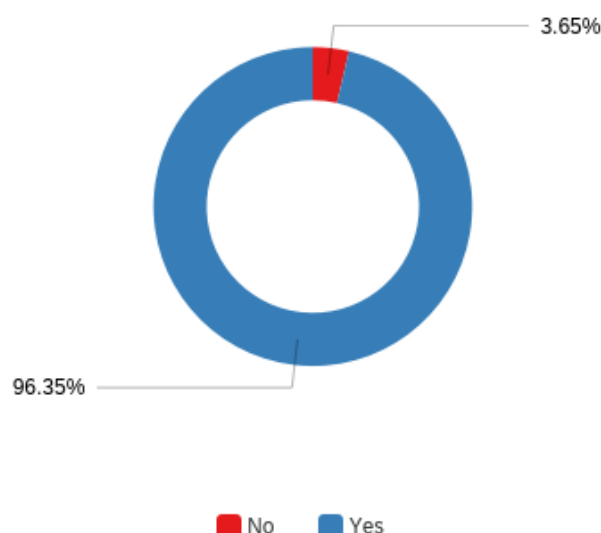
Analysis & Insight:

All employers, 100%, state that receiving feedback regarding their apprentices' academic performance is important, with 94% categorising it as highly important.

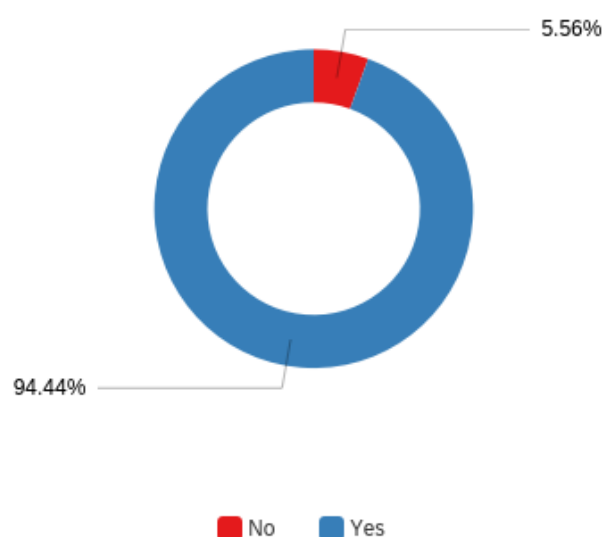


Continuing Professional Development

Question to training providers: Does your institution have a dedicated Apprenticeship Unit/Department?



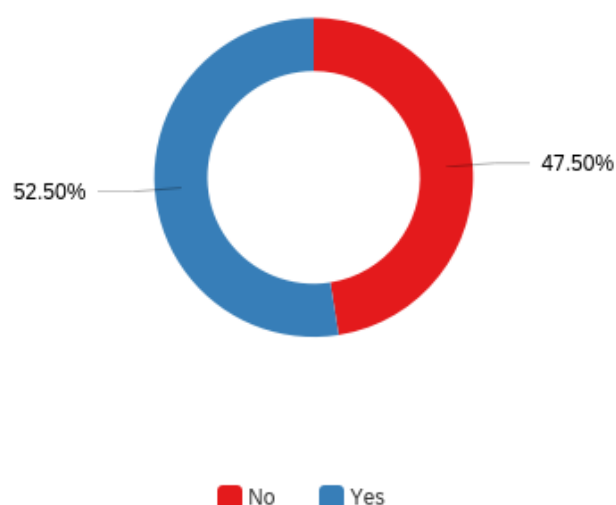
Question to training providers: Does your institution have a professional development team which supports teaching practice and pedagogy?



Question to training providers: Is training for delivering Degree Apprenticeships available as a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunity within your institution?

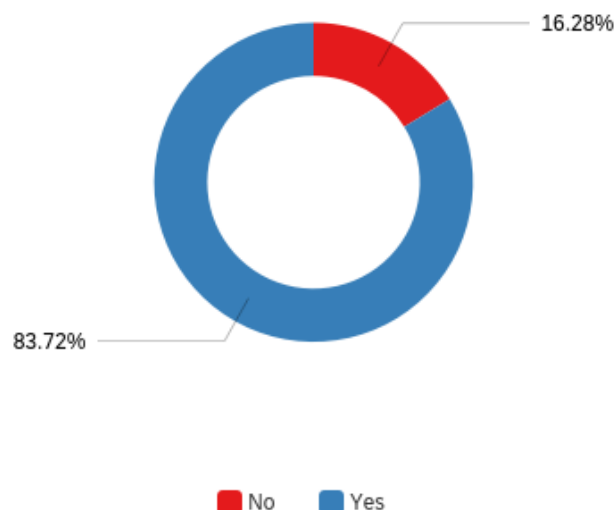
Analysis & Insight:

While a significant majority (96%) of training provider participants report dedicated apprenticeship departments or units, and 94% have teams supporting teaching practice and pedagogy, only 53% offer training for delivering Degree Apprenticeships as a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunity within their institutions.



Sharing Good Practice

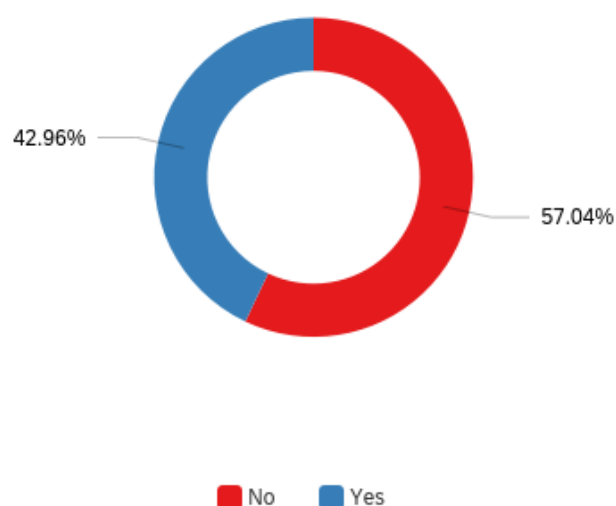
Question to training providers: Does your institution take steps to ensure that good practice from teaching Degree Apprenticeship is spread to non-apprentice provision?



Question to training providers: Are you aware of opportunities to share teaching practice (of Degree Apprenticeships) with other academics outside of your institution?

Analysis & Insight:

A significant proportion (84%) of training provider participants acknowledge that their institutions actively disseminate effective teaching practices from Degree Apprenticeships to non-apprenticeship programmes. However, only a minority (43%) are cognisant of opportunities to share teaching methodologies related to Degree Apprenticeships beyond their institutional boundaries.



Regarding the training and induction of those involved in delivering and supporting Degree Apprenticeship programmes, participants have highlighted various training formats. Some mentioned having yearly teaching/training for staff saying,

'We take them through the programme and the requirements and the KSBs so they know exactly their best place to support the apprentices in clinical practise.' There were also 'signpost both internal and external training and development opportunities for staff on a regular and ongoing basis.'

The majority stated having meetings and conversations between tutors and programme leads to sharing good practice and their expertise:

'I think they're really, really effective. I've been involved in lots of them for different apprenticeships. And it's where a lot of good practice or, or questions about what might be good practice are raised and discussed.'

Another staff mentioned,

'an apprenticeship management group...[is] not a formal committee of the university, we, obviously we have those. But it's the right people being in the right, mostly virtual space, discussing developments and opportunities and things that needs to be put in place to deliver high-quality apprenticeships. It's across all of the faculties of the University and includes professional services staff, faculty staff, staff from my team in the Centre of apprenticeships and skills and it's been absolutely essential...'

CONCLUSION

In summary, the project team has formulated several recommendations and compiled a comprehensive good practice guide.

Recommendations

Government

- **Recognise the critical role of the apprenticeship levy in supporting the successful implementation of Degree Apprenticeships.** Approximately 97% of employer partners emphasise the importance of funding Degree Apprenticeship courses through the apprenticeship levy. Sustain the levy to ensure continued growth and accessibility of Degree Apprenticeships, especially given the demonstrable impact of Degree Apprenticeships.

Training Providers

- **Enhance the Learning Community Experience:** Training providers should actively work toward improving the learning community experience for learners.
- **Alignment of Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviours (KSB):** Ensure that the curriculum aligns KSB (Knowledge Skills and Behaviours) with real-world workplace requirements.
- **Training for Line Managers and Mentors:** Develop structured training programmes for line managers and mentors to enhance their understanding of apprenticeship requirements.
- **Strengthen Training Provider-Employer Interaction:** Foster stronger collaboration and communication between training providers and employers.
- **Prioritise academic support for degree apprentices:** Implement dedicated structures and mechanisms to offer targeted academic skills support to degree apprentices, distinct from non-apprenticeship peers.

- **Develop bespoke teaching approaches:** Encourage and incentivise academics to diversify teaching methods for degree apprentices, tailoring them to workplace context and learning needs.
- **Invest in apprenticeship-specific training:** Ensure all staff involved in Degree Apprenticeships receive regular, high-quality training, including new hires and those who have not yet participated in any apprenticeship-specific training.
- **Foster knowledge sharing:** Encourage internal and external collaboration to share best practices in teaching and supporting degree apprentices.
- **Feedback on Apprentices' Academic Performance:** Training providers should prioritise providing feedback to employers regarding the academic performance of their apprentices.

Employers

- **Promote Apprenticeship Advantages:** Employers should actively promote the benefits of apprenticeships, emphasising both individual career prospects and organisational growth.
- **Workplace Mentoring:** Recognise the importance of workplace mentors for degree apprentices. All employer participants agree, to varying degrees, that apprentices should have a workplace mentor.
- **Promote awareness of off-the-job needs:** Raise awareness among employers (line managers and mentors) and learners regarding the importance of off-the-job learning and the specific requirements and responsibilities involved.

Employer-Training Provider Relationship

- **Provide line manager/mentor training:** While almost all training providers and employers recognise the importance of this relationship, nearly half of the employers do not feel adequately supported. Address the gap by ensuring that training providers offer induction or training for line managers and mentors.
- **Focus on employer expectations:** Training providers should focus on delivering effective training to meet employer expectations and enhance support for apprentices.

Third-Party Organisations

- **Address perceptions of Degree Apprenticeships:** Work collaboratively to improve the perception and esteem of Degree Apprenticeships among learners and the wider community. Highlight success stories and showcase the value proposition of these programmes.
- **Enhance learner integration:** Foster a more inclusive learning environment for degree apprentices. This could involve dedicated spaces, social events, and mentorship programmes.

By implementing these recommendations, we can ensure that Degree Apprenticeships continue to provide a high-quality, valued learning experience for all involved, contributing to individual and organisational success.

Good Practice Guide

Training providers

1. Training providers should implement a rigorous recognition of prior learning (RPL) process and a robust non-standard entry route during the application stage. This will ensure that relevant work experience is appropriately recognised and valued, even when it does not align with traditional academic requirements.
2. Training providers should create specialised apprenticeship departments to oversee Degree Apprenticeship programmes. These departments would be tasked with coordinating staff inductions specific to apprenticeships, ensuring compliance with regulatory standards, preparing for Ofsted inspections, and facilitating continuous professional development and best practices across departments and institutions.
3. Training providers should guarantee a demonstrably differentiated learning experience for Degree Apprenticeship learners compared to traditional full-time degrees. This includes employing distinct teaching methods and assessments directly linked to learners' workplace contexts. Furthermore, robust study skills support should be implemented to empower participants in navigating the demands of academic study alongside their professional commitments.
4. To optimise the success of apprenticeship programmes, training providers should forge robust partnerships with employer partners. This commitment should manifest in regular engagement, fostering collaborative participation in programme design and delivery, ongoing feedback mechanisms on apprentice progress, and dedicated training and induction opportunities for line managers.

5. Programme teams should meet regularly to discuss learner progress, to action employer and learner feedback, and to adjust or enhance the course offer.
6. To ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness to learner needs, programme teams should convene regularly to 1) analyse learner progress data, 2) action practicable employer and learner feedback, and 3) collaboratively adjust or enhance the course offerings.
7. Programme teams should incorporate annual peer observations into their staff development plans. This practice ensures ongoing standardisation of course delivery, enhancement of teaching methodologies, and adequate preparation for Ofsted evaluations.

Employers

1. Trailblazer groups, responsible for developing Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviours (KSBs) for apprenticeships, should ensure that these KSBs are demonstrably informed by and aligned with established higher education learning outcome expectations. This alignment will ensure that apprenticeships deliver qualifications that are recognised as being equivalent to traditional higher education degrees in terms of academic rigour and knowledge attainment.
2. Employers should champion efficient utilisation of apprentice off-the-job time, providing both workplace support and resources to facilitate their academic progress.
3. Line managers play a pivotal role in the success of apprenticeships by actively fostering the tripartite relationship between employer, training provider, and apprentice. This commitment manifests in consistent attendance at induction, training, and progress meetings, complemented by initiatives that broaden the apprentice's skillset, leadership potential, and business acumen.
4. To cultivate employee engagement and career progression, employers should actively showcase the transformative potential of Degree Apprenticeships to their existing workforce. Highlighting the programme's benefits can elevate internal perceptions, foster a culture of lifelong learning, and incentivise talent retention.

Learners

1. Degree Apprenticeships offer an enriching blend of work and study, but prospective participants should be prepared for its rigorous demands. Robust support networks and effective time management skills are crucial for success, ensuring a fulfilling experience that balances academic growth with professional contributions.
2. To navigate the multifaceted demands of Degree Apprenticeships, proactive communication with key stakeholders is essential. Degree apprentices should regularly engage with their workplace delivery tutor, academic teaching staff, and employer to voice their needs, seek support, and collaboratively ensure a sustainable work-life balance.

APPENDIX

Research Methodology

The research employed a three-phase design to comprehensively address key areas of interest. **Phase One** was initiated with an internal project team (see the Project Team section for the diversity of the team members) meeting to define the scope and identify crucial thematic areas for exploration. Subsequently, these themes were translated into targeted survey questions for two distinct consultation groups. One group comprised staff members from training provider institutions, offering valuable insights from an internal perspective. The other, consisting of learners enrolled in the programmes, provided a vital apprentice-centric viewpoint. To complete the data collection, the research team independently developed questionnaires geared towards employers. A summary of survey respondents is summarised in the table below.

Respondent Group	Number of respondents
Learner	1073 participants
Employer	128 participants
Training provider	248 participants

Table 1: summary of survey respondents

Phase Two saw the deployment of meticulously crafted surveys targeted towards learners, employers, and training providers across the nation. As survey responses steadily populated the dataset, the project team conducted a preliminary thematic analysis, identifying nascent patterns and key areas for deeper exploration. This analysis yielded distinct sets of follow-up questions for each participant group, subsequently employed in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) designed to delve deeper into emerging themes.

The initial data exploration employed Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ("Person Coefficient") with a two-tailed significance level of 0.05 to identify potential causal relationships for further investigation. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was chosen due to its robustness to non-normality in the data. The absolute value threshold of 0.80 for the correlation coefficient represents a strong association, while the p-value of 0.05 signifies a statistically significant relationship at the 95% confidence level. The sample size criteria ensure adequate statistical power for analysis within each participant group. Regarding further inferential statistics, with the use of continuous scales for the dependent variables, and the combination of both categorical and continuous independent variables, a pairwise linear regression was done with Ordinary Least Square (OLS) to investigate the causality with coefficients that indicate the unit changes among the two variables. The use of OLS enables a consistent, measurable, and linear explanation of the research questions proposed.

Phase Three comprised the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Utilising a collaborative approach, institutions within the project team paired up to facilitate the FGDs. Each of these paired groups assumed responsibility for participant recruitment and conducting their designated FGDs. To accommodate remote participation, the discussions were held via Microsoft Teams. Following the FGDs, the team reviewed and verified the auto-generated transcripts from Microsoft Teams, ensuring verbatim accuracy. This rigorous process involved cross-referencing the transcripts against the audio recordings to guarantee fidelity to the participants' voices. To facilitate thematic analysis, the transcripts were further anonymised by removing identifying information.

The initial interview questions served as a foundational coding framework for the thematic analysis. This framework employed a mixed inductive-deductive approach, leveraging the pre-established categories as a guiding structure while simultaneously allowing for the emergence of new themes and sub-codes directly from the transcript data. Codes reflecting similar conceptual nuances were then grouped into broader thematic categories. Subsequently, the refined coding framework was applied to successive transcripts, undergoing an iterative process of refinement until theoretical saturation was achieved, indicating no further emergence of new codes across the entire dataset. Finally, the coded data was exported for thematic organisation and summarisation, facilitating the identification of patterns and relationships between the identified themes.

Participant Profiles

To foster diverse participation, the project team employed a multi-channel recruitment strategy. Leveraging internal institutional channels and external connections, they successfully attracted respondents from all levels of the Degree Apprenticeship programme, ensuring a comprehensive representation of perspectives across the target population.

Apprentices

- The learner participant demographics reveal a good spread of learners across various age groups, with the youngest respondent being 18 years old.
- The breakdown of participant ethnicity reveals that 82% identify as White (British/Irish/Gypsy etc.), while a smaller percentage are from non-White backgrounds. While this distribution generally mirrors the broader population demographics of England and Wales as reported in the 2021 Census⁷, it underscores the ongoing need for focused efforts to encourage greater participation from minority communities in apprenticeship programmes.
- The data reveals a gender composition with just over 60% identifying as women and just under 40% identifying as men. Individuals identifying as transgender, non-binary, or preferring not to disclose their gender comprised less than 1% of respondents. This overall distribution is not too far from the broader UK population trends⁸, but further investigation is needed to understand the experiences and potential barriers faced by underrepresented groups in Degree Apprenticeships.
- The majority (76%) of participating learners were enrolled in a Level 6 Degree Apprenticeship programme. This finding highlights the prevalence of this level within the Degree Apprenticeship structure.
- Most, 58% of Level 6 degree apprentices do not hold a prior degree, indicating a significant proportion enter Degree Apprenticeships without prior academic qualification at this level. Interestingly, among those with existing degrees (45%), a notable portion seeks new skills and career opportunities or personal development through the programme, suggesting broader motivations beyond solely obtaining a higher qualification. About a fifth, 21%, saw Degree Apprenticeships as an alternative route into higher education.
- Most, 64%, degree apprentices earn between £12,571 and £31,420; only 44% of Level 6 learners earn above this band while a majority, 74% of Level 7 learners earn above the band.

Training Providers

- The study found a balanced representation of genders among participants, with 53% identifying as women and 44% identifying as men. The remaining participants identified as transgender or preferred not to disclose their gender identity.
- The majority of participants (approximately 80%) reported having sufficient experience in higher education.
- Given the relatively recent introduction of Degree Apprenticeships, it is unsurprising that approximately half (52%) of the participants have less than three years of experience in this area.

Employers

- A notable 91% of participating employers have been established for at least 15 years, indicating a strong presence of experienced organisations in the programme.
- It is encouraging to see participation from a diverse range of business sizes, with 16% and 21% of employers representing organisations with 1-100 and 101-500 employees, respectively. Notably, over half of the participants hail from larger organisations with 1000 or more employees.
- In terms of experience with Degree Apprenticeships, the majority (60%) of participating employers have been involved for three years or less. Additionally, a quarter have between four and five years of experience, while the remaining participants have been involved for six or more years.
- A significant majority (85%) of participating employers have 1-100 apprentices, while a smaller portion (11%) have between 101 and 500 apprentices.

⁷<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity>

⁸<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/male-and-female-populations/latest/>

We would like to thank all participants and colleagues who have supported the project. We are also indebted to the esteemed colleagues who have contributed forewords.

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