Degree apprenticeship funding competition evaluation

Interim findings: Equality of opportunity

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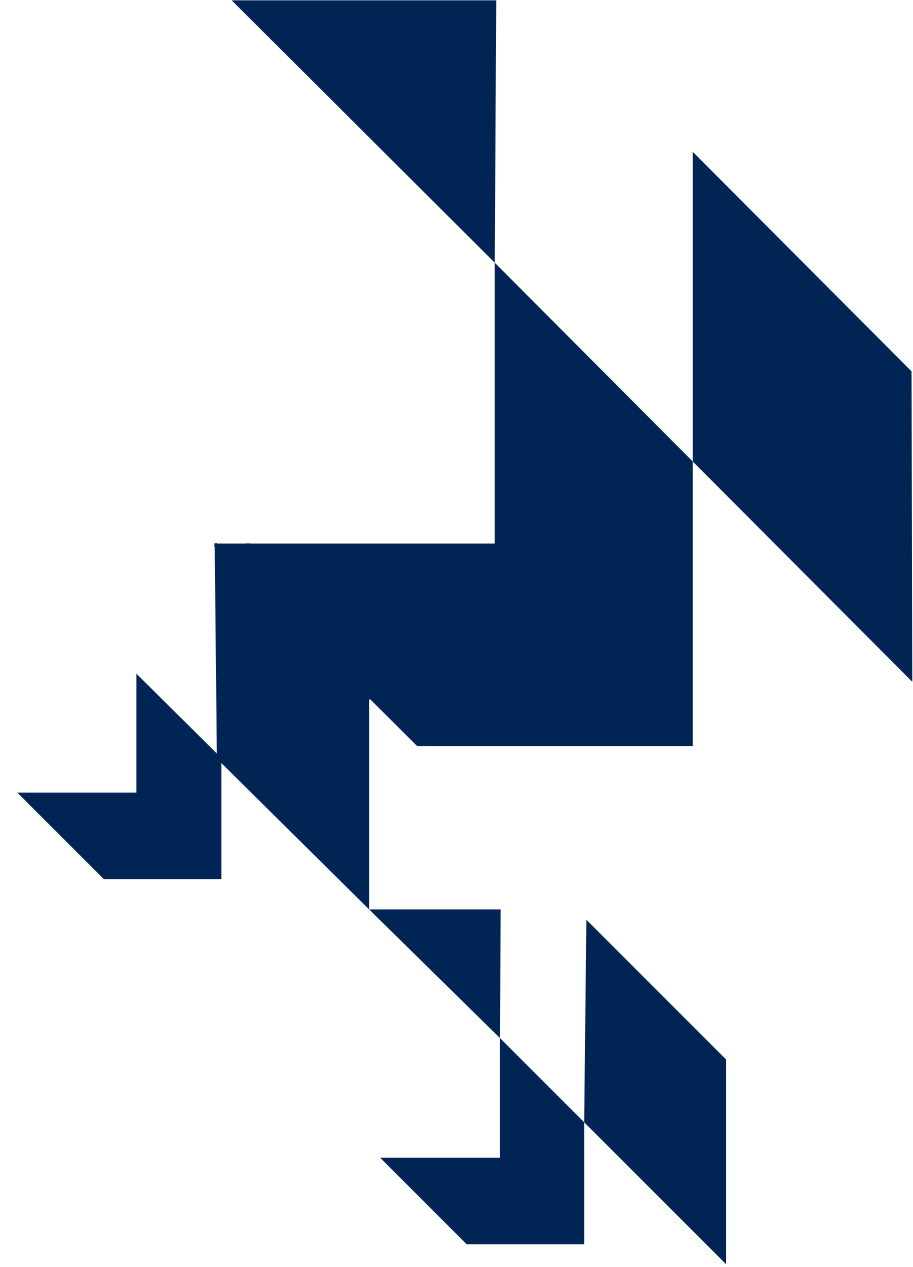
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The importance of degree apprenticeships in our work

The why…

In 2015, the UK government introduced the degree apprenticeship programme as part of the higher apprenticeship standard.

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The OfS wants all students to gain the skills they need to succeed in future employment or further study. We undertake a range of activity to support the supply of higher-level skills in England.

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Degree apprenticeships contribute to the diversity of provision in the English higher education sector. This enables students to have choice, contributes to local and regional prosperity and skills development, and equality of opportunity in higher education.

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Using analysis of various OfS data sets, it was discovered that there was a relatively small proportion of registered providers currently delivering degree apprenticeship starts, there was uneven and slow growth of Level 6 degree apprenticeship starts across registered providers and there was disparity in the number of starts on Level 6 degree apprenticeships for different groups of students with shared characteristics.

The how…

The OfS has previously allocated £8 million to providers (in the academic year 2022-23) to support activities related to the growth and development of Level 6 degree apprenticeship training programmes.

In March 2023, the DfE set out its priorities for the use of the Strategic Priorities Grant that it allocates to the OfS, including that the OfS should provide up to £40 million to deliver a competitive Level 6 degree apprenticeship fund across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years.

In September 2023, the OfS launched a funding competition to support English higher education providers to grow and build capacity and increase equality of opportunity in Level 6 degree apprenticeships.

To date, the OfS has provided £40 million, over three waves, to deliver a competitive Level 6 degree apprenticeship fund across the 2023-34 and 2024-25 academic years.

What has happened in the last 12 months
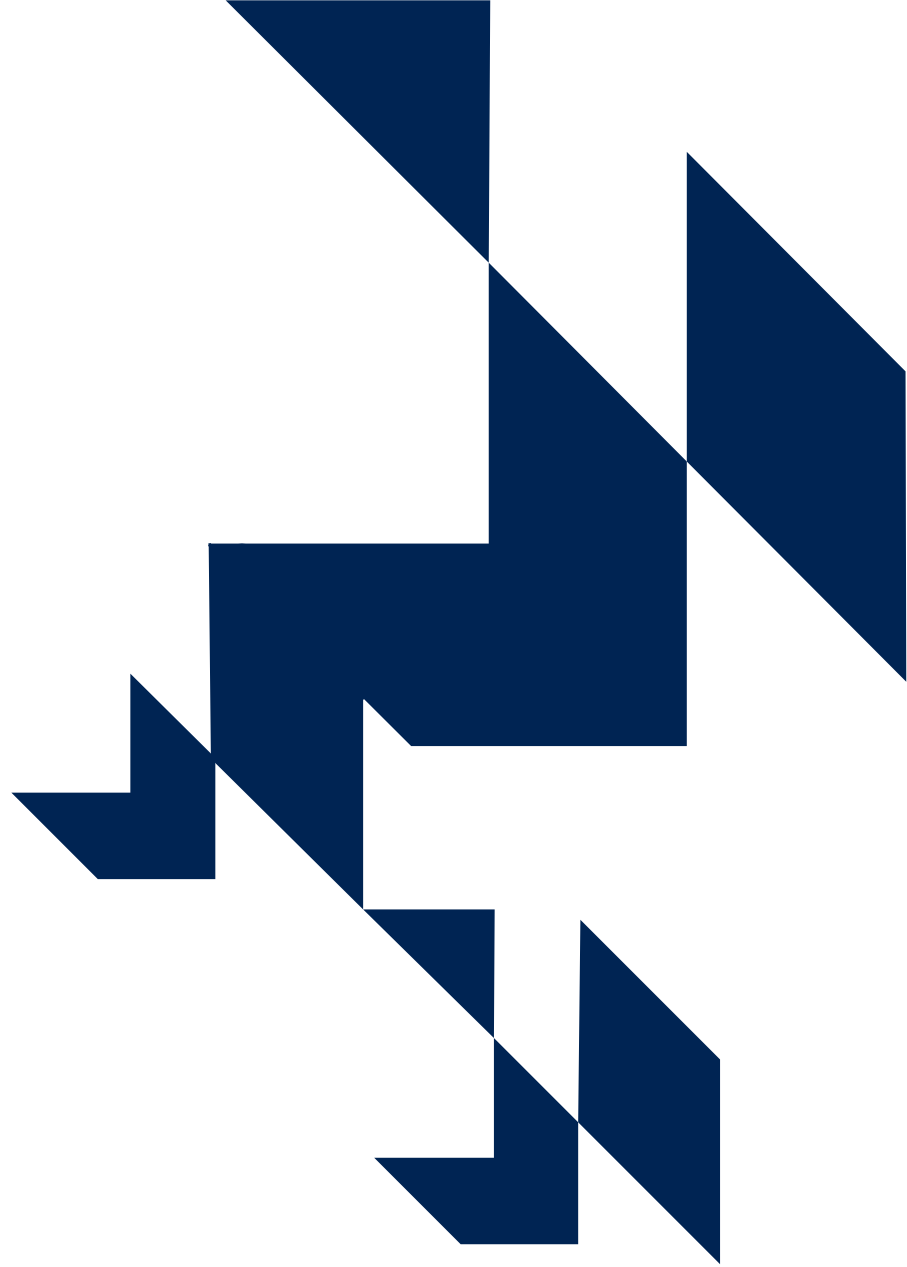
The outputs…

Total number of bids assessed	Successful bids	Unsuccessful bids	Total funding requested	Total funding allocated
217	117	100	£81,351,785	£40,040,057

Region	No. of providers	No. of projects
East	9	13
East Midlands	7	12
London	9	13
North East	3	5
North West	12	15
South East	11	16
South West	14	23
West Midlands	9	10
Yorkshire and Humber	8	10

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Funded standards

Degree Apprenticeship Standard	Count	Degree Apprenticeship Standard	Count
ST0781 - Registered Nurse Degree (NMC 2018)	31	ST0519 - Physiotherapist	13
ST0510 - Social Worker	22	ST0582 - Operating Department Practitioner	13
ST0025 - Manufacturing engineer	19	ST1314 - Biomedical Scientist	11
ST0272 - Chartered Manager	17	Teacher - in development	11
ST0517 - Occupational Therapist	17	ST0409 - Cyber Security Technical Professional	10
ST0585 - Data Scientist	17	ST0417 - Civil Engineer	10
ST0119 - Digital and Technology Solutions Professional	16	ST0470 - Digital user experience (UX) professional	10
ST0619 - Diagnostic Radiographer	16	ST0625 - Creative digital design professional	10
ST0522 - Youth Worker	15	ST1303 - Accounting Finance Manager	10
ST0948 - Midwife (2019 NMC Standards)	15	*6 Standards*	7 to 9
ST0411 - Project Manager	14	*14 Standards*	4 to 6
ST0481 - Digital Marketer	14	*37 Standards*	1 to 3
ST0027 - Product design and development engineer	13		

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Evaluating impact

We have procured an evaluation of the degree apprenticeship funding competition which is being undertaken by **Ipsos UK**, supported by the **Education Policy Institute,** over the course of the funding competition.
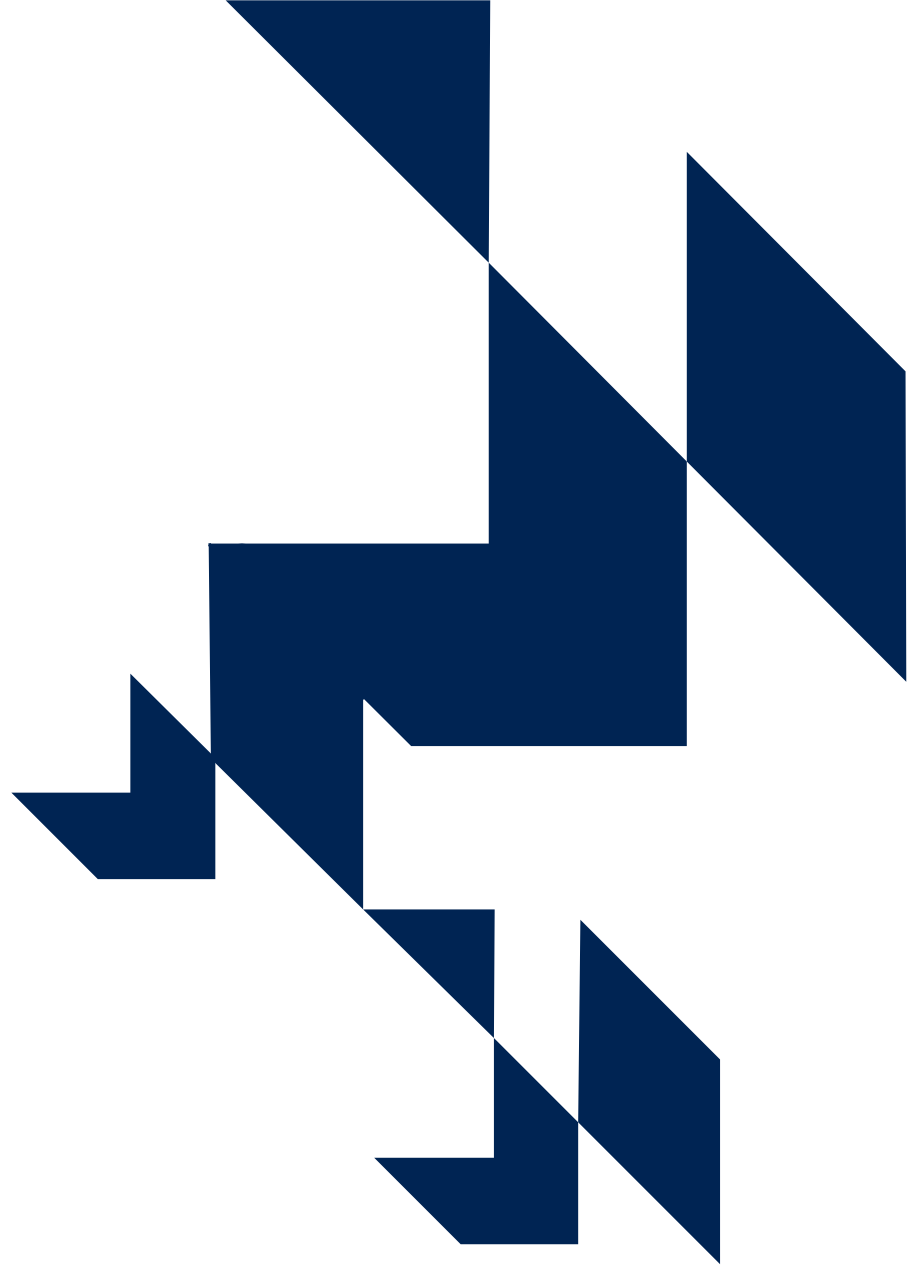
They have already undertaken some analysis of Wave 1 of the competition and produced an **equality of opportunity thematic report**, highlighting early findings.

We can disseminate these findings, today.

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Early findings from wave 1

What worked well

Designated roles

- Recruiting new staff or seconding existing staff into **designated roles focused on marketing and outreach** was said by providers to have worked well
- One provider used the funding to recruit a Marketing Manager who coordinated efforts across social media, events and partnerships, specifically targeting underrepresented groups

Targeted outreach

- Providers who conducted targeted outreach activities reported success in attracting prospective students from underrepresented groups
- Activities included workshops in **schools** located in areas with high deprivation or large ethnic minority populations, **aspiration-raising events**, and **informational sessions for parents and carers**
- One provider noted the benefits of combining outreach activities (going out to students) with hosting events/open days (bringing students into campuses) to reach new prospective students and allow them to experience higher education environments

Challenging misconceptions

- Activities aimed at challenging misconceptions about degree apprenticeships and higher education were particularly effective
- Providers used **peer networks** and **role models**, involving current and former apprentices in outreach events to share their experiences and the benefits of degree apprenticeships

Working with local community groups

- Included working with the Black Apprenticeship Network to expand their reach and connect with students from Afro Caribbean backgrounds and the Quest for Economic Development (QED) which focuses on supporting young people from Southeast Asian backgrounds

What challenges did providers face?

Time constraints

- Providers identified the limited time available to deliver Wave 1 funded activities as a key challenge
- Notification of the funding award was received in December, which resulted in some delays over the Christmas period, and **the seven-month funding period was not considered long enough, particularly to recruit new staff into designated roles**
- Providers have had to delay some course starts to later in 2024-25 or to the 2025-26 academic year

Internal processes

- University processes such as approvals, validation panels, and quality assurance boards were often considered slow and delayed the completion of new apprenticeship programmes
- Where these processes could not be completed in time, this **delayed starts that were planned for the 2024-25 academic year**

Recruitment issues

- The recruitment and onboarding of staff to deliver funded activities presented challenges, particularly for activities aimed at increasing equality of opportunity where **designated roles were often newly created to deliver these activities**

External factors

- Providers referenced external factors such as **inspections and apprenticeship standards reviews**, as created barriers to delivering planned activities within the timescales

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Early indication of outcomes

Increased opportunity

- Over eight in ten (81%) providers who delivered activities aimed at increasing equality of opportunity thought that the Wave 1 funding had contributed to **increased opportunities for students from underrepresented groups**

Improved recruitment practices

- Over three quarters (77%) of providers delivering activities aimed at engaging employers thought that Wave 1 funding had enabled them to **improve the inclusivity of employers' recruitment practices** to reach degree apprentices from diverse backgrounds
- However, providers were more likely to report that Wave 1 funded activities had contributed to other employer outcomes not relating to equality of opportunity

Increased demand

- Over two thirds (69%) of providers thought that Wave 1 funding had enabled them to **increase demand for Level 6 degree apprenticeships from students in underrepresented groups**
- The contribution of degree apprenticeship funding competition activities to increasing applications was considered strongest for students from low-economic backgrounds, mature students, and those eligible for free school meals
- However, many said they **didn't know how far funded activities had contributed to increased applications** from these groups

Longer-term impacts

- Providers who participated in interviews generally felt that it was **too early to tell whether Wave 1 funding had effectively contributed to the diversification of apprentices on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes**
- Some newly developed degree apprenticeship programmes were postponed to later academic years, which may delay a full assessment of the impact of the funding on the numbers of starts from underrepresented groups

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Summary of key findings so far

The degree apprenticeship funding competition has stimulated new and/or enhanced activities

- Providers reported that Wave 1 funding had successfully stimulated new and additional activities aimed at increasing equality of opportunity which would not have been delivered without the funding

- There are promising signs for some activity types

- Designated roles, targeted outreach initiatives and activities aimed at challenging ideas and assumptions about higher education and particular industries all show promise of contributing to increased awareness and demand for Level 6 degree apprenticeships from currently underrepresented groups

It is still too early to measure the full impact

- Providers are not yet certain of the extent to which funded activities have contributed to an increase in applications from underrepresented groups

- This is partly due to the employer-led apprenticeship recruitment process which limits providers' access to detailed application data

- Some funded activities also have longer timeframes (e.g. those delivered in schools) and are not expected to lead to increased starts for another two to five years.

Thank you for listening

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