Evaluation of the Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition (DAFC)

Interim Report 1: Findings from Wave 1 of the DAFC

Report to the OfS by Ipsos UK and the Education Policy Institute

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Background

In September 2023, the Office for Students (OfS) introduced the Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition (DAFC) for higher education providers to increase the provision and uptake of level 6 (L6) Degree apprenticeships. The DAFC's objectives were to: expand offerings among existing providers of L6 Degree apprenticeships by launching new programmes and increasing the capacity and number of new starts within current provisions (Strand 1); grow the provision of programmes among providers new to L6 Degree apprenticeships (Strand 2); and enhance equality of opportunity across L6 Degree apprenticeships.

DAFC funding was distributed across three waves. Wave 1 specifically targeted providers already delivering Degree apprenticeship programmes, pushing a rapid expansion of their offers and boosting the capacity of their existing programmes. The Wave 1 funding period ran from January to July 2024. Waves 2 and 3 were inclusive of all eligible providers, including those that were not already offering this type of provision, focusing on growing and developing new programmes. Funding for Wave 2 ran from April 2024 to July 2025 and Wave 3 ran from October 2024 to July 2025.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

Ipsos, working in partnership with the Education Policy Institute (EPI), was appointed by the OfS to deliver a process, impact and value for money evaluation of the DAFC. The evaluation covers the period from September 2023 to August 2026.

This report presents interim findings of the evaluation, focusing on the design, delivery, outcomes and impacts of Wave 1 funded projects. It draws on data collection and analysis conducted between August 2024 and July 2025.

Qualitative fieldwork for this phase of the evaluation incorporated 11 interviews with funded providers, two focus groups with apprentices, and eight interviews with employers. Additionally, three provider-level case studies were also conducted to provide an in-depth view of delivery experiences, with additional interviews conducted for each case study.

Quantitative data was collected through two surveys, capturing responses from 47 out of 51 Wave 1 DAFC-funded providers and 150 employers that had been involved in Wave 1 DAFC-funded activities. The provider survey was conducted between September and December 2024, while the employer survey ran from November 2024 to January 2025.

Analysis was undertaken on Wave 1 providers' funding applications and monitoring reports submitted to the OfS. This was done using a combination of researcher review and analysis using a

Large Language Model (LLM).[1] The analysis was used to identify key themes in the application data relating to funded activities as well as progress in delivery of these.

To observe trends in the provision and uptake of L6 Degree apprenticeships, student-level data was analysed from the individualised student return collected annually by the Designated Data Body (DDB) and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) collected by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Descriptive secondary data analysis covers the period up to the 2023/24 academic year (the latest available at the time of reporting), which coincides with delivery of Wave 1 DAFC-funded activities. It can therefore be considered a baseline of trends in the provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships prior to the introduction of the funding. Future phases of the evaluation will incorporate analysis of subsequent years' data, which will explore changes in the provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships within funded organisations, focusing on assessing progress towards the key outcomes of interest for the fund.

1.3 Summary of key findings

1.3.1 Design and delivery of Wave 1 funded projects

A total of 51 providers were awarded funding through Wave 1 of the DAFC, totalling £11.7m. Providers requested an average of £227,000, with funding awards ranging from £54,000 up to £1m. Providers applied for funding to deliver a range of activities associated with enhancing their L6 Degree apprenticeship provision including curriculum development, employer engagement, apprentice attraction and project management to ensure funding activities were delivered as planned.

Wave 1 providers generally considered the funding application process to be straightforward and the support from OfS, including templates, guidance, and webinars, to be effective at guiding them through the application process. However, providers raised challenges with the short timeframe to submit their funding applications, uncertainty about how much detail to include in the qualitative sections of the application template and challenges with estimating the numbers of expected new apprenticeship starts.

Providers shared that most projects were delivered as planned. Where there was underspend, this was predominantly due to delays in recruiting and appointing staff, delays to project setup (sometimes due to protracted internal administration processes), difficulties engaging employers and lower than expected costs for some activities.

In most cases, providers were already delivering activities that were similar to those funded by the DAFC. However, more than half of providers said they would have been unlikely to have delivered

[1] Large Language Models (LLMs) are AI systems that learn about patterns in language through training data. They can be used in social research for text classification, question answering, text summarisation and text generation.

the full range of activities without the additional funding. This was most prominent in relation to activities aimed at developing new curriculum for L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes, where 66% of providers delivering these activities reported that they would have been unlikely to do so without the funding.

Providers reported that establishing strong governance processes for project delivery, including senior-level buy-in and employing dedicated specialist staff in key roles such as employer engagement and outreach, were enablers of successful delivery. The main barriers to successful delivery were protracted internal processes, such as internal validation and quality assurance processes for new programmes, lack of employer capacity to contribute to curriculum development and insufficient time to deliver the activities within the funding window.

Providers reported that as result of the funding they had expanded the number of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes and enhanced their organisations' skills and capabilities to deliver them. Around nine in 10 providers reported greater capabilities to deliver L6 Degree apprenticeships (89%), having a more strategic approach to increasing equality of opportunity on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (89%) and more staff time and capacity to deliver these (85%).

1.3.2 Curriculum development and revision

Three-quarters of Wave 1 providers (74%) used the funding to develop curriculum for new L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. This involved engaging employers in curriculum design to ensure alignment with industry needs, ensuring the validation and accreditation of new programmes, and designing teaching and learning resources to be delivered flexibly.

Some providers with staff who were new to Degree apprenticeships described the mindset shift required to develop vocationally focused programmes as opposed to traditional academic courses. These providers referenced requiring additional staff training and upskilling (sometimes from external consultants) to ensure new programmes met the requirements of degree-level apprenticeships.

Successful curriculum development typically involved providers leveraging internal expertise and engaging employers in co-creating and designing the curriculum. External challenges included delays from professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies in programme validation, impacting programme timelines and recruitment targets.

Nearly half of surveyed providers (47%) reported that, as a direct result of activities supported through Wave 1 DAFC funding, between one and 10 new L6 Degree apprenticeship vacancies had been created. However, a similar proportion (44%) could not estimate the number of new vacancies that had been created or did not find the question applicable to them. This was due to it being too soon to tell, particularly for new programmes that had not yet launched.

Interviewed employers generally considered the new programmes to be industry-relevant and to address sector-specific skills needed. Most surveyed employers that were involved with Wave 1-

funded activities agreed that L6 Degree apprenticeships were attractive to their organisation as a recruitment pathway (91%) and an effective way to address skills needs in their organisation (91%).

Feedback from current apprentices on Wave 1-funded apprenticeship programmes was generally positive. They considered the content to be engaging, although some cited challenges related to the wider experiences of engaging in a L6 Degree apprenticeships such as lacking a 'university experience' and challenges accessing pastoral support.

1.3.3 Employer attraction and engagement

Almost all (96%) Wave 1 providers used DAFC funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and engaging employers to support L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. This included delivering focused engagement activities (for example, events and conferences), developing employer engagement plans, attending conferences or forums hosted by employers, and advising on and supporting employers with the recruitment of L6 Degree apprentices.

Providers' engagement strategies with employers were tailored based on factors including whether the employer was local or nationwide, the size of the organisation (larger employers vs small and medium employers), and the sector (particularly public or private).

Half of surveyed employers (49%) engaged in events and/or conferences delivered by providers on the topic of L6 Degree apprenticeships, and around one-third engaged in the design and development of teaching and learning resources (35%), working collaboratively with providers to develop workforce plans which included L6 Degree apprentices (33%) and engaging in curriculum design (31%). Employers generally preferred provider-led forums as a way for them to engage, referencing the ability to connect with providers and other employers working in the same sector as impactful and fostering a collaborative environment.

Providers reported that the number and diversity of employers engaged in L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes had increased because of Wave 1-funded activities. Employers commented on the benefits of Degree apprenticeships, noting the high skill-level of L6 Degree apprentices and the benefit of Degree apprenticeships as both a recruitment pathway and a way to develop existing staff.

There is evidence that Wave 1-funded projects supported employers to engage in the design and delivery of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. Surveyed employers were asked to reflect on whether involvement in Wave 1 DAFC-funded activities had supported them to address barriers they had previously been facing. Nearly half (47%) felt that the activities had helped them to address the costs of managing L6 Degree apprentices. Over half (54%) said the activities had helped to address their lack of choice between providers offering this type of provision. Furthermore, over half (60%) said that the activities helped to address their lack of awareness of L6 Degree apprenticeships.

1.3.4 Apprentice attraction, recruitment and support

The majority (62%) of Wave 1 providers used DAFC funding for activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective apprentices onto L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. The activities included offering information, advice and guidance to prospective apprentices, delivering marketing campaigns and/or outreach events for prospective apprentices and engaging schools, colleges, parents or carers to promote L6 Degree apprenticeships.

Providers highlighted the pivotal role of employers in the attraction and recruitment of L6 Degree apprentices. Apprentices corroborated this view, citing employer marketing and recruitment processes as their main entryway onto L6 Degree apprenticeship courses.

Providers generally perceived that DAFC-funded activities had a positive impact on increasing awareness and improving the attractiveness of opportunities to prospective apprentices. Around one-third of providers (36%) reported that they received between one and 10 additional applications for L6 Degree apprenticeship vacancies as a direct result of the activities funded by the DAFC. Employers of L6 Degree apprentices also said they had received a sufficient number of applications onto their advertised vacancies, although did not directly connect the levels of demand with DAFC-funded activities.

Whilst not a Wave 1 requirement for new programmes, Wave 1 providers used DAFC funding to target groups historically underrepresented on Degree apprenticeship programmes. This included people from ethnic minority backgrounds, low socioeconomic backgrounds and areas of low participation in higher education. Around one in four employers of L6 Degree apprentices had targeted people from low socioeconomic backgrounds (24%), ethnic minority groups (24%) and areas with low higher education participation (22%).

Qualitative evidence from providers and employers indicates progress towards increasing awareness and understanding amongst underrepresented groups, and recognition that DAFC funding generally facilitated a perceived diversification of the wider apprentice cohort.

2 Background

2.1 Introduction

Ipsos, working in partnership with the EPI, were appointed by the OfS to deliver a process, impact and value for money evaluation of the DAFC.

2.2 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition (DAFC)

In June 2023, the OfS announced that they would make £40 million available during academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25 to fund projects aimed at growing and diversifying the provision of level 6 (L6) Degree apprenticeships offered in England.

In September 2023, the OfS launched the DAFC, which invited higher education providers to submit funding applications for projects that would grow and build capacity and increase equality of opportunity in L6 Degree apprenticeship provision.

The specific aims of DAFC were to:

1. Expand provision among providers already offering L6 Degree apprenticeships on apprenticeship standards with low uptake (Strand 1) through (a) delivery of new apprenticeship programmes; and (b) increasing the capacity and number of new starts on current apprenticeship provision.
2. Expand provision of apprenticeship standards with low uptake among providers that are new to the L6 Degree apprenticeships market (Strand 2).
3. Increase equality of opportunity in L6 Degree apprenticeships (cross-cutting theme).

The funding was delivered across three waves. Wave 1 was aimed at providers that are already offering Degree apprenticeship provision (Strand 1) to incentivise rapid expansion of their L6 Degree apprenticeship offer and increase capacity on existing programmes. Waves 2 and 3 were designed for all eligible providers including those that are new to the L6 Degree apprenticeship market (Strand 2) to grow existing and develop new programmes. For Wave 2 and Wave 3 providers, it was a requirement that their funding activities also contributed to increasing equality of opportunity on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. Wave 1 funding was concluded by 31 July 2024 and Wave 2 and 3 funding concluded in July 2025.

2.3 Interim report 1

This report presents interim findings from the DAFC evaluation focused on the design, delivery, outcomes, and impacts of Wave 1 funded projects. The next interim report will focus on Waves 2 and 3, and the final evaluation report to be submitted in August 2026, will present the programme-level evaluation findings across all three waves of funding.

3 Evaluation methodology

3.1 Evaluation overview

The aims of the DAFC evaluation are to:

a. Deliver a **process evaluation** to understand if providers in receipt of funding effectively undertook the activity outlined in their bids:

b. Deliver an **impact evaluation** to understand the extent to which the programme is delivering its strategic aims, and what has contributed to that performance; and

c. Assess the **value of the programme** and the investment provided to understand if it is delivering value for money.

The initial scoping phase of the evaluation ran from March to August 2024. The mainstage evaluation started in September 2024 and will conclude in August 2026 with the submission of the final evaluation report.

This report presents interim findings of the evaluation, focusing on the design, delivery, outcomes and impacts of Wave 1-funded projects. It draws on data collection and analysis conducted between August 2024 and July 2025.

3.2 Primary data collection

3.2.1 Qualitative data collection

As of July 2025, the following qualitative fieldwork activities had been conducted:

- **11 interviews** with delivery stakeholders in Wave 1-provider organisations
- **2 focus groups** with apprentices in Wave 1-supported Degree apprenticeship programmes (n=8)
- **8 interviews** with employers delivering Wave 1-supported Degree apprenticeship programmes.

Additionally, three providers were selected as case studies for enhanced data collection and analysis and to gather a more detailed picture of the delivery experiences and outcomes for those providers. Staff in the provider organisation, employers and apprentices were recruited to interviews across the three case studies. The final sample sizes for each case study were:

- **Case Study 1:** Staff (n=3), Employers (n=2), Apprentices (n=1)
- **Case Study 2:** Staff (n=3), Employers (n=1)
- **Case Study 3:** Staff (n=3), Employers (n=1)

Ipsos also led two workshops with providers in receipt of DAFC funding from across Waves 1, 2 and 3. The aims of the workshops were for Ipsos to present interim findings from the DAFC evaluation and to facilitate knowledge sharing between providers on the delivery of DAFC-funded activities. The first workshop was held on 1 April 2025 attended by 27 providers, and the second workshop was held on 29 April 2025 attended by 29 providers. Ipsos presented the emerging findings from the evaluation and facilitated breakout discussions amongst providers, which were prompted by a series of questions. The themes from the breakout sessions were summarised to further inform the evidence base for the evaluation.

3.2.2 Quantitative data collection

This interim report incorporates findings from two online surveys with providers in receipt of Wave 1 DAFC funding and employers that had been involved with activities delivered by HE providers through the Wave 1 DAFC.

The provider survey was conducted by Ipsos on behalf of the OfS. Fieldwork was delivered between September and December 2024. A total of 47 (out of 51) Wave 1 providers completed the survey achieving a response rate of 92%.

A second online survey was distributed to employers involved in Wave 1 DAFC activities by providers via an online link supplied by Ipsos. Fieldwork ran between November 2024 and January 2025. Overall, there were 150 completes. As the total number of employers that received the link from providers is unknown, it is not possible to calculate a response rate for this survey.

3.3 Secondary data analysis

3.3.1 Applications and monitoring returns

Providers' bid applications and monitoring data, both shared with Ipsos by the OfS, were analysed to identify themes across providers plans for project expenditure and progress in delivery. A combination of desk research and LLM[2] analysis was conducted in four stages:

1. **Systematic review:** First, the outputs from all bid applications and monitoring reports were reviewed by the research team to categorise different activities and progress reported by providers in response to the questions in the monitoring return template.
2. **AI-Powered Thematic Analysis:** This categorised information was then fed into a LLM, which was instructed to identify frequent themes in the providers responses to these questions.
3. **Human validation:** The themes generated by the LLM were then compared against the original content to ensure the output was coherent and reliable.

[2] Large Language Models (LLMs) are AI systems that learn about patterns in language through training data. They can be used in social research for text classification, question answering, text summarisation and text generation.

4. **Synthesis:** Finally, this validated output was used in conjunction with the original materials to produce a detailed overview of the provider responses from the bid applications and monitoring reports.

The resulting analysis detailed common responses from providers to each of the bid application and monitoring report questions. Much of the monitoring returns analysis is therefore thematic, pulling out core themes shared across many providers.

3.3.2 Student-level data analysis

Student-level data for secondary data analysis was collected from the individualised student return collected annually by the DDB and the ILR collected by the ESFA.

As Higher Education Institutions are not required to return learner-level characteristic data, characteristic information for students identified as studying on L6 apprenticeship programmes was collected from the ILR and joined onto DDB student data via person-based linking.

Descriptive secondary data analysis covers the period up to the 2023/24 academic year (the latest available at the time of reporting), which coincides with delivery of Wave 1 DAFC-funded activities. It can therefore be considered a baseline of trends in the provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships prior to the introduction of the funding.

Future phases of the evaluation will incorporate analysis of subsequent years' data, which will explore changes in the provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships within funded organisations, focusing on assessing progress towards the key outcomes of interest for the fund.

3.4 Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) is a collection of assumptions and hypotheses about how a policy or programme is expected to work. The evaluation of the DAFC is underpinned by a ToC which provides the framework for assessing whether and how it has achieved its intended aims. The OfS developed a high-level ToC for DAFC at the initiation of the programme which was further developed by Ipsos during the scoping phase of the evaluation using details from funded providers' funding bids. A description and graphic of the ToC is presented in Appendix 1.

4 Design and delivery of Wave 1 funded projects

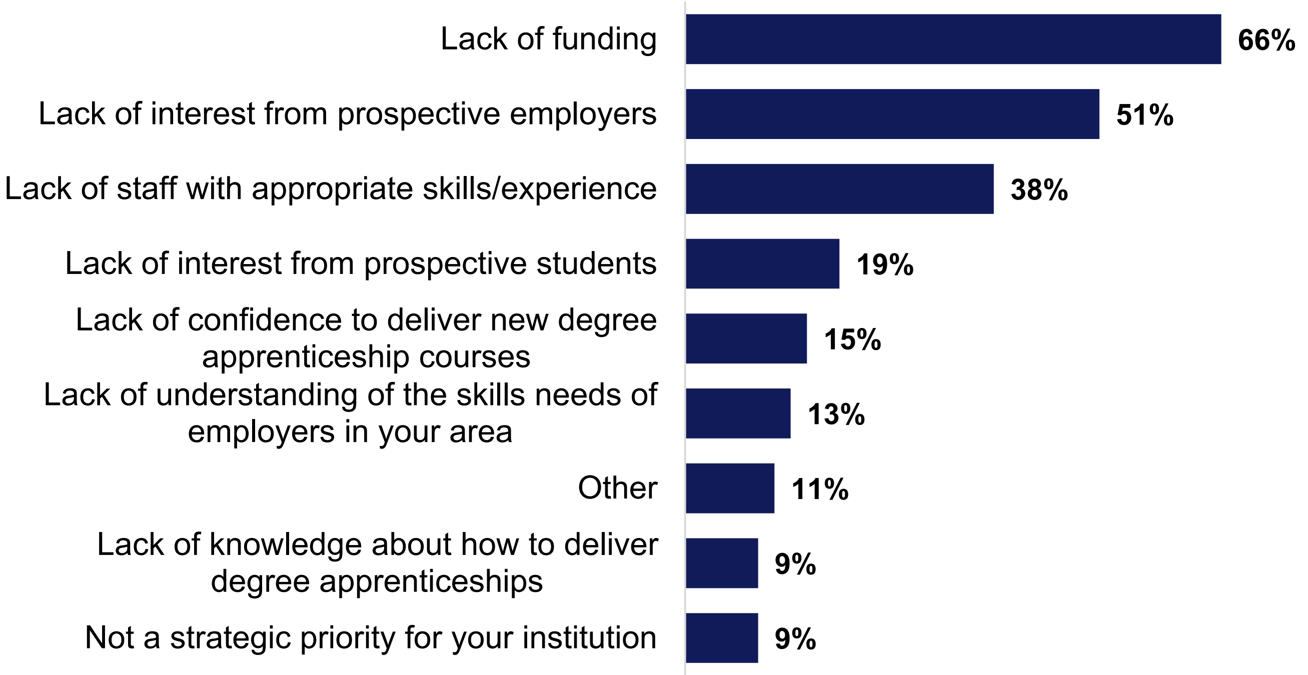
4.1 Wave 1 DAFC funding applications

There were 69 applications for the Wave 1 DAFC. In total, 51 providers were awarded Wave 1 funding with a total value of £11.7million. Successful Wave 1 providers requested an average of £227,000 grant funding through the DAFC to deliver the activities outlined in their funding applications. Funding bids ranged in value from £54,000 to up to £1,000,000. Wave 1 providers were not required to list other sources of funding in their applications, although analysis of monitoring data shows that many providers did draw on other internal and external resources to deliver DAFC activities.

4.1.1 Barriers faced by providers to expanding provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships

Prior to applying for Wave 1 funding, providers experienced a variety of barriers to expanding their provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships. Lack of funding was the most common barrier experienced by two-thirds of providers (66%), followed by lack of interest from prospective employers (51%) and lack of staff with appropriate skills and/or experience (38%). For 9% of providers, expanding provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships was not a strategic priority for their institution.

Figure 4.1: Thinking back to before you applied to the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition, were you experiencing any of the following barriers to expanding your provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships? (Multicode)[3]



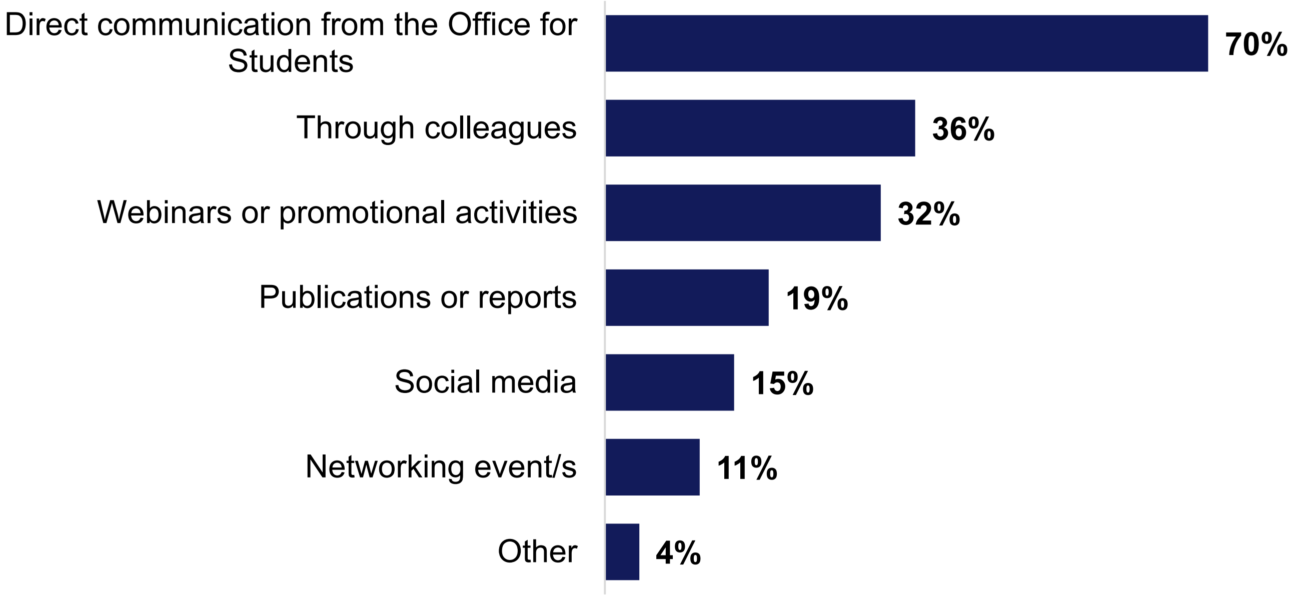
Source: Provider survey
Base: All (47)

4.1.2 How providers heard about Wave 1 DAFC funding

Wave 1 providers (70%) heard about the DAFC through direct communication from the OfS. Around a third heard about the DAFC through colleagues (36%) and/or by attending webinars or promotional activities (32%).

[3] On Multicode questions respondents can select multiple answers. Consequently, percentages do not add up to 100%.

Figure 4.2: How did you hear about the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition? (Multicode)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All (47)

4.2 Providers' experiences of developing funding bids

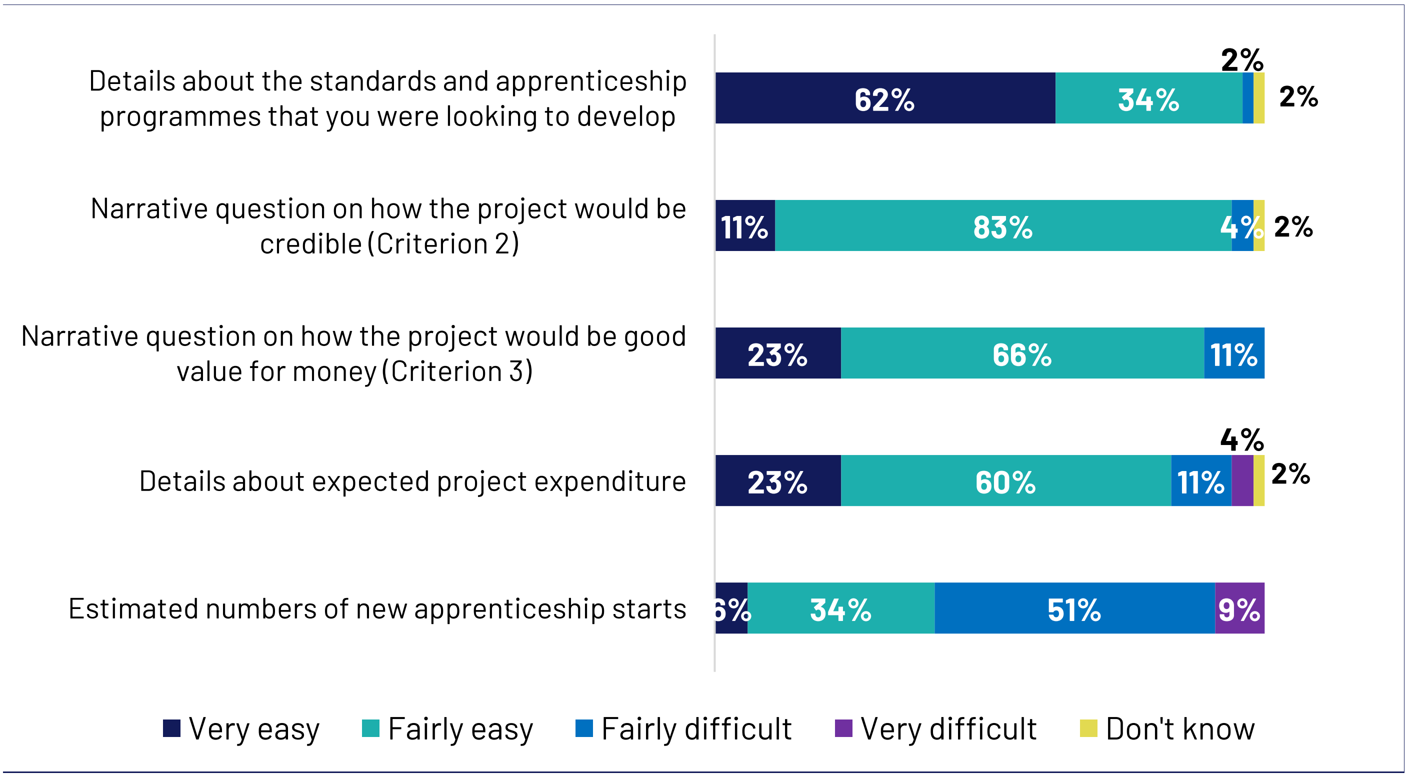
4.2.1 Preparedness to develop funding applications

Providers in receipt of Wave 1 funding reported high levels of preparedness to develop their funding applications and confidence that they would be successful. Of those surveyed, 94% felt prepared to complete the required bidding template for Wave 1 funding, with just 2% saying they felt unprepared. The majority (72%) also felt confident that they would have a successful application.

4.2.2 Providers' reactions to different elements of the funding application

Wave 1 providers found most elements of the application process to be easy, although six in 10 (60%) found it difficult to estimate the number of new apprenticeships starts the DAFC activities would generate. Most Wave 1 providers (96%) found it easy to provide details about the standards and apprenticeship programmes they were looking to develop. Similarly, 94% found the narrative question on how the project would be credible easy to complete.

Figure 4.3: Now thinking about when you were completing the Wave 1 funding application, how easy or difficult did you find it to provide each of the following? (Single code)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All (47)

4.2.3 Positive experiences of funding bid development

Providers found the application template and submission format straightforward

Interviewed providers described the Wave 1 application process as straightforward and accessible. One provider explicitly praised the simplicity of the submission method, which involved an email submission to the OfS rather than to a tender portal, which some providers had found challenging for other non-DAFC funding bids. Another provider highlighted that the amount of information required was relatively minimal, contributing to the feeling that the process was manageable.

> " I don't think it was a complicated bid process, actually… it allowed us to really focus on what we wanted to do." *(Provider)*

Providers perceived OfS guidance and support as helpful

Almost all Wave 1 providers (98%) felt satisfied with the information and guidance provided by the OfS about how to complete their application. Of these, two-thirds (66%) were very satisfied and around one-third (32%) were fairly satisfied.

Providers that were interviewed generally felt that the support and guidance offered by the OfS during the application phase had been beneficial. Webinars were frequently referenced as being particularly valuable. The direct responsiveness of the OfS team was also highlighted. One provider recounted a particularly helpful interaction with the OfS about their bid which helped them better understand the submission requirements.

> "The team at the OFS came back to clarify something on Friday afternoon and… allowed me to tweak my submission on the Monday before the submission deadline." *(Provider)*

Providers that had already identified Degree apprenticeships as a strategic priority found the process easier

Interviewed providers that were already prioritising the expansion of their Degree apprenticeship provision were able to move more quickly through the application process. One provider noted that the funding came at an opportune time and aligned well with their existing 'Place and Partnerships Plan' which included specific targets for growing their Degree apprenticeship provision.

> "It was good that we already had in our mind that we were going to move forward with the development of some of these standards anyway, because we had a good idea then of what we wanted to do and could quite easily then translate that into this bid." *(Provider)*

4.2.4 Barriers to funding bid development

The most frequently cited challenge to bid development was the short timeframe from the call announcement to the submission deadline. Some providers considered themselves to be "bid-ready" through having staff with bid-writing experience and a pre-developed strategy for L6 Degree apprenticeships. However, other providers considered the timelines for bidding a challenge as they did not work well with the academic terms.

> "I think it's just if there were future funding competitions [it would help] acknowledging the academic cycle of a typical university." *(Provider)*

Providers felt uncertain about the required level of detail in the application

Whilst providers generally found the application guidance for Wave 1 to be clear, some expressed uncertainty regarding the expected level of detail, especially in the financial sections of the application form.

> "I wasn't 100% sure whether the way I completed it was exactly what was being looked at by the reviewers… I went with the 'let's put everything in' approach and then hoped that that would sort of give the confidence of what we were actually looking for." *(Provider)*

Providers struggled to estimate apprentice starts

Half of Wave 1 providers (51%) found it fairly difficult to estimate the number of new apprenticeships starts that would be generated from DAFC activities at the application stage. Interviews revealed that this was particularly challenging for providers that were developing entirely new standards. Providers said that employers could be uncertain about how many vacancies they could create. In some instances, this led to what providers described as a "finger in the air" estimate about potential future apprentice starts.

Uncertain contextual factors also made it challenging for some providers to make accurate predictions. For example, one provider developed a standard based on available market intelligence, including from OfS' documentation, only to discover through their validation process that actual levels of demand were not as high as they had anticipated. This led them to decide not to validate the standard at all.

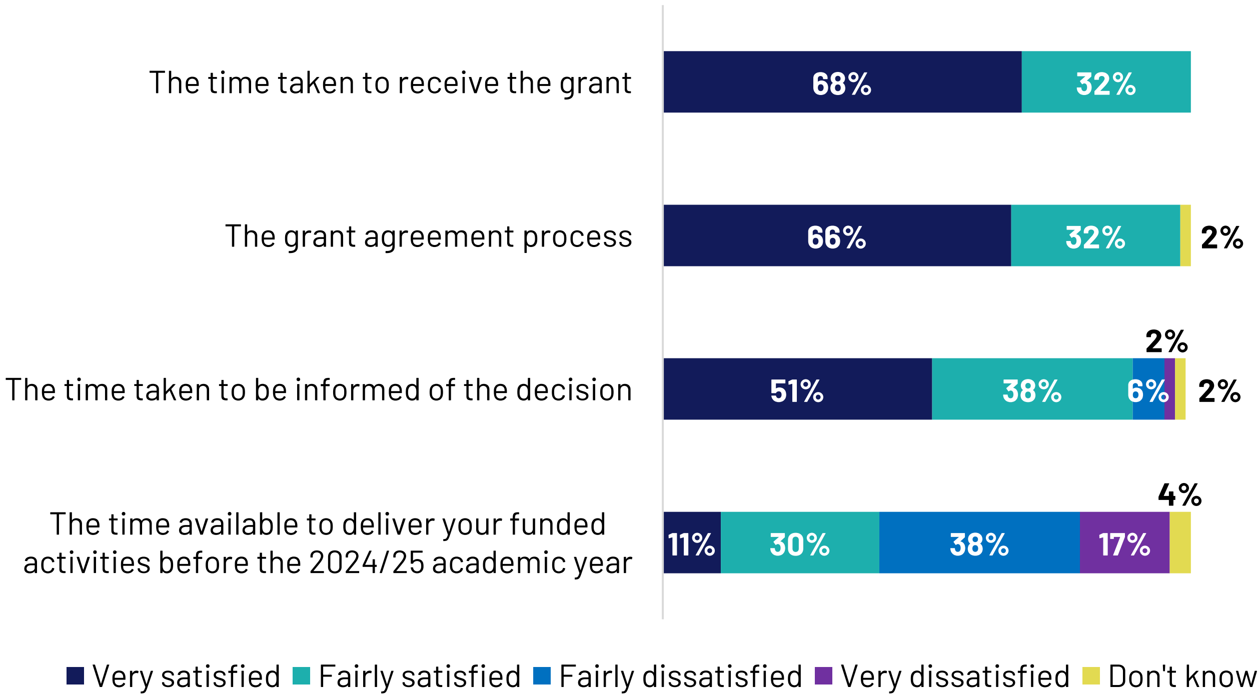
> "The only thing that was quite difficult to do within the application was those sorts of projected numbers," *(Provider)*

4.2.5 Providers' reactions to the outcome of funding applications

Providers were generally happy with the time taken to receive their grant and the grant agreement process, although most would have liked more time to deliver their funded activities. All providers (100%) felt satisfied with the time taken to receive the grant, almost all (98%) were satisfied with the grant agreement process and most (89%) were satisfied with the time taken to be informed of the decision.

Over half of providers (55%) were dissatisfied with the time available to deliver their funded activities before the 2024/25 academic year began. Interviewed providers reflected that this was particularly a challenge for recruiting staff in time for closing projects in July 2024.

Figure 4.4: Once you found out that your Wave 1 funding application had been successful, how satisfied were you with each of the following? (Single code)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All (47)

4.3 Wave 1 funded projects

4.3.1 Overview of Wave 1 projects

Wave 1 providers reported using the funding to deliver activities aimed at:

- Attracting and engaging employers to support L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (delivered by 96% of providers).
- Developing new curriculum for new L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (74% of providers).
- Increasing equality of opportunity on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (66% of providers).
- Attracting and recruiting prospective students onto L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (62% of providers).
- Updating or revising existing curriculum on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (47% of providers).

Most Wave 1 providers (85%) used some of the funding for promotional activities, such as adverts, events and social media campaigns. Around two-thirds used some of the funding to purchase marketing materials (68%), transfer existing staff to different roles (64%), travel and subsistence (62%) and/or recruit new staff (60%).

Figure 4.5: Did you use the Wave 1 Degree Apprentice Funding Competition funding for any of the following? (Select all that apply)

Source: Provider survey. Only codes selected by 50% or more respondents displayed.
Base: All (47)

4.3.2 Project underspend and reasons for underspend

Analysis of monitoring returns highlights that four in 10 Wave 1 providers reported some level of underspend. The reasons given for underspend can be categorised into small-scale 'frictional' issues, which tended to result in small amounts of underspend, and larger-scale strategic issues which caused significant underspend.

Smaller-scale issues included:

- **Staffing and recruitment issues:** Delays in recruiting and appointing staff, difficulties in finding the right staff, key staff members leaving their roles and staff being diverted to other priorities.
- **Project delays:** Initial stages of project setup taking longer than expected, internal administrative processes creating bottlenecks, and overly ambitious initial timelines.
- **Difficulties with employer and school engagement:** Employers being unresponsive or unable to commit time, schools having inflexible schedules, low student attendance at school events.
- **Lower than anticipated costs for certain activities:** Marketing campaigns and collateral production, event expenses like catering, travel, and venues, procurement of software and/or services at lower rates than budgeted.
- **External factors disrupting planned activities:** Inspection preparation and other competing institutional priorities, delays in receiving professional body accreditations, reallocation of funds between budget categories, shifts from non-pay to pay costs to support additional staffing, consolidation of individual marketing budgets into centralised campaigns and redirection of unused event funds to other forms of employer engagement.

Larger strategic sources of underspend were much less commonly reported but were often responsible for the larger examples of underspend. These could most commonly be attributed to the two broad categories outlined below:

- **Cancellation of major project components:** Delays or cancellations of the development of core standards or core elements of planned programmes. These led to significant further underspend due to their impact on other planned areas of spend (for example recruitment, development and engagement activities) resulting in cascading underspend.
- **Cancellation or delay of large-scale events and marketing campaigns:** Major engagement programmes or large-scale events being cancelled or delayed due to lack of interest or because of other project delays.

4.3.3 Other sources of funding for projects

The majority (64%) of Wave 1 providers reported having used other resources not related to the Wave 1 DAFC to support delivery of their activities. Of these, 60% drew on internal budgets and 11% drew on external sources. This included:

- Staff time (often unbudgeted, in-kind contributions).
- Support from other university and/or college departments, such as finance and marketing.

- Existing internal budgets and facilities.

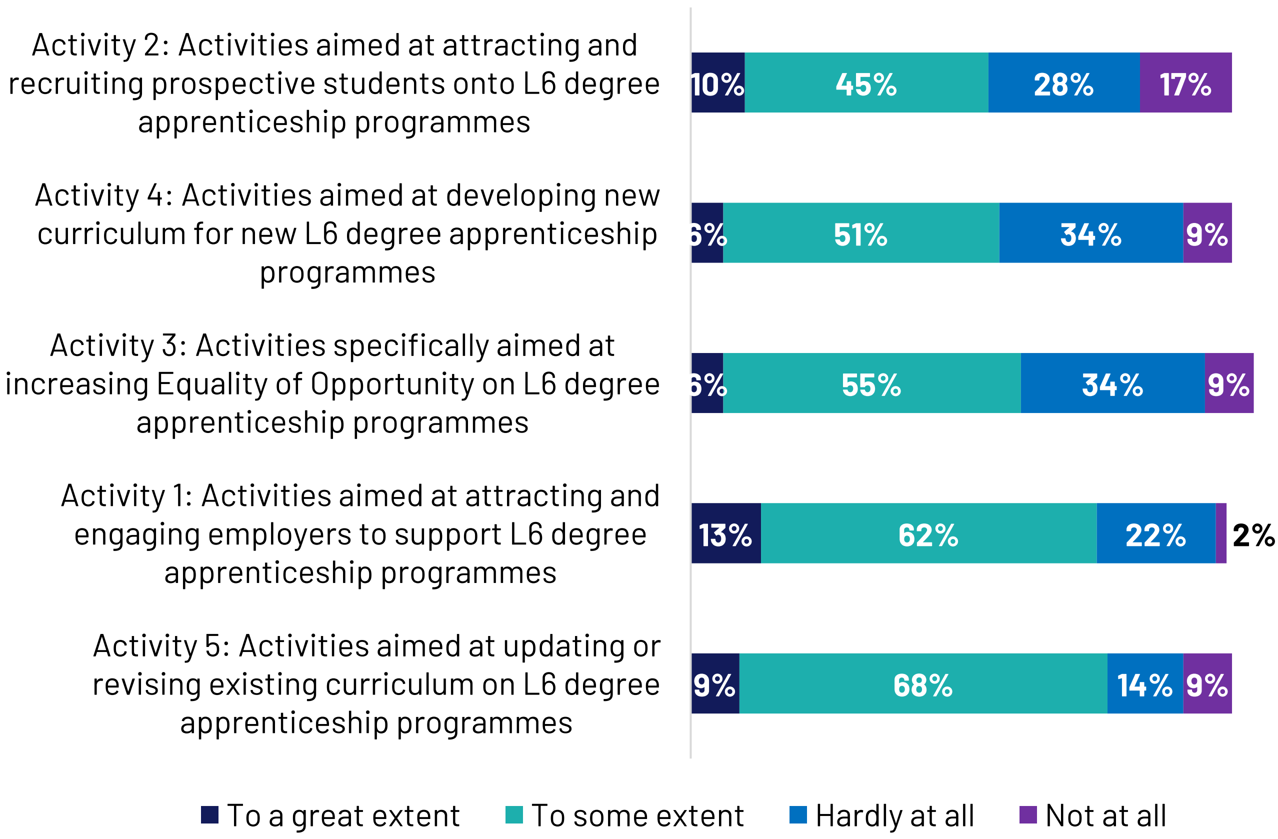
It was noted by multiple providers that not all staff costs were covered from the allocated funding.

4.3.4 Wave 1 funding additionality

'Additionality' refers to whether DAFC funding enabled providers to grow and/or accelerate their activities beyond what they could have delivered without the funding. This is measured by the extent to which providers were already delivering the activities and the likelihood that they would have delivered the activities without the funding.

Of the providers that used DAFC funding to deliver the activity, over two in five were hardly or not at all delivering activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective apprentices (45%), delivering activities at developing new curriculum for new L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (44%) and delivering activities specifically aimed at increasing equality of opportunity on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes, prior to receiving funding. DAFC funding made less of a contribution to the growth of activities aimed at updating or revising the existing curriculum and/or delivering activities aimed at attracting and engaging employers. Three in four providers that delivered these activities were, to an extent, already doing so before they received the funding (77% and 76% respectively).

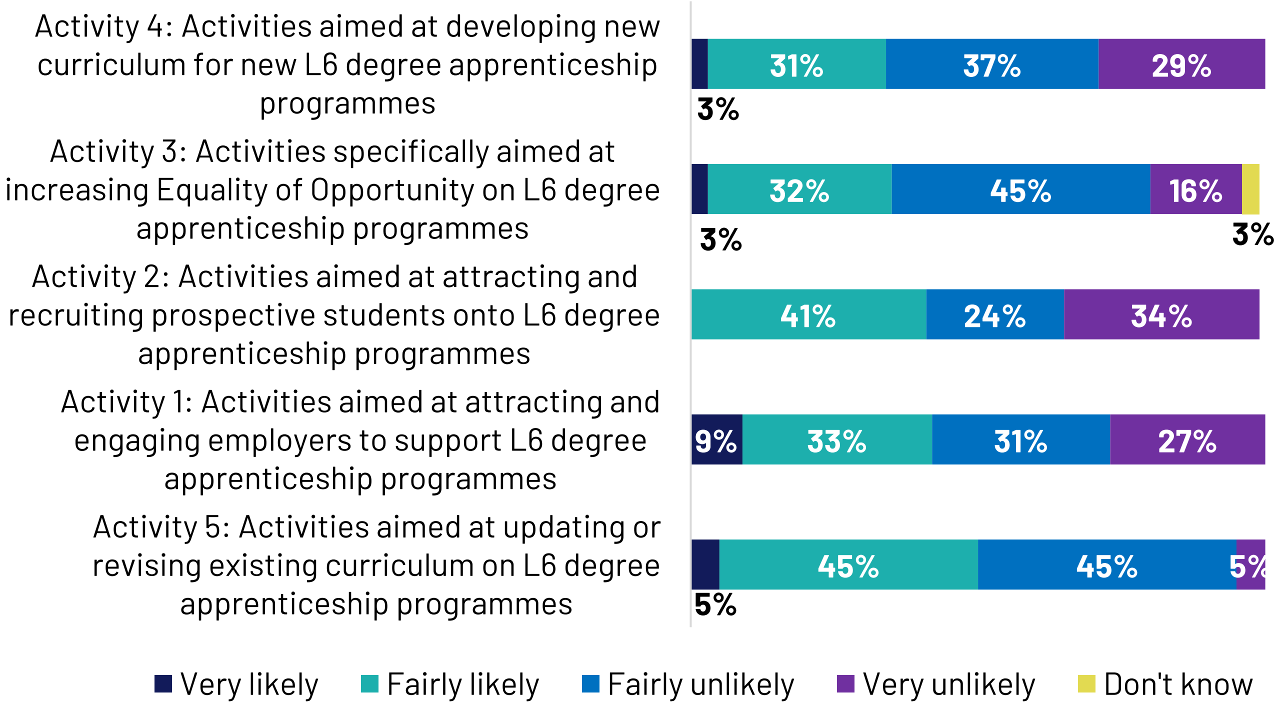
Figure 4.6: To what extent were you already delivering these activities before receiving funding through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition? (Single code)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All that received funding to deliver activities (Activity 2: 29, Activity 4: 35, Activity 3: 31, Activity 1: 45, Activity 5: 22)

Most providers said they were unlikely to have delivered the activities they did without Wave 1 DAFC funding. Two-thirds (66%) were unlikely to have delivered activities aimed at developing curriculum for new L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes without the funding. Similarly, 61% said that activities specifically aimed at increasing EoO would have been unlikely to be delivered without the funding.

Figure 4.7: How likely would you have been to deliver the activities that you did without receiving any funding through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition? (Single code)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All that received funding to deliver activities (Activity 4: 35, Activity 3: 31, Activity 2: 29, Activity 1: 45, Activity 5: 22)

4.4 Enablers and barriers to successful project delivery

4.4.1 Enablers to project delivery

Strong project governance structures, governance processes and senior buy-in

Providers that established clear governance structures underpinned by visible senior leadership support (such as project boards and steering groups) from the outset reported smoother delivery. One provider set up fortnightly project board meetings to bring all stakeholders together. Securing senior-level buy-in (for example, from Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice-Chancellors), was described as a critical success factor. Another provider met with each of their Pro-Vice-Chancellors to stress the importance of the project and ensure it was viewed as a priority. High-level support ensured that the project was known to central teams and ensured that resources could be made available as needed. This oversight provided the necessary authority to drive the project forward and ensure accountability across different university departments.

" We did have full buy-in from the senior leadership team to make sure that… if things weren't moving as quickly as we'd like that they would intervene and make sure that it was." *(Provider)*

Dedicated, specialist staff to support project delivery

Some Wave 1 providers used DAFC funding to recruit or second staff into new roles dedicated to project delivery. Providers that established dedicated project roles found that it enabled them to deliver more within the funding period, and to deliver higher-quality outputs. For example, one provider allocated a significant portion of their budget to employing a dedicated marketing executive to focus exclusively on marketing their apprenticeship programmes to employers and apprentices. Another used the funding to hire a dedicated business development executive. This role focused on new business growth in specific industries and engaging employers in the design and setup of new apprenticeship programmes through facilitating monthly meetings.

4.4.2 Barriers to project delivery

Lengthy internal university processes

Internal organisational culture, particularly within universities with a traditional research focus or for FE colleges working with university partners, was cited as a barrier to expanding provision of Degree apprenticeships. FE colleges that were working with university partners consistently pointed to the slow pace of university processes. This slow pace was attributed to the highly process-driven nature of universities, with multiple validation panels and quality assurance boards that new programmes must navigate.

"We need to think like a training provider that is delivering degree level apprenticeships and not think like a university that's delivering apprenticeships. There's a distinction between those two things." *(Provider)*

"Our university partner's validation process was not a quick quite as swift as we wanted it to be because they just work at a different pace…sometimes universities particularly can be quite slow." *(Provider)*

Insufficient time to deliver DAFC projects within the funding window

The OfS launched Wave 1 at an earlier stage than Waves 2 and 3 in response to feedback from higher education providers already delivering L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes seeking to accelerate and/or bring forward projects in their pipeline. This resulted in a shorter delivery window for Wave 1 projects (seven months) compared with subsequent waves (15 months for Wave two and 10 months Wave 3) and the restriction of Wave 1 funding to providers already delivering L6 Degree apprenticeships.

Nevertheless, Wave 1 providers reported challenges delivering funded activities within the shorter delivery window. Providers also commented that since the delivery window did not align with the academic year or employer recruitment cycles, they could not always realise their intended outcomes before the end of the funding period. For example, one provider found that large employers had already made decisions around which internal employees they were going to place on Degree apprenticeships before their DAFC-funded activities began. Conversely, small and medium-sized companies often left recruitment decisions until later in the year (August and/or September), which was after the end of the funding period. This meant that even with successful employer engagement, recruitment outcomes could not be fully realised within the funding period. Furthermore, the relatively short funding period meant that projects were often ending just as they were building momentum with engagement.

> "We felt that we had just started going in May, June, July, right as the project was concluding." *(Provider)*

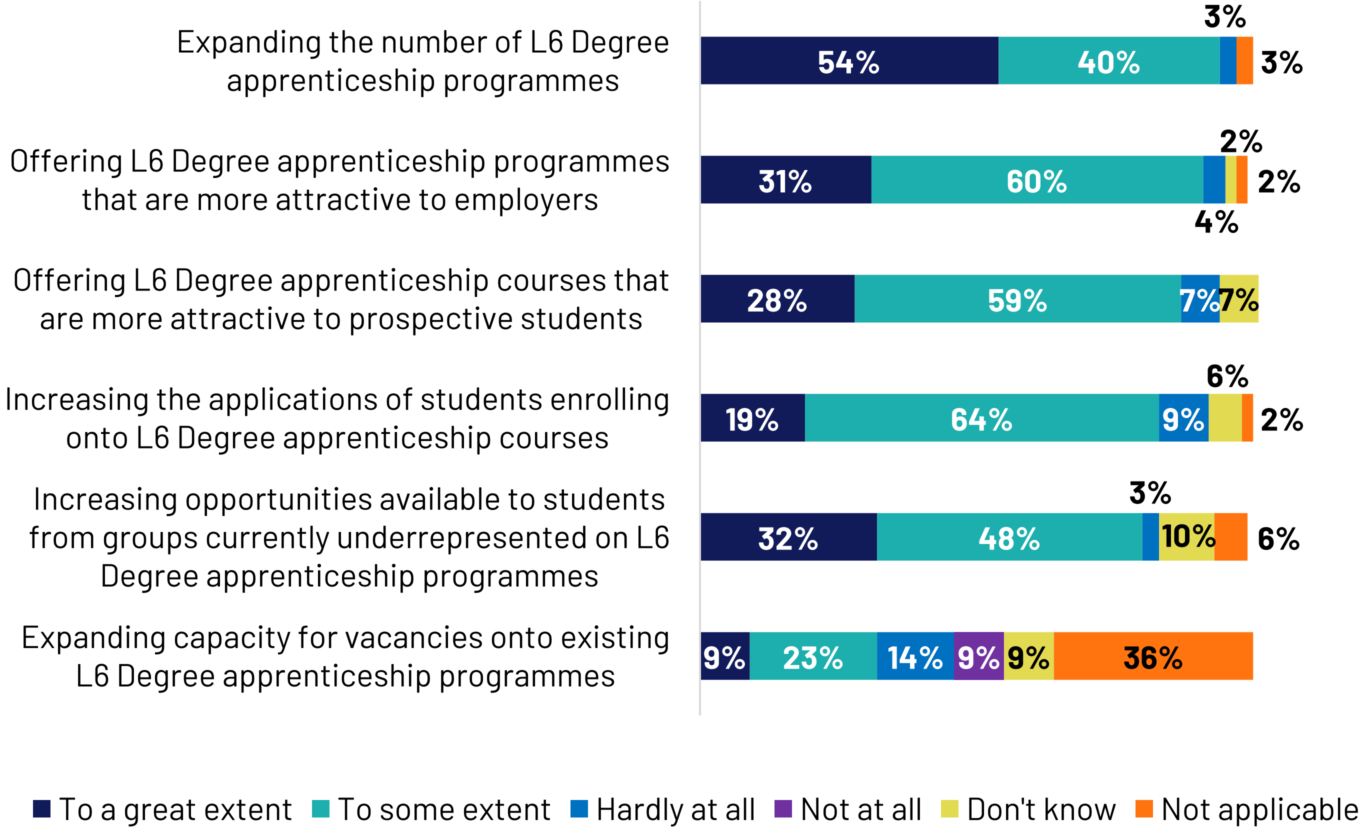
This also had practical consequences for staffing. One provider explained that staff on short, fixed-term contracts often start looking for work before the end of their contract, resulting in some leaving before the end of the project. Ultimately, providers felt that a longer delivery period would have enabled them to better align with employer recruitment timelines and build more sustainable outcomes.

4.5 Outcomes for providers

4.5.1 Broad outcomes for providers

Of Wave 1 providers that delivered the relevant activities, around nine in 10 said that DAFC activities had contributed to expanding the number of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (94%) and to them offering L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes that are more attractive to employers (91%). Additionally, 87% said that the funding contributed to offering L6 Degree apprenticeship courses that are more attractive to apprentices. Over one in three providers (36%) who used the funding to revise existing curriculum selected 'not applicable' to the outcome of 'expanding capacity for vacancies onto existing L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes'. This may be due to providers delaying some new apprentice starts beyond the 2024/2025 academic years.

Figure 4.8: To what extent did activities delivered through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition contributed to... (Single code)

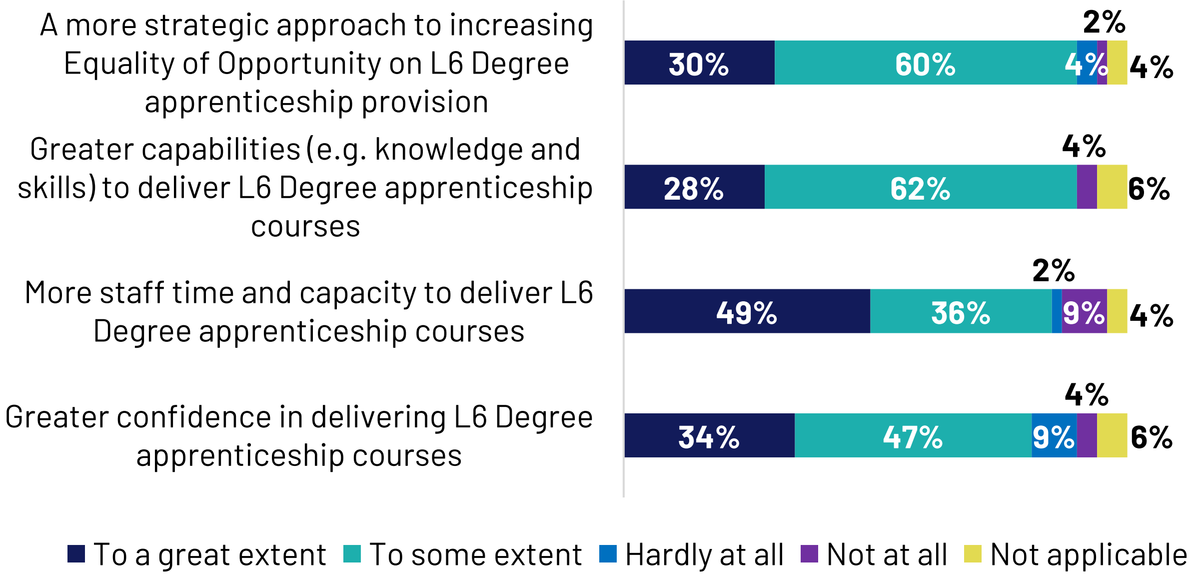


Source: Provider survey
Base: All that received funding to deliver activities (Activity 4: 35, Activity 1: 45, Activity 2: 29, All: 47, Activity 3: 31, Activity 5: 22)

Greater capabilities (for example, knowledge and skills) to deliver L6 Degree apprenticeship courses

Providers reported positive outcomes for their institution as a result of activities delivered through Wave 1 DAFC funding. Nine in 10 reported greater capabilities to deliver L6 Degree apprenticeship courses (90%) and having a more strategic approach to increasing EoO on L6 Degree apprenticeship provision (90%). Other outcomes reported by providers included more staff time and capacity to deliver L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (85%) and greater confidence in delivering L6 Degree apprenticeship courses (81%).

Figure 4.9: To what extent did activities delivered through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition contribute to you and colleagues having... (Single code)



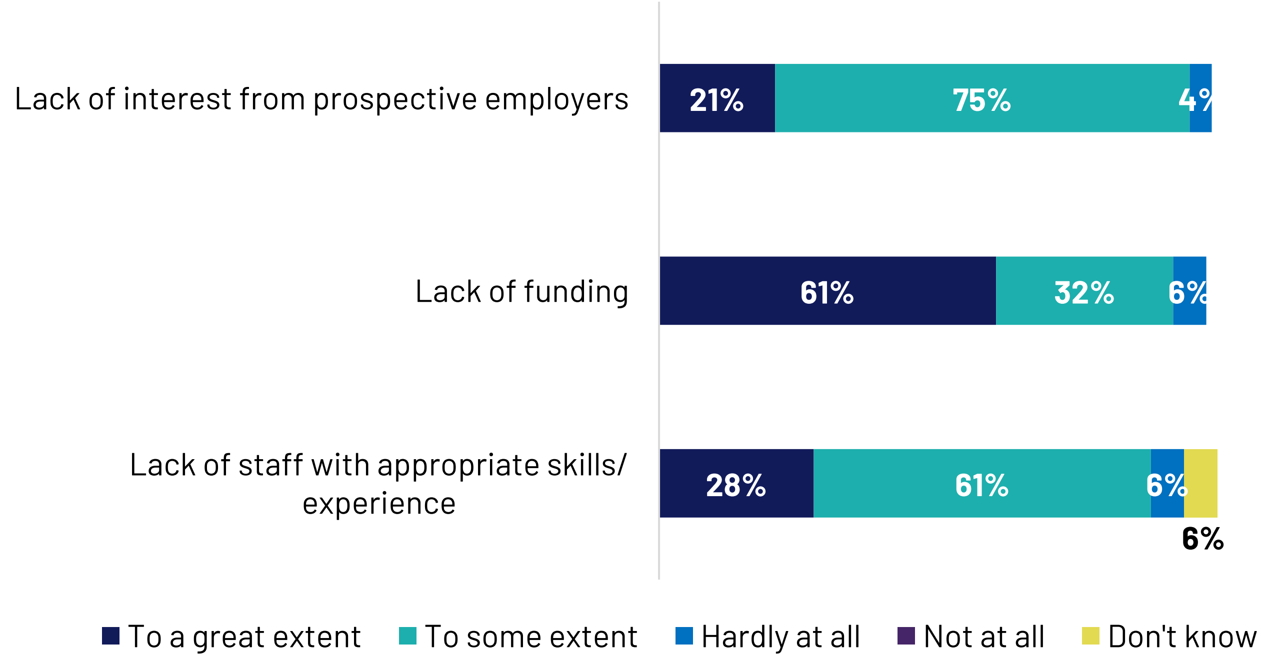
Source: Provider survey
Base: All (47)

Interviewed providers perceived that the funding had been a catalyst for building institutional capacity, enabling them to invest in essential expertise and internal systems. For instance, some providers hired consultants to upskill staff on complex Degree apprenticeship funding rules, while others recruited specialist staff to design new programmes. This investment in personnel drove the development of more advanced operational methods, such as an agile "Sprint" approach to curriculum design and the creation of internal online "community areas" to foster knowledge sharing. Beyond these, providers reported that the funding had cultivated a cultural shift, boosted organisational confidence and broke down internal silos.

Addressing barriers to the growth of L6 Degree apprenticeships

Providers that had experienced one of the top three barriers to expanding their provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships felt that the DAFC had supported them in addressing these barriers. Almost all that experienced a lack of interest from employers (96%) and/or had experienced a lack of funding (95%), felt the DAFC had helped to address these barriers to expanding their provision of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. Additionally, almost nine in 10 providers that experienced a lack of staff with appropriate skills and/or experience reported that DAFC funding had supported them to address this barrier. The following chart reports on small base sizes.

Figure 4.10: To what extent did the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition support you to address the barriers you were facing in expanding your provision of L6 Degree apprenticeships? (Single code)



Source: Provider survey
Base: Providers who experienced lack of interest from prospective employers (24), providers who experienced lack of funding (31), providers who experienced lack of staff with appropriate skills/ experience (18),

4.6 Sustainability of funding and outcome

4.6.1 Sustainable outcomes

Providers identified several key areas where the impact of the funding is expected to be sustained beyond the initial funding period.

Embedded institutional capability and knowledge

The most sustainable outcome referenced by providers was the development of internal capacity and expertise in the delivery of Degree apprenticeship programmes. Providers felt that the funding had enabled:

Creation of replicable models: Providers used the funding to create processes for programme development that they could replicate in the future. One provider said that the funding had enabled them to create a model that had been replicated to deliver Wave 2 and 3 projects.

Cultural and collaborative shifts: Providers described how activities supported by the funding had fostered new ways of working internally, breaking down silos between apprenticeship, higher education, and marketing teams. This cultural shift was seen as a permanent improvement.

> "It's caused us to collaborate more within the organisation... And that will definitely be a lasting legacy from this. That won't change now." *(Provider)*

Increased staff confidence and skills: The process of developing and delivering new programmes upskilled academic and professional services staff, building institutional confidence. One provider launched their first engineering degree apprenticeship and considered this to be a "massive step for the School of Engineering."

> "I think it's definitely increased the confidence in our ability to deliver the programs... we were able to upskill staff so that they could learn different programming languages" *(Provider)*

Strengthened and diversified employer relationships

The funding enabled providers to move beyond transactional interactions to build strategic, long-term partnerships with employers. The process of co-designing curricula has created deep ongoing relationships. The funding has also enabled providers to diversify their employer base, reducing reliance on a few large companies and building a more resilient network that can be drawn on for future programmes. For example, one provider went from having two companies involved in a programme to nine.

Developed and validated curricula as a lasting asset

The new and revised apprenticeship programmes are assets for the providers to continue to develop, and rollout as needed. This includes teaching and learning resources developed with the funding, such as reading lists, online materials, specialist software for labs, and practical guides for apprentices, employers, and even parents. One provider developed an entire first year of content and uploaded it onto their virtual learning environment. Another said that the materials developed were *"far superior to what we would have done without the funding"*. Even in cases where a programme had not yet been launched due to low market demand, the development work was not considered to be a wasted effort. One provider explained that the fully developed standard was now "sitting on the shelf" and ready to be launched if and when demand increased.

4.6.2 Challenges to sustainable outcomes

Providers identified challenges to the long-term sustainability of the growth and momentum generated by Wave 1 funding.

Dependency on continued funding and internal investment

Providers highlighted that the level of activity and development seen during Wave 1 was not sustainable without a continued source of investment, whether external or internal. Another concern was that income generated from successful apprenticeship programmes is often absorbed into central university budgets rather than ring-fenced for reinvestment into further apprenticeship development.

> "We can't rely on pots of money from you guys at the OFS to catalyse our business when it is a commercial activity that we should be investing in... we should be, I would say, investing at

least 5% of that portfolio every year in continuing to progress. Without this internal commitment, the growth is not self-sustaining." *(Provider)*

Dependence on employers

The success of Degree apprenticeships was fundamentally dependent on employers creating vacancies. This was seen as an external dependence that providers could not control. One provider struggled to recruit for a niche programme because the employers were reticent to engage. This reliance on external partners is a risk to the sustainability of outcomes.

Economic and political uncertainty

Providers noted that factors such as a general election, potential changes to the Apprenticeship Levy, and economic pressures made employers nervous to commit to apprenticeships. This directly impacts the sustainability of apprentice numbers.

The short-term nature of funded roles

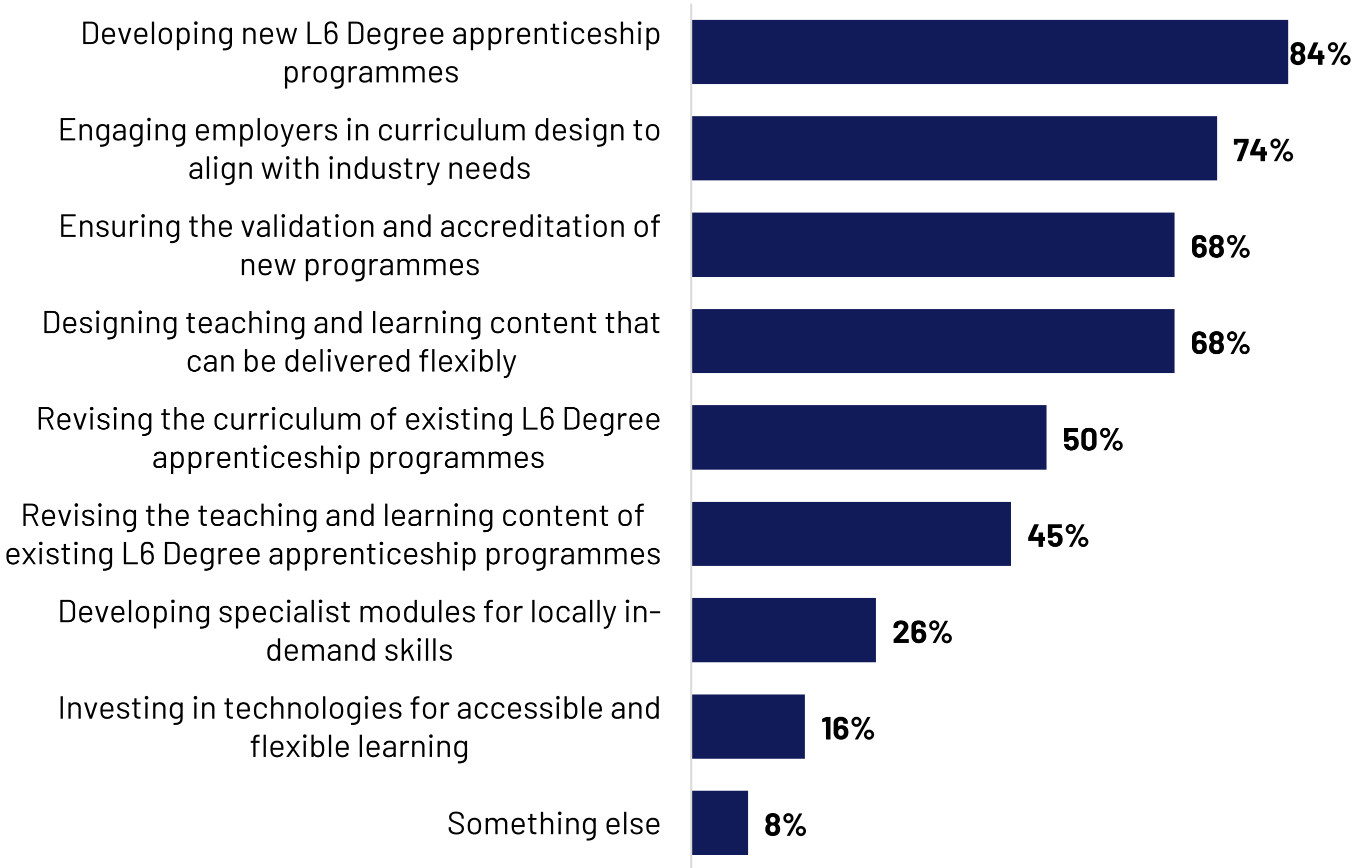
Many of the key operational roles funded through Wave 1, such as project managers and outreach officers, were on short, fixed-term contracts. The loss of this resource posed a direct threat to sustainability. This highlighted the difficulty of retaining expertise once project funding ends.

5 Curriculum development and revision

5.1 Inputs, activities and outputs

The majority (84%) of Wave 1 providers used the funding to develop new L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. Of these, three in four used the funding to engage employers in curriculum design (74%) and two-thirds used the funding to validate and/or accredit new programmes and/or design teaching and learning content that could be delivered flexibly (68%). Relatively few Wave 1 providers used the funding to develop specialist modules for in-demand skills (26%) and invest in new technologies for accessible learning (16%).

Figure 5.1: Did you use Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding to deliver any of the following activities to improve or develop new curriculum? (Multicode)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All respondents that received funding to deliver activities aimed at developing new curriculum for new L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (38)

5.1.2 Providers' and employers' experiences of curriculum development activities

Internal experience and familiarity with Degree apprenticeships

Providers that had less experience in the design and delivery of L6 Degree apprenticeships did not always feel clear on the key aims and objectives of these, relative to more traditional academic programmes. One provider highlighted the need for basic information on the delivery style and curriculum content of apprenticeships. They felt that, due to their lack of experience, the initial design of their programme was too heavily focused on academic knowledge and outcomes rather than a more vocationally driven approach.

Provider staff who experienced challenges in pivoting towards more vocationally focused programme design said that apprentices were still a minority of the student population and that there was not widespread understanding among academic staff of the core principles of apprenticeships. Some providers identified a need for training or advisory support to familiarise staff with Degree apprenticeships.

> "I think the key barrier for us as a university is that apprenticeships are such a tiny part of our provision. We've got, I think, about 500 apprentices compared to a student population of 15,000 students. It's all about really getting that understanding of what an apprenticeship is into the university and into the team." *(Provider)*

Drawing on experienced staff

Using experienced internal staff for curriculum development, as opposed to external consultants, was highlighted as beneficial to delivery for providers that had this capacity. This approach ensured that programmes were tailored to the local context and retained valuable knowledge within the institution. One university appointed existing academics as content development managers and brought in a pool of postgraduate research students to handle the foundational development work. This model was seen as better value for money and more efficient. As one manager noted, it would have cost more money to commission external consultants who would lack knowledge of the local area, and the skill demands of the provider's local employers.

> "The best resource was our own staff and being able to release our own staff to do that work." *(Provider)*

An employer-led approach facilitated curriculum development

Both employers and providers that were interviewed agreed that, where possible, developing content for new L6 Degree apprenticeships was most effective when it was the product of a collaborative effort between a diverse group of stakeholders. This included industry specialists, apprentices, employers, and other providers.

Employers shared that they particularly appreciated the strong emphasis on understanding local employer needs during collaborative curriculum design phases, particularly in the very early design stages. Interviews indicated that involvement in curriculum design contributed to employer perceptions of L6 Degree apprenticeships being a) of high-quality, b) addressing skill needs, and c) meeting industry standards.

> "The [employer] lead was involved in, it was reviewing the content of the programme, but I guess also with that awareness of what their [apprentice] role would give them access to in the workplace as well, so just ensuring that what they [the apprentice] were learning at

university was also supplemented by what their experiences in the workplace were going to be." (Employer)

Reliance on external bodies posed a challenge for successful curriculum development

Delays from external professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) emerged as a barrier for some providers, impacting their ability to establish and launch new programmes within their planned timeframes. Some providers reported delays with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE, Skills England as of 1st June 2025) and other regulatory bodies. Such delays meant that some programmes could not be launched within the 2024 to 2025 academic year, meaning that new apprenticeship starts on these programmes will not materialise until future years. Some providers speculated that there was a lack of alignment between the OfS and the PSRBs that (from the perspective of some providers interviewed) did not seem to have the capacity to manage the sudden influx of validation requests. These delays had a knock-on effect on providers' delivery schedules, forcing them to push some of it back into May 2025 when they had planned to launch in September or January.

> "[PSRB] said that they wouldn't even be able to consider the validation of a new apprenticeship until the autumn time... they don't seem to have had the capacity to do it." *(Provider)*

5.2 Outcomes

5.2.1 Expanding the number of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes

Whilst interviewed providers reported challenges with delivering DAFC-funded activities within the delivery timescales, some had been able to expand their offer of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. Providers shared that Wave 1 funding had enabled them to:

- **Accelerate programme launch:** Providers consistently described the funding as an accelerator. For example, several stated that without the funding, they would have had no new Degree apprenticeship programmes to offer this year, and one used it to bring their development plans forward.
- **Overcome resource bottlenecks:** The funding enabled providers to dedicate staff time to development, which they could not have otherwise afforded to do. The DAFC funding enabled the recruitment of staff to support preparation activities, whereas tight budgets can prevent providers from staffing programmes before apprentices enrol.
- **Pursue ambitious growth:** The additional funding was said by providers to have enabled them the flexibility and resource to increase activity and creativity around programmes. For example, one took on the development of 13 standards which was considered a scale they described as very ambitious and impossible without the fund. Similarly, another added seven new programmes, a level of growth they had not experienced since a previous government funding initiative.

5.2.2 Increased number of course vacancies on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes

Almost half of providers (47%) reported that, as a direct result of activities supported through Wave 1 of the DAFC, between one to 10 new L6 Degree apprenticeship vacancies had been created. A similar proportion (44%) did not know the number of vacancies that had been created or did not find the question applicable to them. This may have been due to some providers delaying apprentice recruitment and starts to future academic years.

Table 5.1: In total, how many new L6 Degree apprenticeship course vacancies were created as a direct result of activities supported through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition? (Single code)

	% of providers
None	4%
1 – 10	47%
11 – 20	0%
21 – 50	4%
51 – 100	0%
101+	0%
Don't know	23%
Not applicable	21%

Source: Provider survey
Base: All (47)

Interviewed providers self-reported an increase in the number of vacancies on L6 Degree apprenticeships on both new and existing programmes. The extent of this increase varied considerably between providers and between programmes, with participants caveating that it was too early to conclude the 'success' of the funding through the single measure of new vacancies created. This was most apparent in cases where providers had faced delays in delivery.

Nevertheless, most providers interviewed felt they had increased the number of vacancies on programmes that did not face significant delays beyond the academic year. This was particularly the case for existing programmes, though noticeable increases in new programmes were apparent.

'Potential spaces' is a more realistic measure of success

Some providers considered an increase in filled spaces to be a longer-term outcome of the DAFC funding and instead chose to focus in the short-term on establishing the infrastructure needed for expanding future enrolment. This was in line with the aims of the DAFC which was to accelerate growth of development activities. Providers considered that a short-term self-reported outcome was the expansion of their Degree apprenticeship "footprint" more generally, even if this did not result in immediate enrolment spaces. Wave 1 funding was broadly considered most impactful at facilitating the internal infrastructure needed for long-term expansion:

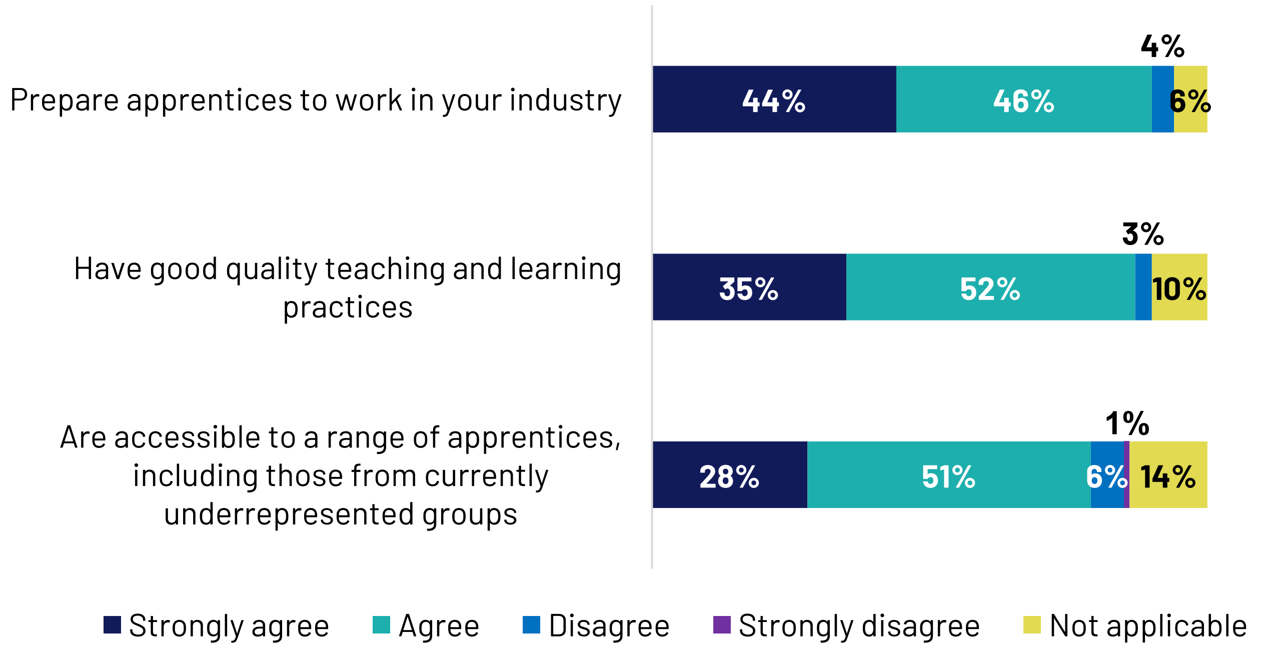
> "So, it [DAFC funding] basically allowed us to create a model of the training that would need to be provided, the additional posts that we need to put in place to work with the programme team to help develop the programme, but also the marketing side of things, etcetera. So, it's basically created us a model which we replicated in our wave three bid for each one of the five apprenticeships. But it worked so well for this first wave of funding" *(Provider)*

5.2.3 Employers consider L6 Degree apprenticeship curricula to be industry-relevant

Employers and providers perceived the curricula to be industry-relevant and an effective way to address sector-specific skills needs

Nine in ten employers that were currently recruiting an apprentice (90%) agreed that the Degree programme/s prepare apprentices to work in their specific industry. A similar proportion (87%) agreed that degree programme/s have good quality teaching and learning practices, and three-quarters (78%) agreed that degree programme/s were accessible to a range of apprentices, including those from currently underrepresented groups.

Figure 5.2: Thinking more specifically about the L6 Degree apprentices working in your organisation, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the degree programme/s... (Single code)



Source: Employer survey
Base: All currently employing 1 or more L6 Degree apprentices (79)

Interviewed employers reported that L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes were mostly relevant to their industries. They reflected on the tailored and informed curriculum content, which they considered aligned with market demand and addressed their specific workplace needs.

In instances where a single employer made up most of the apprentices enrolled on a given programme (for example, a local or large employer), aspects of the programmes were tailored beyond wider industry need and instead to an organisational or single job-role level. Employers appreciated this commitment to ensuring that content was relevant to their needs and reflected on the difference with more generic frameworks, such as those offered in more traditional academic undergraduate programmes. Providers were also confident that programmes were industry-relevant based on the feedback they had received directly from employers.

> "[Provider received] amazingly good feedback from them [employers]. It hit all the points that they [employers] wanted, which it should do given that we had some prior engagement with them. I think the big thing is the alignment [...] with our employers." *(Provider)*

Some employers felt the industry-relevance of their DAFC-funded programmes was important for both upskilling new apprentices to work in their specific sectors, but also for attracting new apprentices who were clear on the industry-expectations of their chosen roles.

Providers perceived industry-relevance as an outcome that needs continual maintenance

Though qualitative data indicates industry-relevance was broadly achieved across many of the Wave 1 programmes, some providers emphasised the iterative nature of this outcome. One provider emphasised the importance of constant programme refining for technical programmes (for example, engineering-based courses) to mirror technological changes more broadly. As a result, they recognise the curriculum will need refining with each cohort.

> "We've now done probably the easy bit. We've now got five years of developing the programme, keeping people interested in it, keeping the staff relevantly qualified and keeping an eye on what the industry is doing to make sure it's still relevant to them. So actually, that's probably the tricky bit that's coming up." (Provider)

Some providers also emphasised the importance of maintaining the professional relationships developed with employers through engagement activities, to uphold the quality of programmes and service offered.

5.2.4 Prospective apprentices consider L6 Degree apprenticeships to be engaging

Interviews with current apprentices on DAFC-supported L6 Degree apprenticeships indicated that the programmes were considered attractive and offered an engaging way to learn alongside employment. However, one perceived drawback was the stereotypical 'university lifestyle' and practical challenges associated with their engagement and enjoyment of the course. The dynamic between employers, providers and apprentices following enrolment was sometimes considered ambiguous, impacting the level of support some apprentices received.

Apprentices considered the L6 Degree apprenticeships curriculum content to be engaging

Interviewed apprentices generally shared a positive sentiment around their L6 Degree apprenticeships. This sentiment was for both the programme content itself, but also the broader recognition of the programme's significance for their future career development. Some of the apprentices within the focus groups stated that the professional opportunities L6 Degree apprenticeships offered was a key reason they applied.

Apprentices emphasised the importance of self-motivation and discipline. A perceived need for sustained engagement and ability to manage heavy workloads, was considered distinct to Degree apprenticeships compared with full-time undergraduate courses because of the requirements to balance employment commitments with studying. Apprentices said that having the option to study online supported them to achieve this balance, thus improving their engagement and motivation. One apprentice also highlighted how their workplace and colleagues had contributed to their engagement and commitment to the course.

> "A lot of the people at my work have PhDs, very, very highly qualified. It's also good that it's motivational to be able to see where you're going to progress to, especially with the older apprentices as well. You can see what you're aiming towards, what you're working for." *(Apprentice)*

Apprentices can lack practical and/or pastoral support from providers

Whilst most of the apprentices felt the curriculum and course content was high-quality and covered the required theory for their job roles, some felt the support and technical aspects of course delivery was of a lesser quality. For example, some apprentices highlighted the poor quality of the online platform for them to access and complete lessons, alongside other admin requirements (such as logging study hours). One apprentice said that the provider-led support functions for Degree apprenticeships were variable, meaning at times they could not access timely support and were not eligible to access mainstream student communication support.

> "If you're an apprentice, you can't speak directly to [provider helpline] unless it's something regarding a certain amount of topics. Instead, you've got to speak to the apprenticeship team, and they only work at certain times in the afternoon and even if you try and ring them at certain times, they don't answer the phone." *(Apprentice)*

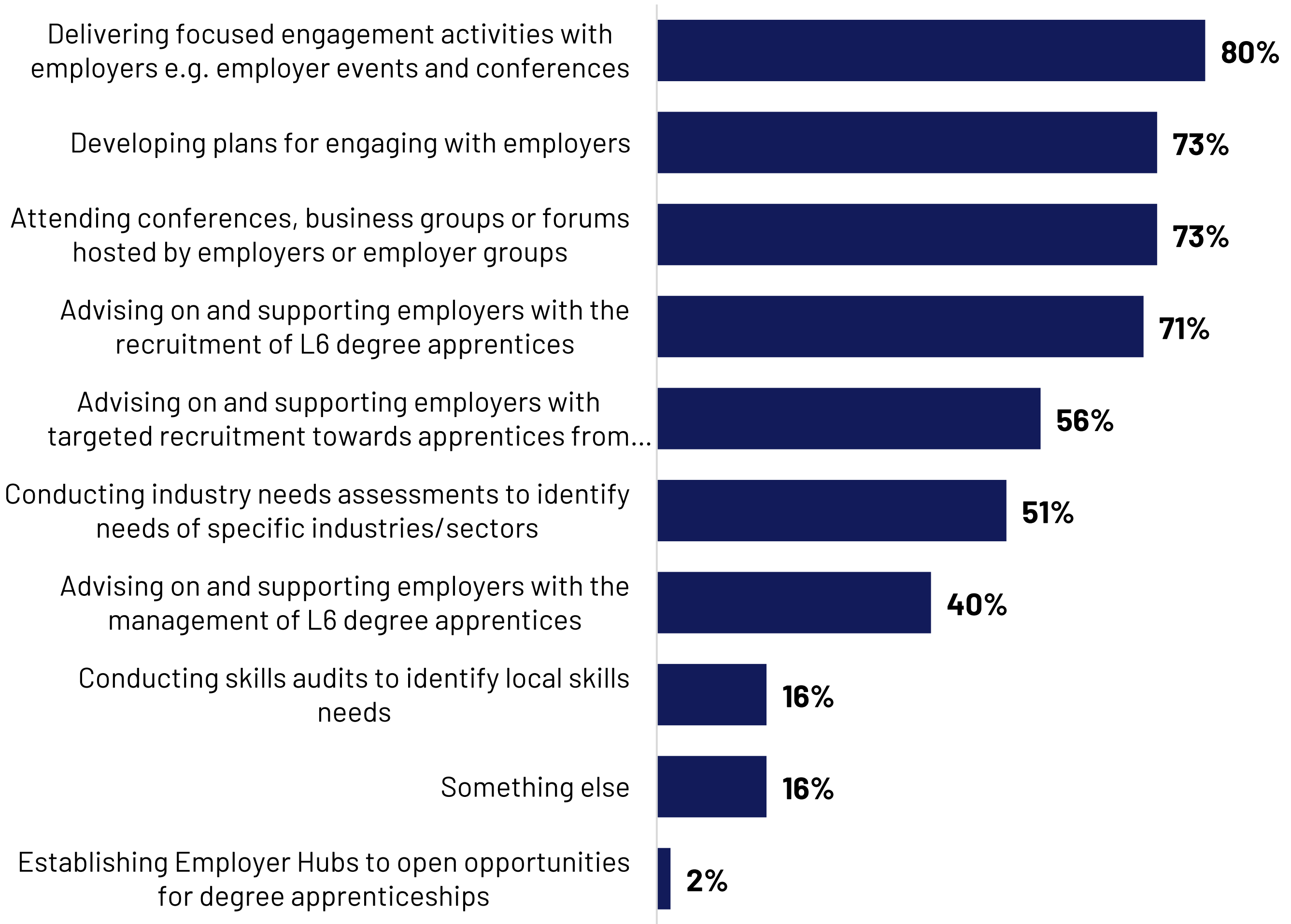
6 Employer attraction and engagement

6.1 Inputs, activities and outputs

6.1.1 Activities delivered by providers

Of those providers that received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and engaging employers to support L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes, the majority (80%) delivered focused engagement activities such as employer events and conferences. Around three-quarters developed plans for engaging employers (73%), attended conferences or other types of events hosted by employers or their representative bodies (73%) and/or advised or supported employers with apprenticeship recruitment (73%). Relatively few established Employer Hubs (2%) or conducted skills audits to identify local skills needs (16%).

Figure 6.1: Did you use Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding to deliver any of the following activities with employers to improve levels of attraction and engagement in L6 Degree apprenticeships? (Multicode)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All that received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and engaging employers to support L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (45)

Wave 1 providers engaged an average of 43 new employers through DAFC-funded activities, whilst two-fifths (40%) engaged over 50 new employers.

- Almost all providers that used the funding to conduct skills audits engaged six or more employers (96%).
- Of those providers that had advised or supported employers with recruitment, 34% had engaged between 21 and 50 employers to deliver this type of support and 32% had engaged over 50 employers.

6.1.2 Providers' approaches to employer engagement

Providers tailored their engagement efforts based on characteristics of employers

Interviewed providers consciously tailored their strategies based on the size, sector, and existing familiarity of an employer with the apprenticeship system.

Local vs regional delivery: Providers designed their employer-engagement activities based on whether the apprenticeship programme could be accessed by employers in their immediate local area. For example, providers that prioritised national engagement through social media marketing and large national and/or regional career events aimed to attract larger employers with potentially national reach, such as the NHS. On the other hand, providers that delivered more targeted engagement (for example, roundtable forums or one-to-one meetings) typically aimed to attract locally based employers, often SMEs. This was driven by whether the apprenticeship programmes were designed to meet national or more localised skills demand.

Large employers vs. SMEs: Providers found that larger employers often have dedicated HR or apprenticeship teams and a deeper understanding of the Apprenticeship Levy. Providers perceived that engagement with larger employers worked best when focused on aligning with their strategic goals for growth and their plans for the talent pipeline. They found that these employers typically needed less support.

> "The big employers understand... they've got early career development teams that then support them when they get on programme... But many of the SMEs don't really know what's available for them. They perhaps haven't got a big levy pot. They don't understand what it is." *(Provider)*

For SMEs, which were often newer to Degree apprenticeships, providers perceived that engagement was more foundational and supportive. It involved educating them on the benefits, funding mechanisms, and practicalities of apprenticeships, such as the 20% off-the-job training rule.

Public sector vs. corporate sector: Engagement was also tailored according to the sector that employers worked in. Public-sector organisations, such as NHS Trusts, sometimes had unique constraints, such as strict headcount limits and budget envelopes, which required a different approach compared with employers in corporate sectors. One provider explained that when engaging with corporate employers, they framed the apprenticeship as a commercial partnership focused on delivering a clear return on investment and competitive advantage. However, when engaging with public-sector employers they would emphasise the way in which the apprenticeship addresses critical public service needs, fills national skills shortages (such as in nursing or policing), and creates a sustainable talent pipeline for the community.

Providers typically considered employers as their 'customers'

Interviewed providers recognised that, unlike non-apprenticeship undergraduate degrees where students are their primary consumers, Degree apprenticeships must be tailored to employer's needs. Providers generally perceived employers as their focus for engagement and marketing of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. Providers also viewed prospective apprentices as one step removed from them given that employers were ultimately responsible for creating vacancies and generating and driving demand for these.

Apprentice experiences of their entry routes and initial awareness of the L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes supported the idea that they may not be the direct 'customers' for provider marketing. All the apprentices that participated in focus groups said they had engaged with programme marketing and information about L6 Degree apprenticeships through non-provider routes (for example, employer websites, GOV.UK website). Most of the apprentices were not local to their provider (participating in course-based learning virtually), and some had relocated to be closer to their employers rather than their provider. As a result, some provider marketing strategies were unable to reach prospective apprentices, legitimising the 'employer-centric' focus of provider marketing and engagement efforts.

Providers carefully planned their employer-engagement activities

Interviewed providers delivered a range of activities to maximise the success of their employer-engagement activities.

Dedicated business development and engagement teams: Funding allowed providers to either expand or create dedicated teams or roles, such as "Business Development Executives" or an "Employer Engagement Team," whose sole focus was to build and maintain relationships with employers. Providers considered that the DAFC funding had enabled them to expand this capacity.

> "We employed an employer engagement officer who could really focus on reaching out to employers, being able to explain more about what the courses were, what an apprenticeship was, how it might support their business." *(Provider)*

Targeted on-site engagement: Engagement plans were often proactive rather than reactive. This included strategic outreach based on occupational clusters or geographical targets. One provider described physically visiting potential employer partners to build relationships within their own environment. This was further refined to focus on "occupational clusters" within specific sectors. This allowed for individual members of the provider team to visit distinct employer departments. Rather than only hosting events on campus, some providers took their engagement activities directly to the employer's environment. This was particularly effective for large, site-specific employers like hospitals.

> "We went in and ran specific events within NHS hospital. So, we kind of worked with some of the NHS staff... to put on a specific event to promote the apprenticeship, because we expected that quite a number of those applying would actually already be in a role within the NHS." *(Provider)*

Alignment with regional skills plans: Engagement strategies were heavily informed by regional priorities and labour market intelligence, ensuring that apprenticeships developed were aligned with local economic needs.

> "We've been subject to and actually helped inform a lot of the labour market intelligence... Both the Strategic Development Fund and the Local Skills Improvement Plan have reflected on very key local priorities... which has helped inform that strategy and make sure we are responsive." *(Provider)*

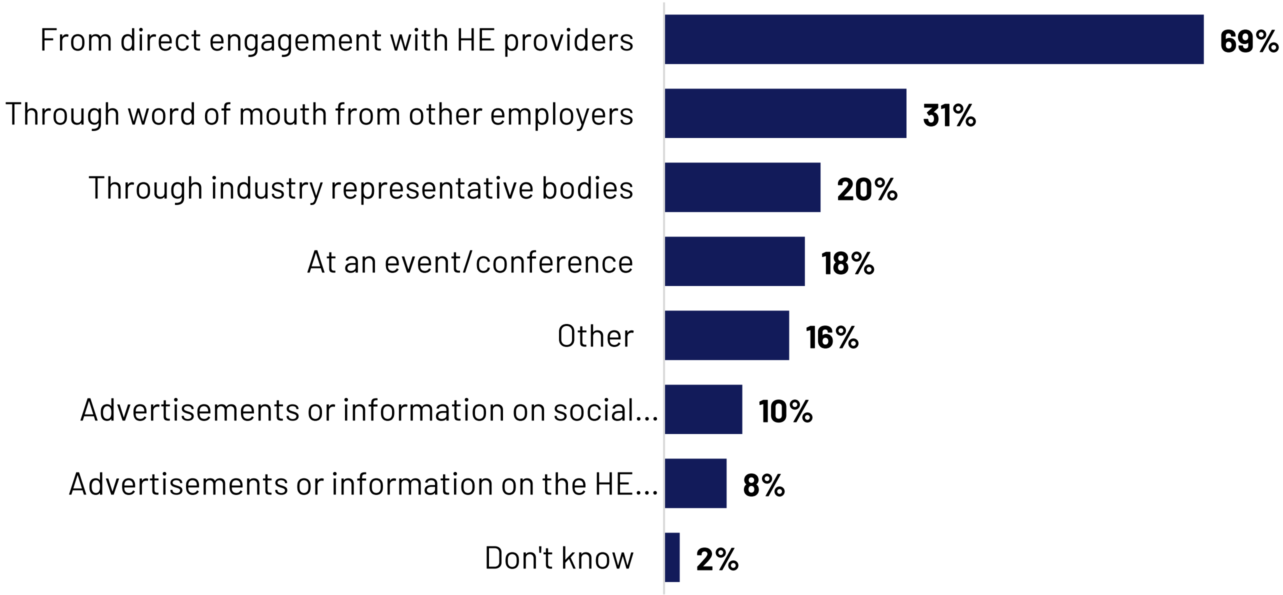
6.1.3 Employer engagement in provider-delivered activities

Aside from curriculum development, which was discussed in Section 5, employers engaged with providers in three key ways: 1) attending provider-led events, 2) collaborating on strategic workforce plans to anticipate future skills needs and 3) participating directly in the recruitment and selection of candidates.

Employers predominantly heard about provider-led activities from direct engagement by the provider

More than two-thirds (69%) of employers became aware that activities were being delivered by the HE provider through direct engagement from them. Other approaches included word of mouth from other employers (31%), through industry representative bodies (20%) and at an event or conference (18%). Online advertisements or information on HE provider websites or social media were less effective methods for engaging employers.

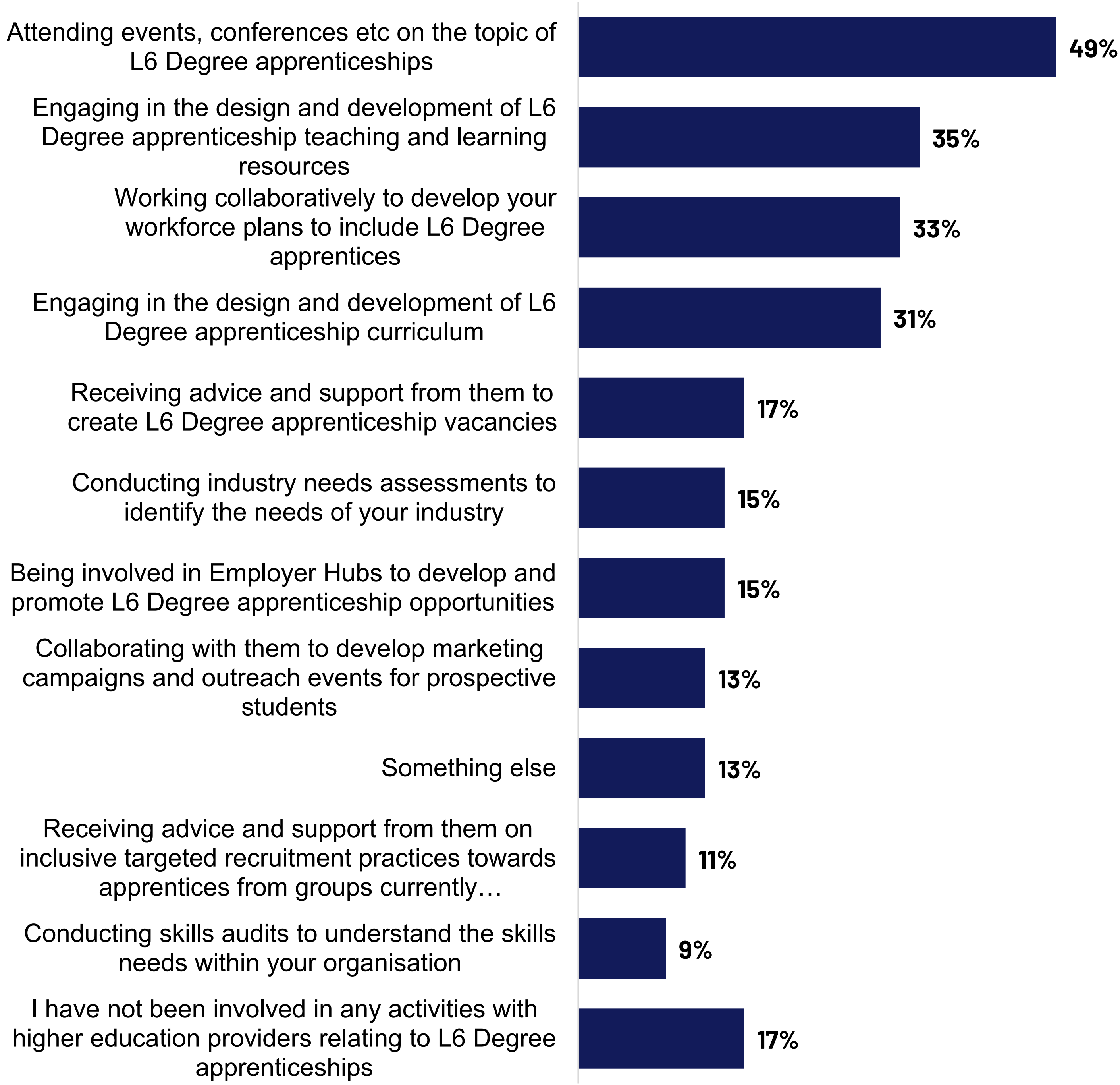
Figure 6.2: How did you become aware that these activities were being delivered by the HE provider? (Multicode)



Source: Employer survey
Base: All respondents where employer approached the HE provider/s (51)

Surveyed employers had been involved in a range of activities with Wave 1 DAFC providers. Half (49%) had attended events or conferences on the topic of L6 Degree apprenticeships. A third had engaged in the design and development of L6 Degree apprenticeship teaching and learning resources (35%); worked collaboratively to develop their workforce plans to include L6 Degree apprentices (33%); or had been involved in the design and development of L6 Degree apprenticeship curriculum (31%).

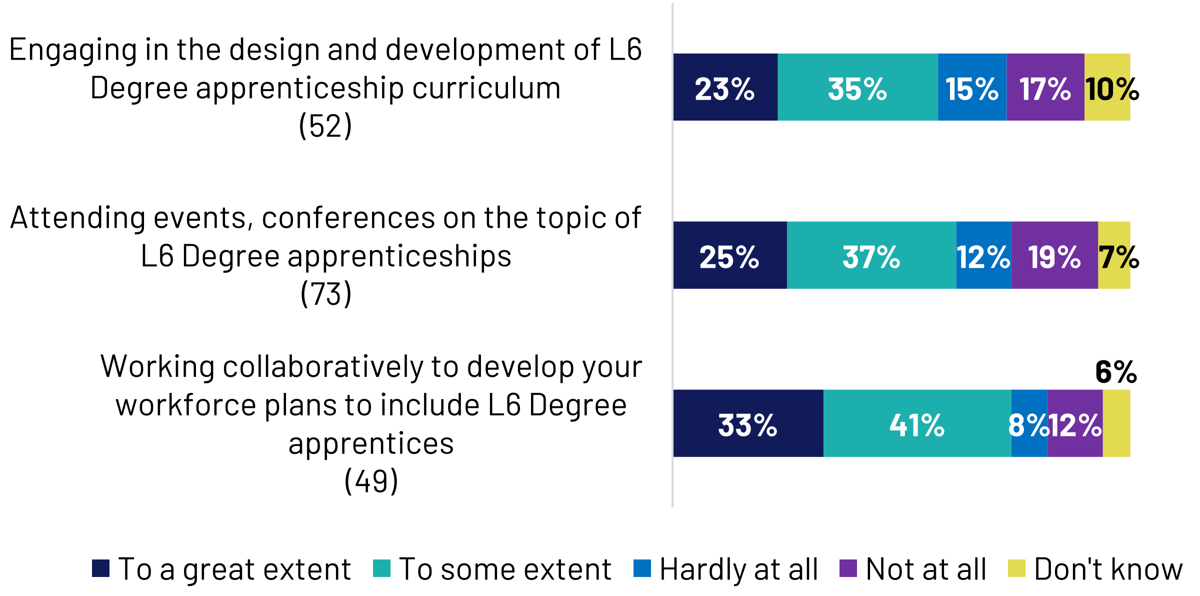
Figure 6.3: Which of these activities have you been involved in with [HE provider], if at all? (Select all that apply)



Source: Employer survey
Base: All respondents (150)

Of the top three DAFC-supported activities that employers had engaged with, around one in three employers had hardly and/or not at all engaged in the design and development of curriculum (32%) and attended provider-led events and conferences on L6 Degree apprenticeships (31%) prior to working with the provider. Employers were more likely to have collaborated on developing their workforce plans, with one in five (20%) reporting they had hardly and/or not at all conducted this activity prior to engaging with the provider.

Figure 6.4: Aside from your involvement in these activities with your associated HE provider, over the past year, to what extent had your organisation been involved in similar activities in the past? (Single code)



Source: Employer survey

Base: Employers that attended events, conferences on the topic of L6 Degree apprenticeships (73), employers that worked collaboratively to develop their workforce plans to include L6 Degree apprentices (49), employers that engaged in the design and development of L6 Degree apprenticeship curriculum (52).

Interviewed employers generally preferred engaging in provider-led forums to other methods of engagement

Employers found participating in provider-led employer forums to be their preferred way to engage. These events were typically held during the design or review phase of an apprenticeship programme and used to gather employer input. One NHS employer attended a forum which brought together a range of providers to talk about changes to the programme, general updates, successes, areas for improvement, and emerging skill and equipment needs, as well as what was going well and less well. These events helped to build positive working relationships between employers and providers. Employers appreciated the opportunity that these events provided for networking with other employers

> "It encouraged a pleasant, harmonious working relationship with all the attendees. It was very enjoyable. [A] real good mixture of people who had just wanted open conversations and just wanted to make the apprenticeship better" *(Employer)*

Employers led apprentice recruitment activities and engaged providers in the process

Employers generally took the lead on apprentice recruitment activities but often engaged providers to support on these. In some cases, employers collaborated closely with providers to support recruitment and enrolment onto programmes. They jointly participated in open days and internal events to promote the programme and shared marketing responsibilities. For example, an NHS trust worked with a provider to deliver a “career bus” to visit local schools in lower socioeconomic areas and deliver information sessions. They also conducted interviews together to ensure both practical and academic suitability were assessed, with employers being responsible for the final decision. This was described as particularly beneficial by employers as providers offered different but complementary perspectives on potential apprentices. Employers were best placed to assess a candidate's suitability for the practical elements of the apprenticeship, while providers were better equipped to evaluate their academic capabilities.

Some providers offered a "matching service" (connecting prospective apprentices with employers with vacancies) or even embedded staff within employer organisations to help them promote vacancies and manage the recruitment process. Some employers found this helpful as it enabled employers it streamlined their recruitment process, saving time and resources.

> “This person's really good at their role. But if academically, if they can't fulfil the academic side, then you know that they're not really suitable for the course. So definitely in terms of recruitment, we were able to tell the university what works well, what doesn't work so well. That's why we have the university now having a look at the short listing and also sitting in on the interview panel as well for us to help us select our apprentices.” *(Employer)*

Whilst employers generally led recruitment activities, some interviewed employers discussed attending provider-led events to support recruitment efforts. One employer described their joint outreach strategy as going directly "into the community through the job centre, through schools, through community events" to advertise the profession and engage potential applicants from all backgrounds. In some cases, employers had a significant presence at provider-led events. One employer explained how they were regularly invited to "go along to open days at the university" to speak directly with prospective apprentices.

> “We're quite a brand name that we don't necessarily need the help [from providers], but it is nice to have. We do want to try and employ local people [through the provider events] where possible.” *(Employer)*

Employers valued providers’ input into their workforce plans and identifying opportunities to include L6 Degree apprentices

Employers discussed developing workforce plans, a strategy for developing a sustainable internal talent pipeline by formalising career progression and securing a regular intake of new staff to fill gaps. For example, one employer converted a junior role into a L6 Degree apprenticeship to establish a direct progression route for a successful Level 3 apprentice. Another explained that the apprenticeship was "very much embedded in the workforce plan" and helps with recruitment and retention because it offers a clear career pathway for existing staff.

Workforce plans were often developed through a multi-stage partnership between employers and providers, which began with the co-design of programmes to address specific skills gaps and regularly reviewed during ongoing governance, including strategic meetings. Workforce plans were treated as living documents which were updated in response to how delivery was working. For example, one employer revised its strategy to de-risk future investment by placing potential candidates on a 12-month taster course to ensure they were prepared for the demands of a degree-level apprenticeship.

Employers found that involving providers in their workforce planning was essential for future-proofing their talent pipeline. They explained that by providing direct insight into emerging technologies and industry trends, they could ensure the apprenticeship programme was both current and forward-looking.

Employers shared challenges to engaging in provider-led events

The main challenges associated with provider-hosted events were not related to the quality of the events themselves, but to practical barriers preventing employers from attending.

Geographical distance: This was the most frequently cited reason for non-attendance. For employers not located near the university, the time and travel commitments were prohibitive. Even for local employers, day-to-day work pressures made it difficult to prioritise attending events.

> "For me, any attending anything is at least a whole day [out of] my day job... I can't afford the time to travel over to [Provider] to an event" *(Employer)*

Perceived lack of need due to strong existing relationships: In cases where the employer had an existing close relationship with the university, formal events were sometimes seen as less essential. One employer felt that because they worked on the same campus as their provider, they could reach out directly if they wanted to discuss anything with them, making attendance at a formal event feel less critical.

6.2 Outcomes

6.2.1 Increase in the number and diversity of employers engaging with L6 Degree apprenticeships

The consensus from the Wave 1 providers that were interviewed was that the funding had led to an increase in both the number and diversity of employers engaging with L6 Degree apprenticeships. Providers perceived that DAFC funding had enabled them to dedicate resources to proactive outreach, strategic marketing, and the development of a more sophisticated engagement offer. This, in turn, had attracted new employers, particularly SMEs, and deepened relationships with existing employers. Providers consistently reported growth in their employer networks, moving beyond their traditional partners to engage a more varied and sustainable employer base.

Growth in absolute numbers of employers: Some providers were able to provide concrete examples of an increase in the number of employers they were working with. For example, one provider reported that:

> "Rather than have two companies involved in that programme, this year, we have nine companies involved. So it is that diversification and sustainability, it's enabled us to do...." *(Provider)*

Diversification beyond large, established partners: Providers were able to engage with SMEs and new types of businesses, reducing reliance on a small number of large employers. One provider explained how the funding helped them build resilience. Another provider had used the funding to recruit an employer-engagement role which had enabled them to connect to new businesses that they could not reach through existing contacts.

> "We relied on a small number of large employers, and we needed to diversify and have the time. This project enabled us to invest in the staffing to work with those employers." *(Providers)*

Increased interest and new conversations: Providers perceived that funded employer-engagement activities had generated a marked increase in inbound inquiries from employers that were previously unaware of the university's apprenticeship offer.

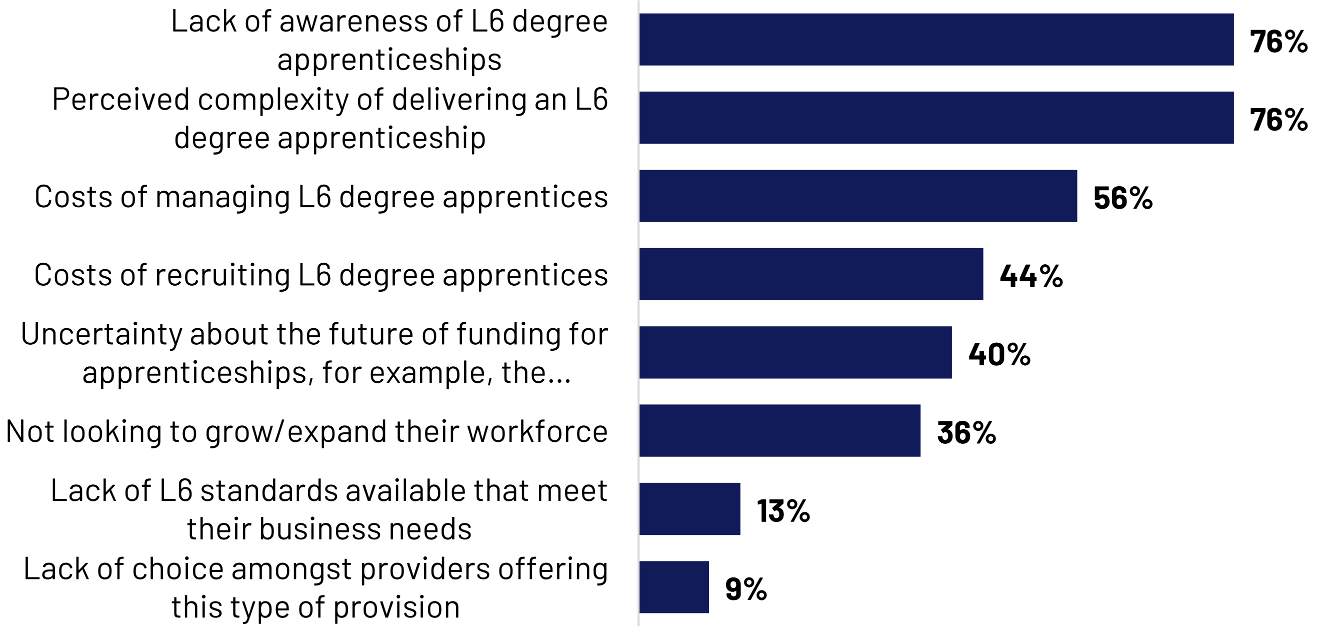
> "I guess the other metric that sort of demonstrates some success is the increased number of employer inquiries, new employers. Because obviously that is a really good benchmark, not just for the Wave 1 period, but I think for us... to ensure that there was a legacy." *(Provider)*

6.2.2 Employers are aware of the benefits of L6 Degree apprenticeships

Employers perceived that engaging in activities with DAFC-funded providers had supported them to address barriers they had faced to incorporating L6 Degree apprentices in their workforce

Providers perceived the main barriers faced by employers in recruiting L6 Degree apprentices to be a lack of awareness of these (76%) and the perceived complexity of delivering them (76%). Other perceived barriers included the costs of managing and recruiting L6 Degree apprentices (56% and 44%, respectively).

Figure 6.5: What do you think are the main barriers faced by employers in recruiting to L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes? (Multicode)

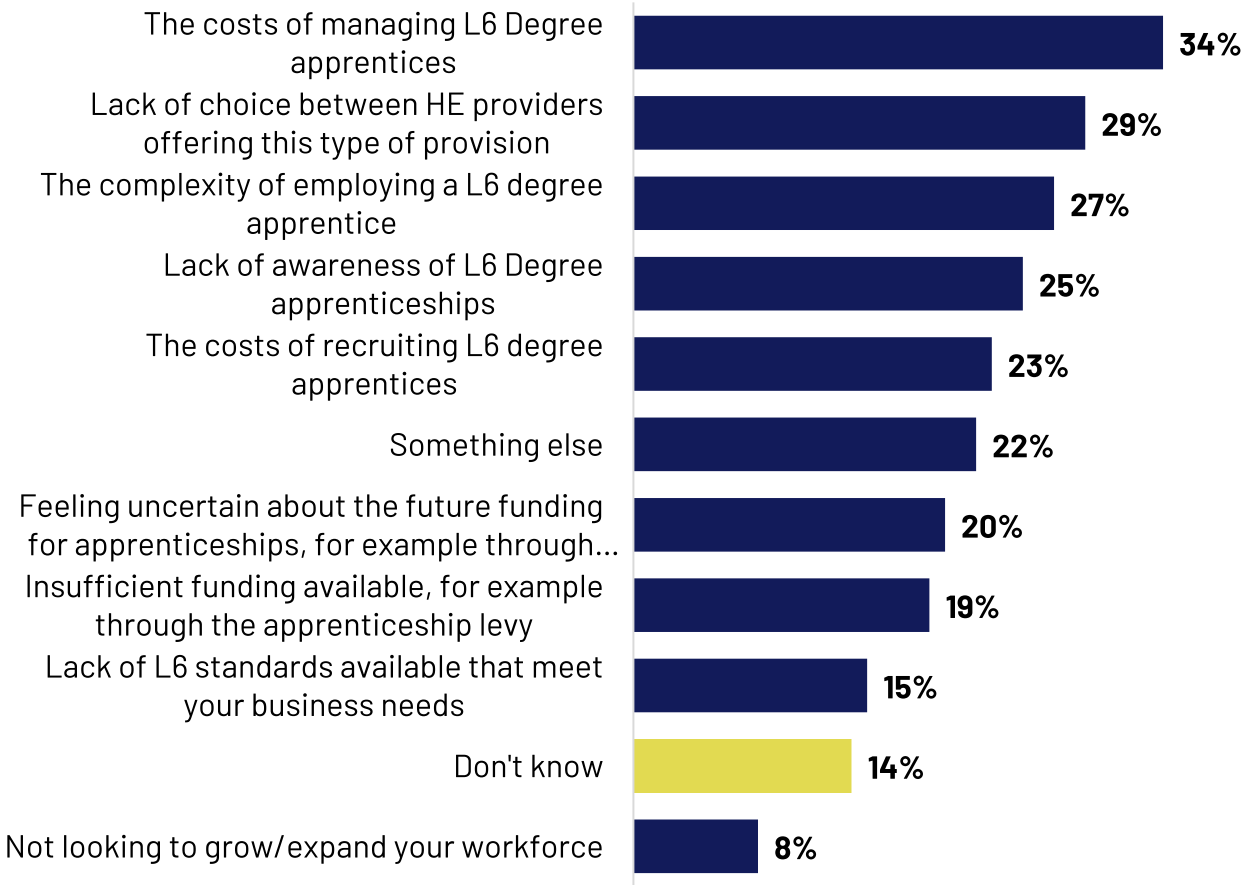


Source: Provider survey
Base: All that received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and engaging employers to support L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (45)

The barriers reported by employers that took part in the survey were different to those perceived by providers. The most important barrier raised by employers related to the cost of managing L6 Degree apprentices (referenced by 34%), followed by lack of choice between HE providers offering a specific type of provision (29%) and the complexity of employing a L6 Degree apprentice (27%).

Other barriers reported by employers included lack of awareness of L6 Degree apprentices (25%), the costs of recruiting L6 Degree apprentices (23%) and feeling uncertain about the future funding for apprenticeships (20%).

Figure 6.6: Have you ever experienced any of the following barriers to including L6 Degree apprenticeships within your workforce? (Multicode)



Source: Employer survey
Base: All respondents (150)

Reflecting on whether involvement in Wave 1 DAFC-funded activities had supported them to address these barriers:

- Almost half (47%) of employers felt the activities had helped them to address the costs of managing L6 Degree apprentices.
- Over half (54%) felt the activities had helped to address their lack of choice between HE providers offering this type of provision.
- Three in five (60%) said the activities had helped to address their lack of awareness of L6 Degree apprenticeships.

Nearly all employers (90%) that completed the survey felt confident about including L6 Degree apprentices in their workforce. This comprised over half (56%) feeling very confident, a third (34%) feeling fairly confident, 5% feeling not very confident and 1% not feeling confident at all.

Employers perceived that L6 Degree apprenticeships to be an effective way to support the progression of their existing employees

The "grow your own" model was frequently cited by interviewed employers as a benefit of Degree apprenticeships, offering a solution to ongoing recruitment and skills challenges.

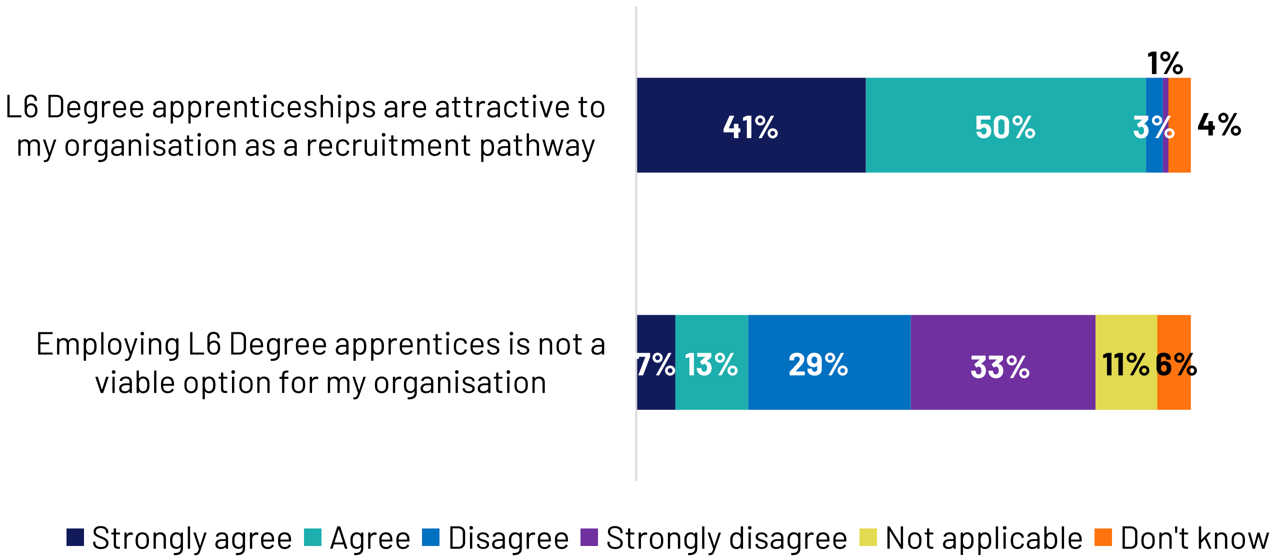
Employers viewed apprenticeships as offering a clear, funded career ladder, providing opportunities for advancement to employees that might otherwise lack the financial means to pursue a traditional degree. One employer described the approach of promoting from within as a risk-reduction strategy, as they were investing in a known employee whose work ethic, commitment, and cultural fit were already established. For example, one NHS trust facing a shortage within a particular profession uses the apprenticeship to create a sustainable pipeline. Similarly, a hospital that describes itself as geographically challenged for recruitment viewed the apprenticeship as a vital tool to develop local staff and ensure a sustainable workforce for the future.

Beyond filling vacancies, employers found that the model formalised career progression for existing staff, boosting morale and creating a culture of internal development. In one instance, an employer created a L6 role specifically to provide a direct progression route for a talented Level 3 apprentice, successfully retaining an employee who had not previously seen a future for themselves in higher education.

Employers also saw the benefits of L6 Degree apprenticeships as a way to secure new talent into the organisation

Most employers agreed that L6 Degree apprenticeships were attractive to their organisation as a recruitment pathway (91%). Furthermore, over six in 10 (62%) disagreed that employing L6 Degree apprentices was not a viable option for the organisation, with one in five (20%) agreeing with this statement.

Figure 6.7: Thinking generally about L6 Degree apprenticeships, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements… (Single code)



Source: Employer survey
Base: All respondents (150)

Most surveyed employers (93%) agreed that L6 Degree apprenticeships were beneficial to their organisation as a workforce and recruitment option. Nearly two-thirds (63%) strongly agreed with this statement.

Employers were asked how and in what ways HE providers could better support inclusion and expansion of L6 Degree apprenticeships in the workplace. Key themes in the responses related to:

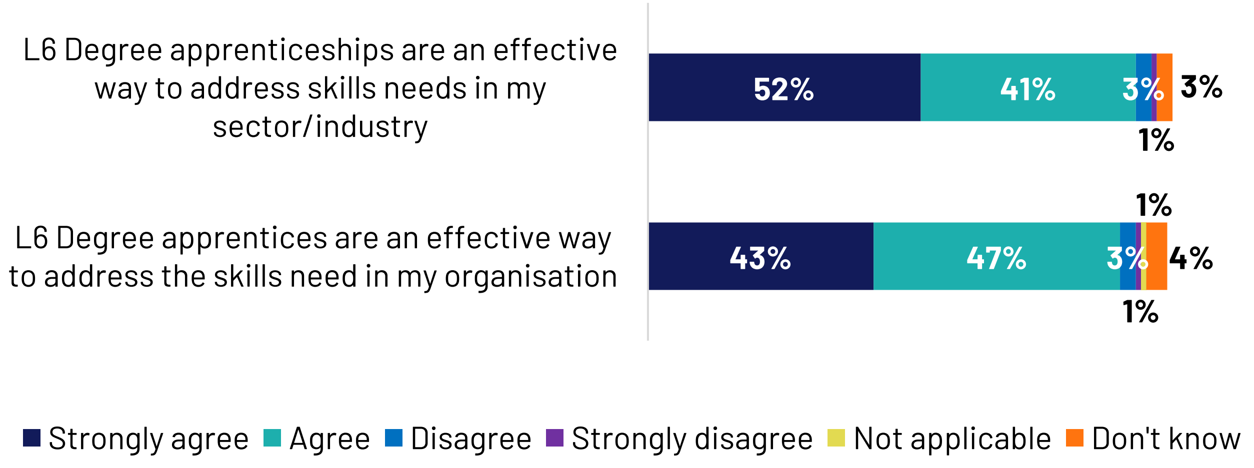
- **Flexibility and structure:** Employers emphasised the need for more flexible and well-structured courses, including avoiding online-only delivery and offering more in-person teaching.
- **Funding and financial support:** Enhanced awareness and assistance regarding funding options for employers, and potential financial support for apprentices, were mentioned. Employers expressed a strong desire for more funding assistance, particularly for smaller businesses and support for placement expenses.
- **Employer engagement and communication:** Clearer communication between HE providers and employers, including regular updates and discussions, were highlighted by employers as a potential area for improvement. There was a desire for better collaboration and understanding of employer needs, particularly in relation to timetabling and curriculum relevance.
- **Improving access and entry requirements:** Suggestions from employers included flexible entry requirements, to support a wider pool of prospective apprentices.

Some interviewed employers described recruiting L6 Degree apprentices as a tactic used for attracting new demographics into the organisation, such as school leavers. For large corporations in particular, it has become a core part of their entry-level talent acquisition strategy, with some receiving thousands of applications from across the UK for their Degree apprenticeship roles.

Employers perceived L6 Degree apprenticeships as effective at ensuring skilled employees

Most surveyed employers (93%) agreed that L6 Degree apprenticeships were an effective way to address skills needs in their sector and/or industry and an effective way to address the skills needs in their organisation (91%).

Figure 6.8: Thinking generally about L6 Degree apprenticeships, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements... (Single code)



Source: Employer survey
Base: All respondents (150)

Employers consistently reported that apprentices completing a L6 programme were more competent, professional, and "job-ready" than recruits from other pathways, including traditional university graduates. The integrated nature of on-the-job experience and academic learning meant apprentices were highly effective from the moment they qualified, reducing onboarding time and associated costs.

One NHS trust stated that their apprentices required minimal supervision when they qualified. Beyond practical skills, the employers perceived the apprenticeships' academic rigour to elevate the professionalism of the entire workforce. An employer within the police force, for example, described a key benefit as the shift from training, which focused on how to do a task, to education, which involved understanding the impact of an individual's actions, helping to professionalise policing by creating more reflective and critical-thinking officers.

Wider benefits to employers

Employers highlighted a range of positive impacts of Degree apprenticeships on their business outcomes. These included improved employee retention, the capacity to drive innovation, offering clear financial benefits, fostering greater loyalty and reducing the high costs associated with staff turnover. For example, one large employer provided an example stating that their retention rates for Degree apprenticeships were in the 90s, whereas for graduates they were around the mid-70s. This evidence prompted a long-term strategic shift within the company to take on more Degree apprentices. Apprentices were also seen as a vital source of new ideas and are frequently tasked with projects that deliver tangible value. One employer shared an example of an apprentice who single-handedly saved a failing project, stating that the project would not have progressed without their inputs.

The process of engaging with providers and supporting apprentices was said by employers to have enhanced their internal teams and overall organisational culture. It fostered more of a learning and mentorship environment within the organisation, where the presence of apprentices encouraged existing staff to step up as mentors, improving the skills and engagement of the entire team. For instance, one NHS trust observed that the apprenticeship programme had improved the department's willingness to supervise colleagues as previously reluctant staff became more invested in mentoring.

Employers are likely to continue employing L6 Degree apprentices in the future

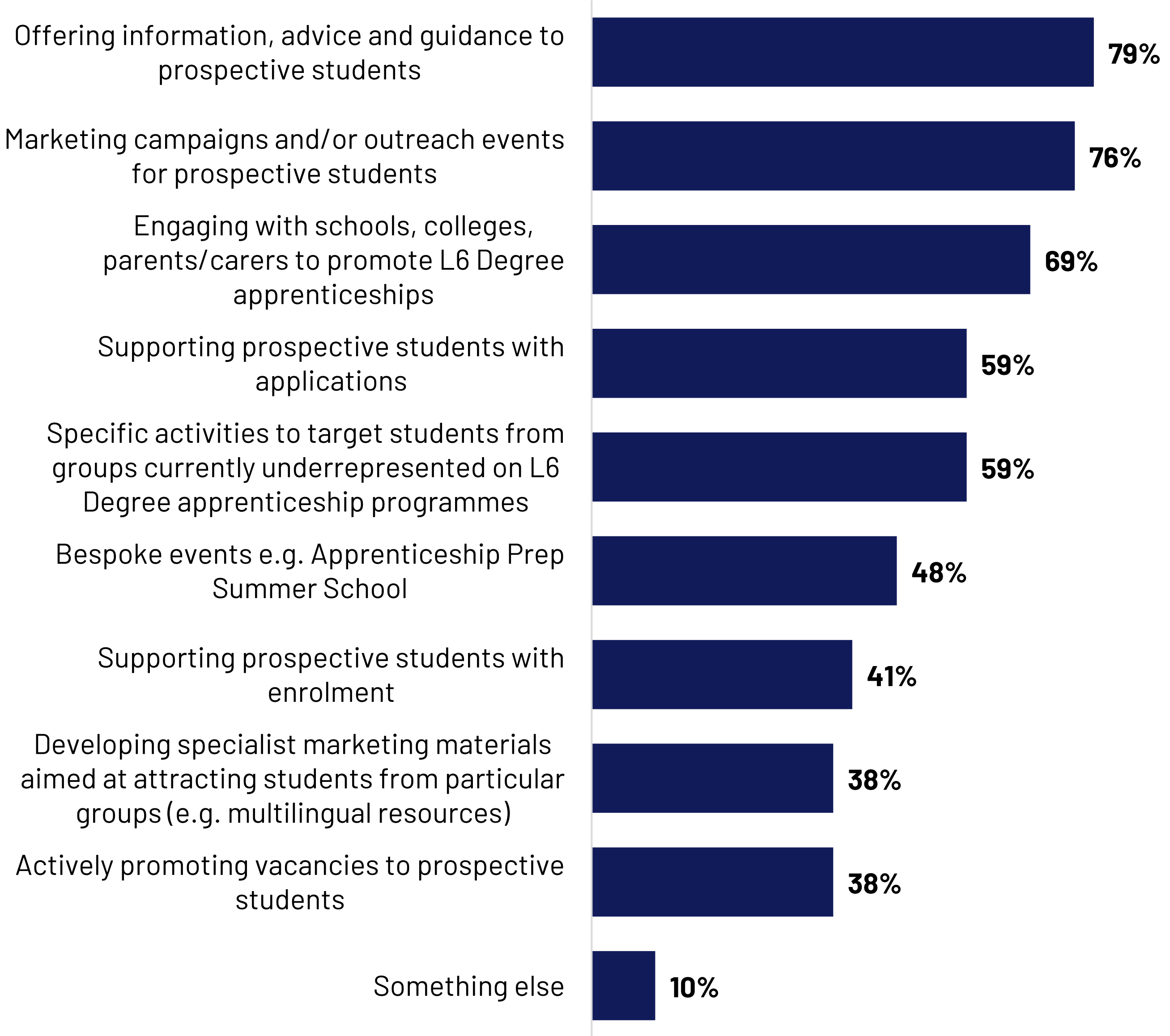
Nine in 10 employers (90%) that responded to the survey said they were 'very' or 'fairly' likely to continue to employ L6 Degree apprentices in the future. Relatively few (5%) said they were unlikely to do this, suggesting that those who responded to the survey were particularly invested in the programme.

7 Apprentice attraction, recruitment and support

7.1 Inputs, activities and outputs

Six in 10 (62%) surveyed providers received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective apprentices onto L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes. Of these, four in five (79%) offered information, advice and guidance to prospective apprentices. Following this, three in four (76%) delivered marketing campaigns and/or outreach events and seven in 10 (69%) engaged with schools, colleges and parents or carers to promote L6 Degree apprenticeships.

Figure 7.1: Did you use Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding to deliver any of the following activities to attract prospective students onto L6 Degree apprenticeships? (Multicode)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All respondents that received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective students onto L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (29)

7.1.2 Providers' approaches to attracting prospective apprentices

Apprentice recruitment and attraction is often employer-led

Providers perceived that employers have greater onus and incentives for attracting high-quality prospective apprentices. Some providers understood this distinct dynamic underpinning L6 Degree apprenticeships, and considered it a core lesson learned throughout Wave 1:

> " I think in many ways understanding what the thoughts and the way that industry thinks about these programmes and what they want and it's not necessarily the same as what the prospective apprenticeship student might be looking for. And the question is then who's the right person to pitch to and who makes the final decision? Well, ultimately it's the employer." *(Provider)*

Attracting prospective apprentices demands innovative methods

Whilst some providers continued to focus on localised recruitment and placed a strong reliance on employer-based recruitment to attract prospective apprentices, other providers discussed using social media, developing online resources, and leveraging nationally recognised opportunities (such as the National Apprenticeship Week). Some providers emphasised the importance of including current apprentice testimonials in their messaging to capture the online-based talent pool:

> "I think, getting that student voice and being able to have students that are like, yeah, I've done it and it's been really great. You can do it too. You know, those, the positive messages we've been trying to put out through TikTok videos and kind of social media campaigns and things as well as on our website and things as well so that students can look at those and watch them." *(Provider)*

7.1.3 Apprentice engagement in activities

Over one-third of providers (36%) delivering activities aimed at recruiting apprentices reported that over 101 prospective students attended engagement events aimed at attracting new apprentices supported by Wave 1 funding. A further 36% reported that between 21 and 50 prospective students attended the events. Additionally, two in five (41%) providers supported 51 – 100 students to complete applications for L6 Degree apprenticeship courses through activities delivered using Wave 1 funding.

Apprentices did not seek provider-led information sources

Qualitative evidence from the apprentice focus groups indicated that whilst awareness and demand for L6 Degree apprenticeships was apparent amongst the cohort, this was not a result of provider-led activities or marketing. All apprentices in the focus groups had not attended or accessed any engagement activities delivered by their provider prior to their application, and instead sought information once enrolment was confirmed. Apprentices had accessed information about the programme and apprenticeship via other sources, including: the employer website, GOV.UK website, and other FE or career support websites (such as, Unifrog). Apprentices felt they had developed sufficient understanding from these other sources, potentially explaining their absence from provider-led activities:

> "I think personally, I didn't have to look into the university myself independently because I was supplied with the information that I needed [by their employer]. I was given everything in a layout to do with how my study days would work, how I'd be doing, how I'd be examined, the different breakdown of all the modules." *(Apprentice)*

The limited role of providers in attracting prospective apprentices was most apparent for apprentices who were working and living in a different area to where their provider was based. Generally, apprentices were required to live closer to their employer and were more likely to commute further (if at all, depending on the remote study offer) to their provider for study days.

Some providers focused their marketing efforts on prospective apprentices who were school leavers or earlier in the talent pipeline (while still in school, for example) in their local areas. Some apprentices speculated that this localised approach to marketing meant they were not exposed to it given their geographical distance:

> "I think they could maybe push it to a wider audience rather than just pushing it to schools and colleges that are nearby. Like, we're over six hours away, so the chances of us seeing it are quite slim. So maybe just push it more online rather than just in local schools and colleges." *(Apprentice)*

Moreover, apprentices said that their motivations for applying to L6 Degree apprenticeships were often led by their preference for the specific job role and the employer organisation, with the provider and specific programme curriculum being less important. This aligned with employer marketing that aimed to engage with potential apprentices who were immediately looking to enter the workforce or were already in it (such as an existing employee).

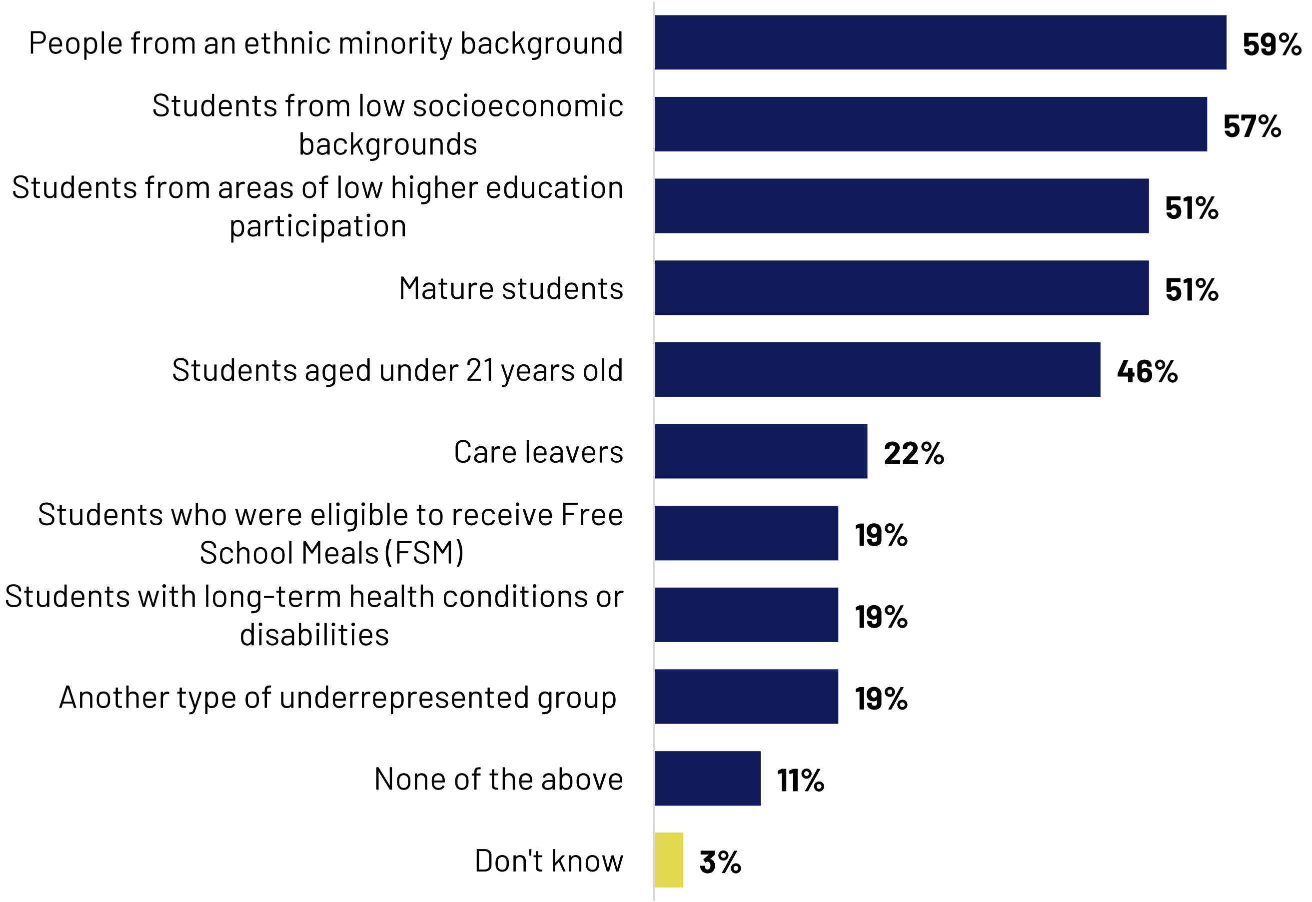
7.1.4 Attracting and supporting apprentices from underrepresented groups

Whilst Wave 1 providers were not required to conduct activities aimed at increasing the equality of opportunity on L6 Degree apprenticeships, Wave 1 providers were asked if they had conducted these activities and the outcomes they perceived them to have achieved.

Steps are being taken by providers to engage underrepresented groups

Of the providers that delivered apprentice-recruitment activities, 59% used the funding to target people from an ethnic minority background, 57% targeted students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, 51% focused on students from areas of low participation in higher education and whilst not a target group for DAFC, 51% targeted mature students. One-fifth (19%) targeted another type of underrepresented group, including refugees, people experiencing homelessness and neurodiverse individuals.

Figure 7.2: Thinking about the activities supported through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition, did you target any of the following groups when delivering student attraction activities? (Multicode)



Source: Provider survey
Base: Received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective students onto L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes (37)

Interviewed providers discussed the approaches they had implemented under Wave 1 DAFC to raise awareness amongst underrepresented groups. This included embedding existing best practices from other departments and seeking advice from employers. Examples included:

- Hosting apprentice recruitment events in target areas, including areas with high levels of deprivation.
- Engaging with local 'target schools' via the provider's school liaison department to attract cohorts of underrepresented school leavers.
- Engaging with internal specialist units and departments, such as Special Educational Need and Disability centres, to advise on recruitment strategies for underrepresented groups.
- Expansion of eligibility criteria and access routes onto programmes, including more qualifications/recognitions (such as international qualifications). Some application processes were designed to be more accessible, removing formalities that may be a barrier for some prospective apprentices (such as a traditional interview style).

- Introduction of apprentice choice over assessment methods to support their learning style (. coursework versus endline exam).
- Some providers reduced rhetoric around their research-based or Russell-Group status for apprenticeship marketing to attract different types of learners who may not be looking not pursue a formal academic route.
- Developing and advertising mentoring programmes offering support to enrolled apprentices through a role-model system specifically targeted at disadvantaged students.
- Engaging with employers to understand common barriers to recruitment (particularly amongst underrepresented groups) within specific sectors helped to ensure that apprenticeship marketing was tailored and challenged common misconceptions. This ensured that the notion of 'underrepresentation' considered industry shortages (such as women in the STEM sector). Joint employer-provider taster days supported this industry-led approach.

Diverse recruitment is dependent on employer recruitment practices

Whilst there was some indication of progress in targeting underrepresented groups, some providers highlighted that success depended on employer practices. Some employers had existing approaches to diverse and equitable recruitment, though providers perceived that collaboration was required to align provider and employer strategies around equality of opportunity:

> "But to have the conversation around equality of opportunity and that EDI focus, I think that's been the real strength of our project, is to really entice employers into a conversation where using degree apprenticeships can absolutely change the narrative in some of the inequality issues that they've got either within their sector or within their employer setting. So, it's provided an opportunity for employers to hold a mirror up to themselves around some of their problems". (Provider)

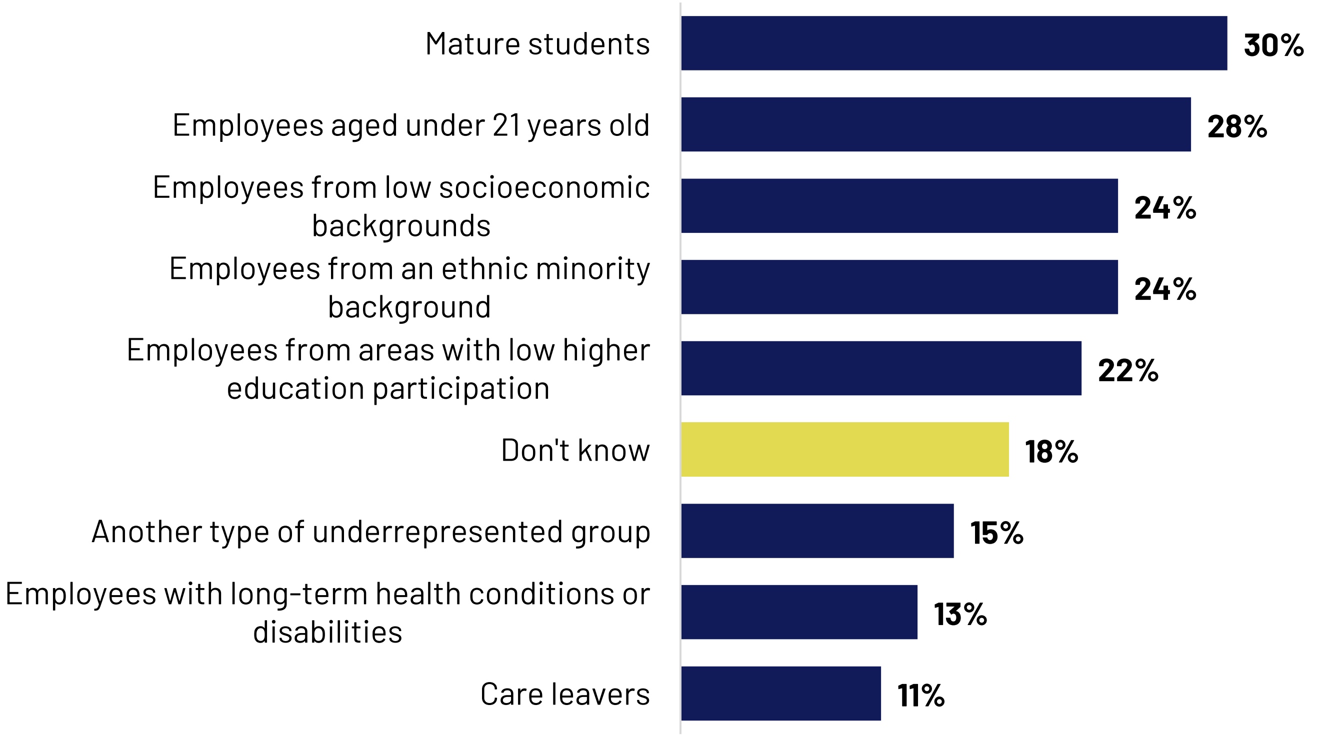
As with broader recruitment and apprentice attraction, provider progress was strongly dependent on employer strategy towards engaging underrepresented groups. This demanded nuance on how 'underrepresentation' was understood and perceived in each industry, alongside broader indicators of underrepresentation in the workplace.

There is evidence that employers are making steps towards targeting recruitment of L6 Degree apprentices at underrepresented groups

A subset of questions was asked to employers that were currently employing one or more apprentices associated with a Wave 1 DAFC-funded provider.

Employers that were currently employing a L6 Degree apprentice with a Wave 1 DAFC provider targeted multiple underrepresented groups when recruiting L6 Degree apprentices in their organisation. Again, whilst not a target group of the DAFC programme, three in 10 employers targeted mature students (30%) and employees aged under 21 years old (28%). Other groups targeted were employees from: low socioeconomic backgrounds (24%), an ethnic minority background (24%), areas with low higher education participation (22%). Employees with long-term health conditions or disabilities (13%) and care leavers (11%) were also targeted during recruitment.

Figure 7.3: Did you target any of the following groups when recruiting L6 Degree apprentices in your organisation? (Multicode)



Source: Employer survey
Base: All currently employing 1 or more L6 Degree apprentices (79)

Employers were asked to identify the most impactful activity delivered by their affiliated provider, which supported them to employ L6 Degree apprentices from underrepresented groups. In response, employers valued the following:

Personalised communication and guidance: Examples of this included recording videos outlining the learning objectives and having calls with applicants.

Independent recruitment effort: Several employers highlighted that they often conduct their own recruitment, either through job boards, local campaigns or internal processes.

Events and outreach: Organising career fairs and using media channels were noted as successful methods in engaging prospect students.

7.2 Outcomes

The short-term outcomes in the ToC for activities aimed at attracting and recruiting L6 Degree apprentices focused on the increasing demand and applications from individuals who might consider starting an apprenticeship, in other words, prospective apprentices. Qualitative data is limited to assess outcomes for prospective apprentices as it draws on a small sample of currently enrolled apprentices who shared retrospective views on being a prospective apprentice, thinking back to before they started their course. This section explores self-reported outcomes from current apprentices and perceptions of providers to provide indicative analysis against these outcomes.

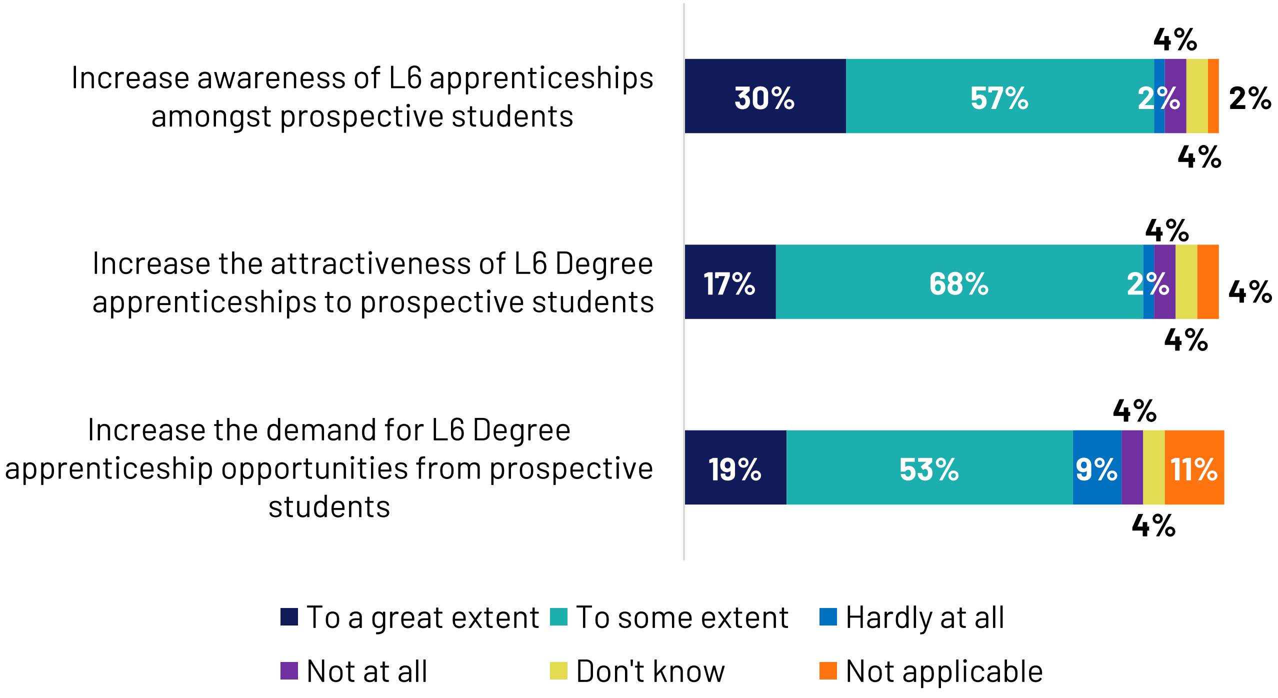
7.2.1 Increased awareness, understanding and demand among prospective apprentices

Providers perceived that DAFC-funded activities had led to increases in awareness and demand among prospective apprentices

Providers generally perceived that Wave 1 DAFC-funded activities had a positive impact on increasing awareness and improving the attractiveness of opportunities to prospective apprentices. Almost nine in 10 (87%) providers thought the funding had enabled them to increase awareness of L6 Degree apprenticeships amongst prospective apprentices and 85% felt that the funding had helped to increase the attractiveness of L6 Degree apprenticeships to prospective apprentices.

Other outcomes included increasing the demand for L6 Degree apprenticeship opportunities (72%) and increasing demand from underrepresented groups (66%).

Figure 7.4: To what extent do you think the funding received through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition has enabled you to...? (Single code)



Source: Provider survey
Base: All (47)

Providers reported that they had received an increase in applications for L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes compared with previous years

Among surveyed providers, 23% reported receiving between one to 10 applications from prospective students for new L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes developed using the funding from DAFC. Similarly, 30% also received one to 10 applications from prospective students, but instead for existing apprenticeship programmes that were revised or enhanced using the funding from DAFC. The remaining providers answered Don't Know (19%, 21% respectively) or Not Applicable (40%, 38% respectively). This may have been due to some providers delaying apprentice recruitment and starts to future academic years.

Around one-third of surveyed providers (36%) reported that they received between one to 10 additional applications for L6 Degree apprenticeship vacancies as a direct result of the activities funded by the Wave 1 DAFC.

Some interviewed providers highlighted a perceived increase in demand among prospective apprentices, underpinned by a broader public recognition of L6 Degree apprenticeships. Some providers also expressed frustration that this perceived rise in apprentice demand was being met by providers through programme development, accreditation, and teaching capacity, but employers did not have the capacity or funding to fill spaces and match levels of demand:

> "We still don't have enough employers to meet the demand of people wanting to do L6 Degree apprenticeships in the areas that were part of our bid. So, we did do work with smaller employers to try and support them. Not in terms of the recruitment because they were well established, but in terms of recognising the benefits of the apprenticeship model because it was a bit of a myth for them." *(Provider)*

Providers reported an increase in the number of new starts onto L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes

At the time of the survey, which was delivered in Autumn 2024 and therefore early in the 2024/25 academic year, over half of providers (57%) estimated that there had been or would be between one to 10 additional L6 Degree apprenticeship programme starts that year. Almost one in five (17%) said they did not know how many new starts there had been or would be in the year, which may have been due to an expectation that starts would be delayed.

Table 7.1: Overall, approximately how many additional L6 Degree apprenticeship programme starts have there been, or do you think there will be, at your institution in the 2024/25 academic year? (Open-ended numeric)

	% of providers
None	13%
1 – 10	57%
11 – 20	4%
21 – 50	2%
51 – 100	0%
101+	0%
Don't know	17%
Not applicable	6%

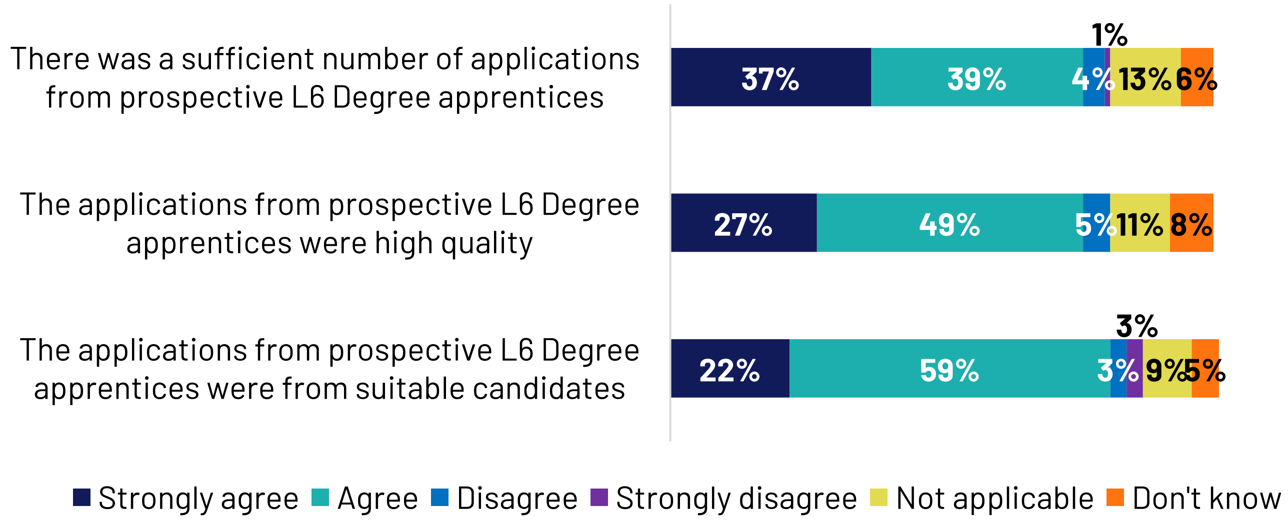
Source: Provider survey
Base: All (47)

Providers participating in interviews said that it was too early to accurately estimate the impact of DAFC-funded activities on the number of starts. Nevertheless, providers were of the view that DAFC-funded activities would lead to an increase in the number of new apprenticeships starts in the current (2024 to 2025) or future academic years.

Employers reported that there had been sufficient demand from high-quality candidates

When recruiting L6 Degree apprentices to the organisation, 81% of employers that were employing an apprentice with a Wave 1 DAFC-funded provider agreed that the applications from prospective apprentices were from suitable candidates. A further three-quarters agreed that there were enough applications from prospective L6 Degree apprentices (76%) and that the applications were of a high quality (also 76%).

Figure 7.5: Thinking about when you recruited L6 Degree apprentices to your organisation, to what extent do you agree with the following statements... (Single code)



Source: Employer survey
Base: All currently employing 1 or more L6 Degree apprentices (79)

7.2.2 Increased awareness, understanding and demand among prospective apprentices from underrepresented groups

Some evidence of increased awareness and demand from underrepresented groups

Surveyed providers generally perceived that Wave 1 DAFC-funded activities had a positive impact on increasing awareness and improving the attractiveness of opportunities to prospective apprentices. Regarding underrepresentation, two-thirds (66%) thought the funding had enabled them to increase the demand for L6 Degree apprenticeship opportunities from prospective students from currently underrepresented groups.

Qualitative evidence indicates there was some progress towards increasing awareness and understanding amongst underrepresented groups, and recognition that DAFC funding generally facilitated a perceived diversification of the wider student cohort within providers. The very nature of L6 Degree apprenticeships - that encourage a non-traditional approach to study - was considered a core benefit amongst some providers, with some feeling this enriched the learner community beyond their usual intake of school leaver cohorts:

> "There will be so many people studying in different ways, studying together and from different backgrounds that you've not got that homogenised kind of traditional cohort where everyone's an 18-year-old student in a classroom who's gone through A Levels and then come to university." (Provider)

Another provider discussed that applications for L6 Degree apprenticeships inherently attracts a more diverse cohort because of the embedded opportunity to earn whilst studying:

> "It [DAFC funded programme] really has encouraged social mobility, it's encouraged progression from our full-time student base. And that disadvantage factor is a big thing in terms of where we are located and that has really helped." *(Provider)*

Apprentices within the focus groups felt it was important to attract apprentices from underrepresented groups, though were unable to comment on whether this had been achieved. Instead, one apprentice emphasised that awareness of L6 Degree apprenticeships needs to be improved generally, not necessarily just targeting underrepresented groups:

> "{...] when you say the word apprenticeship, everyone, you know, they do think it is in plumbing and bricklaying and skills like this, they didn't realise they are in more stereotypical academic subjects as well. [...] So, I think it's not so much about advertising it to [underrepresented groups], I think it's advertising it to everyone." *(Apprentice)*

Employers reported that they had received applications from candidates from underrepresented groups

Over half of surveyed employers (56%) agreed that there were applications from prospective L6 Degree apprentices from underrepresented groups. Broken down, this was 15% strongly agreeing and 41% agreeing.

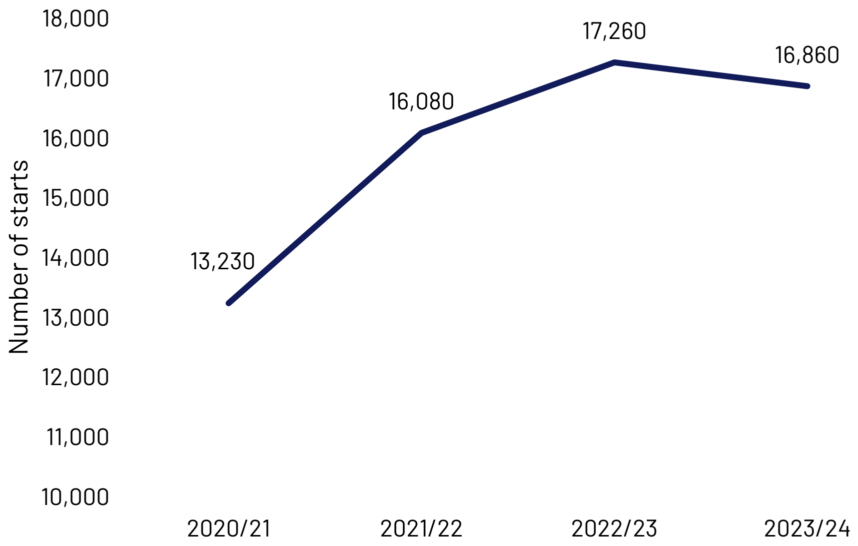
7.3 Impact baseline

Descriptive secondary data analysis on L6 Degree apprenticeship starts covers the period up to the 2023/24 academic year, which was the latest available at the time of reporting. This coincides with delivery Wave 1 DAFC-funded activities, meaning that it is unlikely to capture any increase in starts as a result of DAFC-funded activity. We could expect that these would show up in data for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years. Future phases of the evaluation will incorporate analysis of subsequent years' data, and these statistics can therefore be considered as a baseline.

7.3.1 Increased number of starts on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes

The number of starts on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes increased rapidly since 2020/21. The majority of these increased starts came in 2021/22, which saw a 21.5% increase in the number of new starts. This then slowed in 2022/23 with a 7.3% increase to a peak of 17,260 starts, before falling slightly to 16,860 in 2023/24.

Figure 7.6: Number of starts on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes, 2020/21 – 2023/24



7.3.1 Increased number of starts on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes among those from currently underrepresented groups

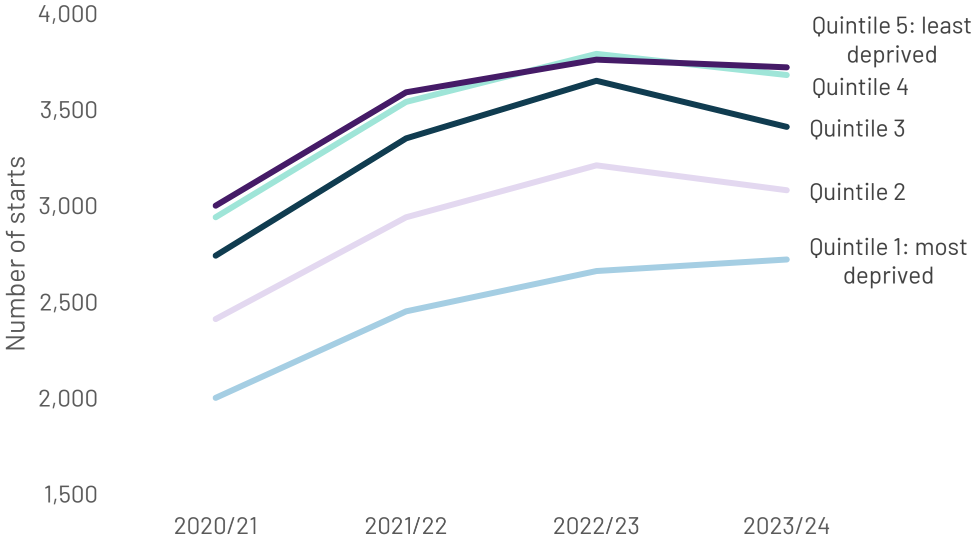
Whilst not a key aim for Wave 1 of the DAFC, an overall aim of the programme and a requirement for activities funded in Waves 2 and 3, is to increase equality of opportunity in L6 Degree apprenticeships among those from currently underrepresented groups. The following subsections review the increased number of starts from these groups for which data is available in the ILR.

Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is used as a measure of socioeconomic background with students categorised into five quintiles. The IMD is a measure of relative deprivation that ranks small areas in the UK by assigning them a score based on indicators associated with deprivation such as access to employment, services, and living conditions. Quintile 1 represents students from the 20% most deprived areas of the country, while quintile 5 represents those from the 20% least deprived areas.

Both quintile 1 and quintile 5 saw the same increase in number of starts per year over the time period, with other quintiles seeing slightly smaller growth. Despite this, the least deprived quintile of students remains the largest group in the latest cohort at 22.4%. The most deprived quintile on the other hand, while still the smallest group at 16.4% of the total cohort, has seen the largest increase in share of starts between 2020/21 and 2023/24, suggesting signs of progress in increasing starts among the most deprived students.

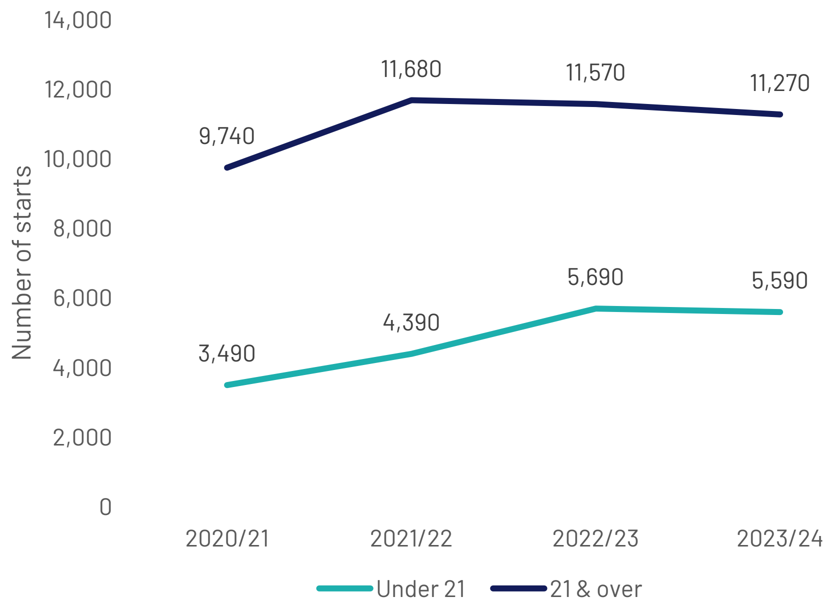
Figure 7.7: Number of starts on L6 apprenticeship programmes by IMD quintile, 2020/21 – 2023/24



Students aged under 21 years old

Students aged 21 and over make up the majority of all L6 Degree apprenticeship starts. Despite an increase of 1,940 starts in 2020/21 among this group, the number of starts has declined in each following year. Students aged 21 and over now make up 66.8% of the total cohort in 2023/24, compared with 73.7% in 2020/21.

Figure 7.8: Number of starts on L6 apprenticeship programmes by age bracket, 2020/21 – 2023/24

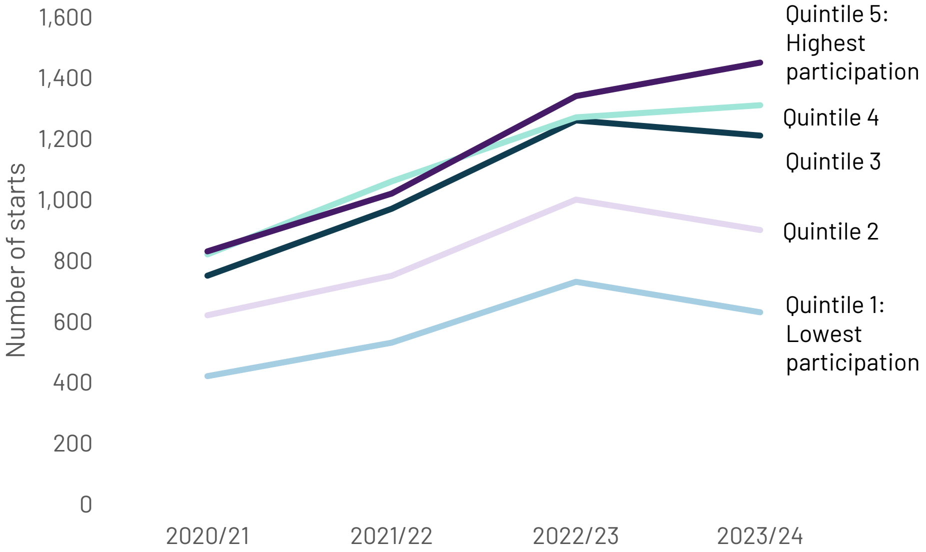


Students from areas with low higher education participation

TUNDRA (tracking underrepresentation by area) is an area-based measure that uses tracking of state-funded mainstream school pupils in England to calculate youth participation in higher education. TUNDRA classifies local areas across England into five equal groups – or quintiles - based on the proportion of 16-year-old state-funded mainstream school pupils who participate in higher education aged 18 or 19 years. Quintile 1 shows the lowest rate of participation. Quintile 5 shows the highest rate of participation.

Quintile 5 has seen the highest increase in number of starts since 2020/21 and has remained the largest group over the period, growing from 24.2% of the cohort in 2020/21 to 26.4% in 2023/24. Quintile 1, on the other hand, has seen the lowest increase, and along with quintiles 2 and 3, saw a decrease in the number of starts in 2023/24.

Figure 7.9: Number of starts on L6 apprenticeship programmes by TUNDRA quintile, 2020/21 – 2023/24



Students with a disability

The number of starts from students with a reported disability has grown steadily since 2020/21, with large rises in 2020/21 and 2021/22. A key positive is that start numbers remained relatively static in 2023/24 at a time when the wider cohort saw large falls in starts.

8 Interim conclusions

Conclusions on the delivery, outcomes and impact of the DAFC will be presented in the final evaluation report produced in August 2026. This section presents emerging interim conclusions based on the delivery and outcomes of Wave 1 funded activities only. These interim conclusions are categorised as either emerging best practice for the delivery of DAFC-funded projects or emerging conclusions on the extent to which Wave 1 funded activities have contributed to programme impacts. These interim conclusions should be interpreted as indicative only.

8.1 Best practice for design and delivery

The following approaches were prominently or frequently referenced as effective strategies for delivery across a range of activity types:

- **Strategically allocated project staffing:** Providers emphasised the benefits of using DAFC funding to recruit to specialist roles, particularly in areas such as employer engagement, project management and marketing, promotion or outreach.
- **Co-collaboration for curriculum design:** Providers and employers highlighted the benefits of working together to develop industry-relevant curriculum. The co-design process was often in the form of provider-led workshops attended by multiple employers. This was considered the most effective way to ensure programmes were aligned to employers' skill requirements and were appealing to prospective apprentices.
- **Employer-focused engagement strategies:** Providers recognised the pivotal role of employers in supporting the growth and diversification of L6 Degree apprenticeships, and as such, considered employers as their main target audience for DAFC-funded activities.
- **Proactive and targeted employer interaction:** Providers considered initiatives such as tailored marketing campaigns and in-person employer visits to be more impactful than more passive communication strategies, such as mass emailing. Employers also considered forums to be a valuable way for them to engage in the design and implementation of L6 Degree apprenticeships and to network with other employers in their sector.
- **Employer partnerships to drive apprentice attraction:** Whilst some providers used Wave 1 funding for apprentice attraction activities, such as social media campaigns, outreach and online resources, apprentice recruitment was predominantly driven by employers. This underscores the essential role of provider-employer partnerships in generating apprentice interest and demand.

8.2 Emerging contribution story

There is some emerging evidence that Wave 1 funded activities are contributing to the short and medium-term outcomes that may lead the programme-level impacts in the future.

8.2.1 Increase in the number of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes being delivered

Providers successfully launched new apprenticeship programmes which they considered were industry-relevant and attractive to both employers and prospective apprentices. This view was corroborated by employers involved in DAFC-funded activities.

Providers perceived that the allocation of additional funds toward activities aimed at supporting delivery of new apprenticeships, such as staffing, professional development, and marketing, had accelerated the introduction of new programmes.

Navigating accreditation processes led to some delays, which in turn affected the number of new programmes that were ready for delivery in in the 2024/25 academic year. However, there is evidence that Wave 1 funded projects have contributed to growth in the number of L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes being delivered based on providers' self-reported views that they would not have delivered the activities they did without the funding.

8.2.2 Increase in the number of starts on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes

Wave 1 providers reported that they had received more applications for L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes than they otherwise would have without the funding. Employers also considered that demand for L6 Degree apprenticeship vacancies among prospective apprentices had been high, although it is not conclusive whether DAFC-funded activities had directly contributed to this demand.

Nevertheless, providers and employers shared the view that enhanced collaboration between them, amplified by DAFC-funded activities, had helped ensure that programmes were aligned closely with employer demand. This collaboration had also helped support recruitment efforts, which is likely to have contributed to growth in apprenticeship starts.

8.2.3 Increase in the number of starts on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes among those from currently underrepresented groups

An increase in the number of starts on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes among those from currently underrepresented groups was not a key aim of the Wave 1 DAFC funding. However, both providers and employers of L6 Degree apprentices said they had made efforts to target marketing and recruitment at these groups.

It is too early to tell whether the DAFC has contributed to an increase in the number of starts on L6 Degree apprenticeships from currently underrepresented groups. However, feedback from Wave 1 providers and employers they are working with suggests that targeted activities could contribute to the future diversification of L6 Degree apprentices.

Future reports will build on this evidence base by including more recent data on apprenticeship starts and include data collected from Waves 2 and 3 funded providers for which increasing equality of opportunity on L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes was a primary outcome.

9 Appendix 1

9.1 Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) is a collection of assumptions and hypotheses about how a policy or programme works. The evaluation of the DAFC is underpinned by a ToC which provides the framework for assessing whether and how it has achieved its intended aims. The OfS developed a high-level ToC for DAFC at the initiation of the programme which was further developed by Ipsos during the scoping phase of the evaluation, using details from funded providers' funding bids. The ToC is presented in Figure 9.1: below.

This section summarises the key components of the DAFC programme ToC. The remaining sections of the report focus on the extent to which the programme's inputs, activities and outputs were delivered as intended and to what extent Wave 1 funded projects delivered the intended outcomes and impacts.

9.1.1 Inputs, activities and outputs

Inputs

The inputs are the resources that are invested into the delivery of the DAFC. The main inputs into the funding programme are:

- **Staff time and/or resources:** Allocations from the Department for Education (DfE) and the OfS related to the design, delivery, and management of the DAFC funding programme, including tasks such as bid assessment and fostering engagement with providers.
- **Provider resources:** Involve the dedication of staff time and resources within provider organisations such as materials, IT infrastructure, travel, and staff expenses necessary for both developing funding applications and delivering funded projects.
- **Employer resources:** Commitment from employers in the form of staff time, recruitment expenses, materials, and travel to DAFC-funded activities.
- **Prospective apprentice time and/or costs:** The financial and time investment of prospective apprentice in engaging with, applying to, and enrolling in Degree apprenticeship programmes.
- **Other resources:** Extend to entities related to standards delivery, such as the IfATE, and apprenticeship placements facilitated by bodies like the ESFA.

Activities

The activities are the specific services, tasks and/or actions that will be delivered by the OfS and funded providers. The activities have been categorised into the following five broad areas:

- **DAFC programme management:** Involves the activities by the OfS to create, execute, and manage the funding competition.

- **Project delivery:** Encompasses the activities by providers to deliver funding projects, including project management tasks, monitoring and reporting to the OfS.
- **Curriculum development:** Focuses on the design and development of new L6 Degree apprenticeship programmes, and revisions of existing programmes, to align with industry and academic standards.
- **Employer attraction and engagement:** Includes fostering and strengthening relationships with employers to effectively advocate for Degree apprenticeships and recruit L6 Degree apprentices into their organisations.
- **Apprentice attraction, recruitment and support:** Targeted efforts to draw in and support apprentices through the Degree apprenticeship journey, ensuring they have the resources and guidance they need.

Outputs

The outputs are the tangible and quantifiable products of the activities. The main outputs of funded activities are:

- **Project delivery:** Completion of project plans, establishment of contracts, and submission of thorough monitoring reports.
- **Curriculum development:** Delivery of new and refined programmes, creation of relevant learning content, and development of progression pathways.
- **Employer engagement:** Development of skills plans, establishment of employer networks, creation of toolkits, and formulation of workforce and recruitment plans.
- **Apprentice activity:** Compilation of marketing materials, execution of targeted campaigns, and provision of essential support services to prospective and current apprentices.

9.1.2 Outcomes

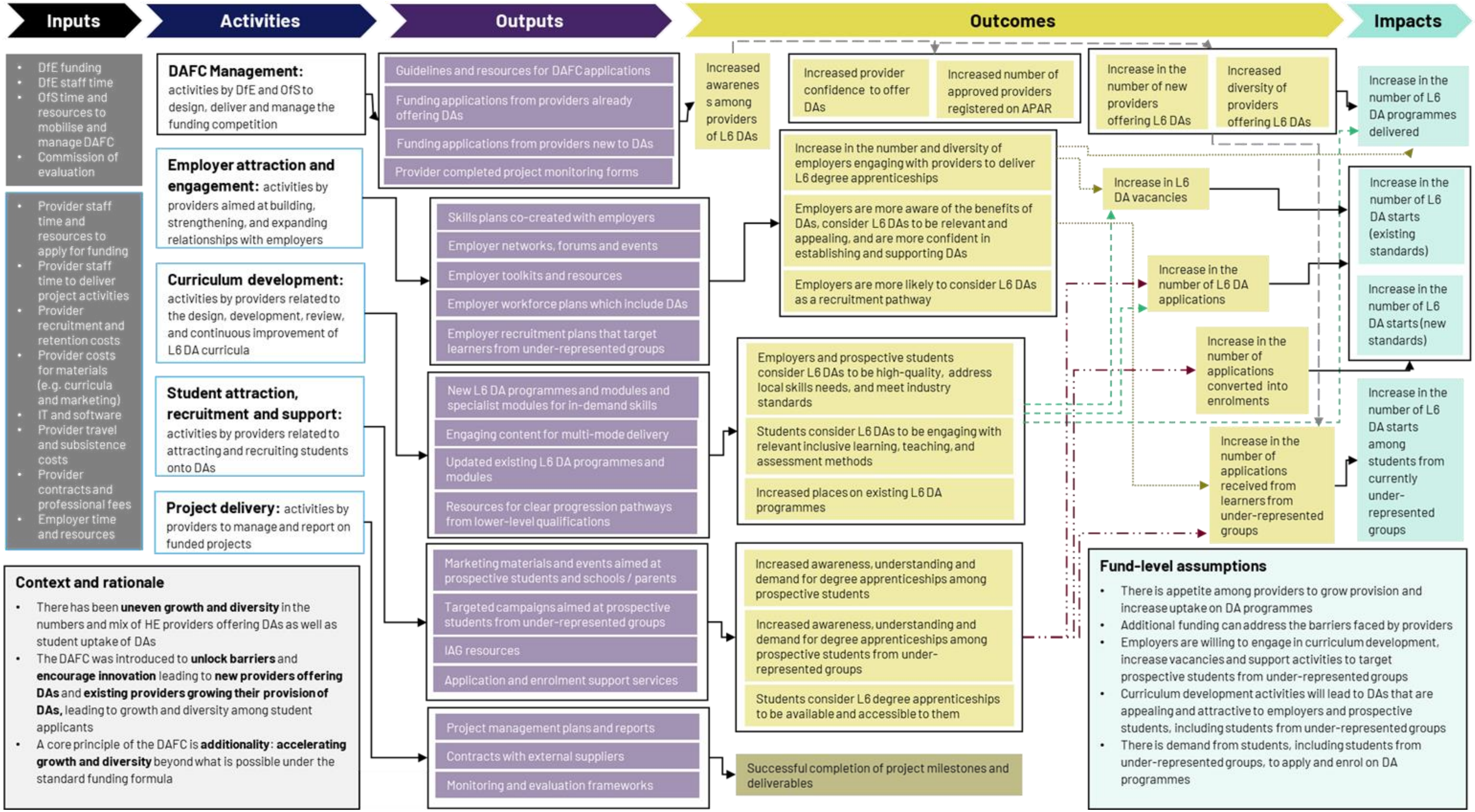
The outcome of the DAFC are the measurable changes resulting from DAFC-funded activities. These can be categorised by the main beneficiaries of the outcomes:

- **Providers:** Increased awareness of L6 Degree apprenticeships and confidence to deliver them, enhanced capacity and capability to deliver new programme and expansion of places on existing programmes.
- **Employers:** Increased awareness of the benefits recruiting L6 Degree apprentices, improved confidence in supporting programme development and recruiting new apprentices, an improved likelihood of including Degree apprenticeships in their workforce.
- **Prospective apprentices:** Increased awareness and demand of L6 Degree apprenticeships, improved perceptions of L6 Degree apprenticeships, and an increase in applications from apprentices with an emphasis on boosting applications and starts by underrepresented groups.

9.1.3 Impacts

The impacts of the DAFC programme are the overarching aims of the programme as detailed in Section 2.2.

Figure 9.1: DAFC Programme-level Theory of Change



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