

Registered degree apprenticeships: CoDH policy position

BACKGROUND

The apprenticeships agenda is moving very rapidly, driven by the introduction of the Apprenticeships Levy in April 2017. The registered degree nursing apprenticeship Standard has recently been published and apprenticeships in several allied health professions are now under development. These apprenticeships are being developed at support-worker, pre-registration and post-registration level.

Apprenticeships are a devolved policy matter. Employers in all four UK nations will contribute to the new apprenticeship levy from 2017. The UK Government will return a proportion of the apprenticeship funding to the nations but how this money is spent will be a devolved decision. Scotland has consulted on its plans for the levy but is likely to move in a different direction from England. The Welsh Government does not currently fund public sector apprenticeships.

Like most of its members, the Council has chosen to participate in apprenticeship policy. Our work is led by Ruth Taylor (workforce portfolio) and Fleur Nielsen (head of policy) with the support of a working group of members. The Council has a seat on the nursing and nursing associate trailblazer groups and is in close contact with professional organisations, Health Education England and Skills for Health about other healthcare apprenticeships. The Council has published [guidance](#) for members on apprenticeships and held dedicated apprenticeship workshops and seminars.

OUR POLICY POSITION

Equivalence

All new developments in healthcare apprenticeships should be designed around patient safety and public confidence. Degree level apprenticeship routes into the registered healthcare professions must result in equivalent outcomes to the university-based degree route. This includes exposure to a similar range of practice learning environments to allow students to develop skills, knowledge and experience across different settings.

The workforce requires healthcare students and graduates with high level critical thinking, research, leadership and decision-making skills. Nursing, midwifery and allied health curricula already reflect these skills and outcomes. Revised NMC Standards are likely to require an even broader range of skills in the near future, including for example a level of

Apprenticeships policy statement:

This paper outlines the Council's policy position on apprenticeships. It has been developed by the executive team under the leadership of Ruth Taylor, executive lead, workforce.

Publication date

19 May 2017

Review date

November 2017

Relevance for CoDH members:

Members requested a position paper for use locally and with national stakeholder organisations.

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Apprenticeship routes into the healthcare professions must result in equivalent outcomes to the university-based degree route

prescribing and a stronger focus on leadership. Degree level education is the most effective way to achieve these outcomes.

Students need to have time and space to study to develop critical thinking and develop an understanding of the evidence base of the professions they aspire to join. As nursing, midwifery and allied health become increasingly research and evidence based professions, time both in a practice and academic environment will enable students to become reflective practitioners delivering safe and effective care. If students are not allowed or cannot find enough protected study time, or if too much learning is delivered in the workplace, apprenticeships could undermine the academic experience.

A clear balance needs to be struck between ensuring students have a good experience in practice and achieving learning in an academic environment. We aspire to educate healthcare professionals who operate safely in a practice environment in any setting or role while demonstrating the critical thinking and evidence based decision making offered by academic study.

It is important that new models of education continue to enable students to engage with the research that universities undertake. Engagement on campus with a range of research active staff enriches student learning and is an important contribution to innovation.

The Council will support NMC and HCPC rigour in course approval for apprenticeship programmes to protect standards and outcomes regardless of the path taken into the professions.

Significance

Many of our members already have a history of delivering programmes to practising healthcare workers and work collaboratively with employers to deliver employer-sponsored degrees.

It is difficult to predict how many registered healthcare professionals will come through the apprenticeship route in the future. Employers will choose how to spend their apprenticeship levy, prospective professionals will have to decide which route best suits their needs and individual universities will come to their own conclusions about their participation in apprenticeship delivery.

The Council believes that apprenticeships are likely to remain a relatively minor contributor to the overall nursing, midwifery and allied health profession workforce, particularly as employers need to pay backfill costs for apprentices and have a range of other professional calls on the levy. This complementary route will not provide a short or long term solution to workforce problems. The apprenticeship agenda must not detract attention from the maintenance and development of university-based degree routes.

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Opportunities and limitations

The NHS will be subject to the apprenticeship levy from April 2017, with a projected apprenticeship budget of £200m per year. This money is not ring-fenced for the NHS and will be lost if it is not used.

We acknowledge that apprenticeships may help to widen participation in the professions, giving aspiring nurses and AHPs a chance to continue in employment while studying.

Apprenticeships are unlikely to solve workforce shortages nationally. Apprenticeships cannot offer a quick or cheap route into the professions. Indeed they take longer than full-time degrees. The quickest way to boost workforce supply nationally is to recruit people through full-time university-based programmes and retain them in the workforce over the long-term.

Post-registration apprenticeships

There is scope to develop level 7 apprenticeships to support advanced practice, workforce development and post-registration education. With the introduction of the levy and cuts to CPD budgets, traditional sources of funding for this education, including employer-sponsored degrees, are at considerable risk. An Expression of Interest for a multi-professional advanced practice apprenticeship has now been submitted to the Department for Education. The Council will be working to help develop this Standard and associated policy. Post-registration apprenticeships should be regarded separately to pre-registration apprenticeships as post-registration education has traditionally been delivered to employees along the lines of the apprenticeship model. The Council will be working to help secure post-registration apprenticeship standards for our professions.

Funding

Nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions are high cost subjects and must be adequately funded if they are to educate a skilled workforce. Apprenticeships funding is capped and will need to be supplemented by a teaching grant to bring funding in line with university-based degrees. Carving money out of the available funding for End Point Assessment (EPA) may threaten the viability of these programmes.

Strengthening the contribution of universities

Although the apprenticeship agenda is explicitly employer-led, it is vital that universities engage in apprenticeship development and policy to ensure that the future workforce receives robust and rounded education.

Outstanding questions

Important questions and challenges remain around apprenticeships: new types of relationships will be forged between employers and universities; additional pressures may be felt by existing mentors and educators; education may need to be delivered in new ways. It is entirely unclear what significance EPA will have in the context of these professions. There

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are also some financial risks for HEIs, particularly around non-completion of EPA.

Advice to members

The Council aims to keep its members informed about apprenticeship policy development and to influence developments. It advises members to:

- keep abreast of this policy area
- understand the rules and processes
- talk to local employers
- consider carefully both the particular educational and support requirements of apprentices and the resources available for providing apprenticeships
- share local intelligence with the Council and do not hesitate to approach us with any policy questions
- offer leadership in local apprenticeship development to help uphold educational standards and protect the student experience.

Council guidance can be found [here](#).