

The workplace classroom

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The degree apprenticeship not only benefits students but can also prove valuable for built environment employers. Jane Stonehouse explains how the scheme works

Since the [Richard Review](#) in 2012 there has been a rapid period of change in apprenticeships. With greater attention on high-quality provision, professional alignment and increasing accessibility in order to produce a different kind of professional, higher education was challenged to respond and provide higher and degree apprenticeship programmes.

A degree apprenticeship is a new educational route, which in most cases provides quicker progression to membership of a professional body by using the workplace as classroom to support academic learning. Degree apprenticeships are similar to higher apprenticeships but differ in that they give an opportunity to gain a full bachelor's or master's degree, as well as aligning university study and on-the-job training in a way previously difficult to achieve.

Practical partnerships

Degree apprenticeships at Northumbria University are more than a learning programme: they are a partnership, as we work with organisations and professional bodies to create courses that meet businesses' demands. The apprenticeship levy was implemented to put the employers at the centre of apprenticeships, while the university can provide employees with the skills and knowledge required to take on tomorrow's challenges.

Students enrolled on degree apprenticeships divide their time between the workplace and flexible university study. The students must have 20% of their working time dedicated to off-the-job training, the learning undertaken outside their day-to-day workplace role that contributes to the apprenticeship. Such training can be provided by the university and at their place of work, and includes:

- teaching of theory, for example attending lectures, role-playing, simulation exercises, online learning and manufacturer training;
- practical training, for example shadowing, mentoring and industry visits; and
- private study time, for example reading, researching and writing assignments.

Apprenticeship structure

Northumbria was one of the first UK universities to offer government-supported degree apprenticeships, and has been involved with the Trailblazer consortium on the development of programmes in construction, surveying, architecture, project management and chartered management. Its chartered surveyor degree apprenticeship open programme is the largest of its kind in the UK.

The chartered surveyor degree apprenticeship standard at Northumbria University

incorporates the professional body requirements of RICS. Degree apprenticeships are designed to provide distinctive work-based learning for students who wish to learn while in full-time employment, to engage in the principles of theory with respect to putting their critical insights into practice, and to equip them with the skills and attributes to shape their career. Learning fits around the students' work commitments and involves flexible modes including day release, block release, distance or blended learning. Our programmes are designed by Northumbria along with the employers involved.

During the apprenticeship all assessments are work-based, including student projects; they can be informed by the context and activity of the employer, leading to increased organisational understanding and performance by the student while ensuring they develop new skills and enhance productivity and business performance.

In order to complete the programme, the student will have to demonstrate that they have obtained the relevant skills and knowledge required during their workplace training. They will also have to take an end-point assessment to conclude their apprenticeship and become a chartered surveyor.

The apprentice will be able to start recording work experience for the RICS APC from stage 4 of the course, and take the end-point assessment within six months of finishing the degree. The student will be employed as an apprentice in a surveying role throughout their studies, and will therefore be able to apply their knowledge of the discipline to professional and industrial practice as they progress through the programme.

This framework has a common suite of modules to introduce surveying practice, followed in subsequent years by opportunities for specialisation in building surveying, quantity surveying and real estate. All students will study core modules to give them a breadth of knowledge of the property sector, and to develop their professional attributes and skills.

There are no optional modules in the programme as there are three prescribed pathways that have been designed to satisfy professional body requirements for each career route. The student will choose their pathway in conjunction with their employer to reflect their job profile and career aspiration.

Key modules, such as those on professional practice, on business and professional development, and the dissertation, offer the student the opportunity to tailor their learning to their workplace, to capitalise on their work-based learning experience, and to shape their future professional career.

Benefits both ways

Whether they are taken by a current employee or by a new recruit, degree apprenticeships offer the opportunity to develop talent in your organisation and shape the future skill set of your employees. In the present climate, companies need to be sure that they are developing their people in line with current and future demands. The specific needs of your business can be met with teaching that is based on practical workplace activities and live projects to complement day-to-day operations.

Developing your workforce through the higher and degree apprenticeships scheme enables you to use your levy payments or access government funding to provide new and current staff with a recognised and relevant dual academic/professional leadership and management qualification. You will also enable your organisation to attract and retain high-calibre talent by offering apprentices a job and salary from day one, no tuition fees or debt, and a degree.

As we are nearing completion of the first year of stage 1 and stage 2 of the chartered surveyor degree apprenticeship at Northumbria, some students have reflected on the course so far. Rebecca Watt works at [Turner & Townsend](#) , and explains that she benefits from getting on-the-job training and developing the skills and academic knowledge with Northumbria that she can apply practically throughout her work. Duncan Storey meanwhile is a current degree apprentice working at [Joyce Construction](#) . He finds the benefits are that you can work in the industry and have a professional role but also learn on the side. Every day, he says, you are taking things you have learned from university into a practical role, experiencing the whole spectrum.

Over the past 18 months, the department at Northumbria has been supported by the rest of the university, engaging with the wider higher education sector to develop and share best practice, with regional and national employers and with professional institutes to maintain communication and determine markets, and with international professional institutions to foster quality, currency and excellence.

Integrated education

In their 2007 book Teaching for Quality Learning at University John Biggs and Catherine Tang stated that, in the humanities or basic sciences, the intended learning outcomes focus on building a relevant knowledge base. In other more professionally oriented courses, such outcomes refer to putting that knowledge to work in a practical context, as in the chartered surveyor degree apprenticeship.

As it is a three-way partnership between the degree apprentice, employer and the university, we work together to ensure that the content of the course meets the requirements of RICS and employers. The ability to enable the workplace as a learning environment is key to the development of the apprentice.

In summary, degree apprenticeships are intended to:

- be fully integrated and contextualised to meet employer needs;
- include a work-based learning component plus a requirement for off-the-job training and learning;
- be fully recognised nationally via identified professional bodies, among other organisations;
- be an award that is transferable across the UK and beyond; and
- be an award that can be delivered through a variety of modes to meet all users' needs.

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Further information

- This feature is taken from [RICS Property Journal](#) (July/August 2018)
- Related categories include: [APC pathways](#)