



BIA Guest Blog | Let's get set to fire up more Degree Apprenticeships

Using the apprenticeship levy to get fit for the future

Dr Malcolm Skingle, Director GSK and Science Industry Partnership Chair

Apprenticeships have always been a firm feature of the Further Education (FE) landscape, offering a robust vocational route into many roles across the economy. The term apprenticeship actually comes from the Old French *aprentiz* meaning "someone learning" and it's a route that has taken many people to the very top.

And times are a changing... apprenticeships have moved from being an entirely FE offer, and into Universities, with the advent of Degree Apprenticeships.

In addition, the learning content and assessment arrangements for all "Apprenticeship Standards" are designed by groups of employers in differing sectors, to ensure they meet the needs of jobs roles across the sector.

For my own sector – life sciences – the fact that there are now a range of fantastic Degree and Masters level apprenticeships is great news. The employer-led Life Science and Industrial Science Trailblazer has developed a range of Apprenticeship Standards at level 6 (degree) and above including, for example, Bioinformatician Scientist, Regulatory Affairs Specialist, Clinical Trials Specialist and Research Scientist.

Ours is a sector that traditionally used the graduate intake to grow our talent pipeline, but in the last few years we have wholeheartedly embraced this apprenticeship route at the higher levels and consider ourselves an "early adopter".

At GSK we have a number of examples of this, most recently one of our highly talented apprentices, Hajra Bibi has received a place at the University of Oxford to undertake an MSc in Integrated Immunology. This is a one-year, full-time course for which GSK will fund Hajra's student fees.

And exam fears almost saw 23-year-old Abbey Lightfoot drop out of A levels; but thanks to an apprenticeship with life sciences company and SIP member UCB, she has embarked upon a prestigious four-year Wellcome Trust PhD in the mechanisms of inflammatory disease at the University of Birmingham.

So that's the great news. However, we know we need to do more.

The SIP's Apprenticeship Survey, published in September last year, revealed that the majority of science employers' apprenticeship levy contribution remains unrecovered: only 13% of the levy raised by the respondents had been recovered for apprenticeships (dropping to 6% in life sciences).

Employers did however express a strong desire to use their levy for high quality, high level apprenticeships – and those at the Higher Levels are increasingly attractive.



Employers in the science industries have recently expressed concerns with a key recommendation as set out in the Augar Report (The Independent Panel report on the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding), which would see the restriction of Apprenticeship Levy funding at Level 6 and above for individuals who already hold a degree.

Science Industry Partnership members believe that if this recommendation is taken forward, it would limit our sector's ability to meet our higher level skills requirements and curtail our competitiveness, growth and productivity.

We are therefore urging Government, ahead of the Budget, to ensure that any policy decisions do not restrict our ability to use our Apprenticeship Levy contributions to meet our sectors' skills needs at the higher levels.

Such high level skill developments are a fundamental aspect of our UK Industrial Strategy. As a delivery partner in this via the Life Science Sector Deal, the SIP is currently refreshing our forecasts and build a new 'big picture' of future skills requirements. This Life Sciences 2030 Skills Strategy research will provide a gap analysis to show where investment is required to build the skills of a future.

A future which will see a continued merging of biological, chemical, computational and data skills – a brave new world for which we need to prepare both our current and incoming talent. Equipping people with such an integrated skills set is both urgent and exciting, and the apprenticeship route provides us with the means to this critical end.

About the SIP

The SIP is an established, influential Employer Partnership for the science industries, which takes direct responsibility for sectoral ambition on skills