

# Working Life After Degree Apprenticeship: An Impact Study

Dr Katy Jones, Manchester Metropolitan University, January 2021



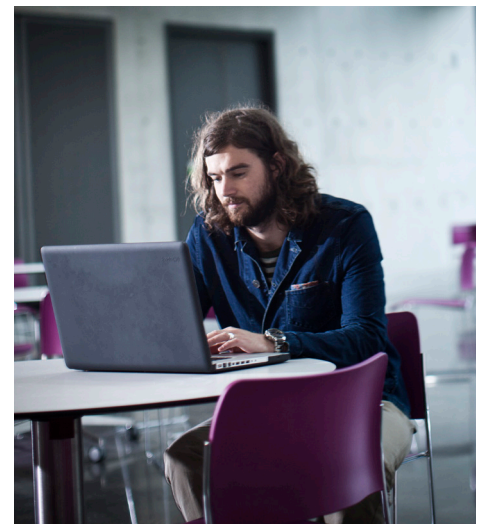
**The Working Life After Degree Apprenticeship (WLDA) project is one of the first studies to explore the working lives of apprentices, upon completion of their degree apprenticeship.**

The study had a broad aim: to explore the impact of degree apprenticeships on working life from the perspectives of a) graduating degree apprentices and b) participating employers.

Phase 1 of the study involved qualitative longitudinal research consisting of two waves of semi-structured interviews with 22 people who graduated from the Digital and Technology Solutions Degree Apprenticeship. Forty-four interviews were conducted in total in April/May 2019 and April/May 2020, reflecting a 100% retention rate.

The second wave of interviews took place during the UK's first Covid-19 national lockdown, and consequently also explored participants' experiences of this and its impact on working life and future career prospects.

Phase 2 of the study involved qualitative research with employers. Through ten semi-structured interviews, the project explored employer experiences of engaging with degree apprenticeships and explored two key issues pertinent to broader policy objectives – social mobility and productivity.



## What we discovered

The project found that experiences of degree apprenticeship were overwhelmingly positive, and that participating in the programme had a very positive impact on the working lives and future prospects of degree apprentices.

All participants were in full-time employment at the time of both interviews. At wave a, 18/22 had permanent contracts, rising to 21/22 by wave b. Overall, the median salary at wave a was £29,000, and by the time of wave b interviews had risen to £37,000 (the mean salary at wave a was £30,000 and at wave b was £39,000). Several had multiple promotions during their degree apprenticeship and/or between the two interview waves.

Positive outcomes could be enhanced even further - especially for apprentices working in businesses where support and progression mechanisms are less well established (for example, through the promotion of good employment practices, and adjustments to careers advice).

Whilst difficult to quantify, the research found that degree apprenticeships appear to be making a positive contribution to the productivity of UK businesses, primarily through the development and utilisation of technical and soft skills.

However, the research raises questions regarding degree apprenticeships' contribution to the broader social mobility agenda. Whilst there are (limited) examples of degree apprenticeships facilitating social mobility, there appears to be a lack of clarity about how this can be achieved. Indeed, several employers were unclear about the meaning of this core policy objective.

For degree apprenticeships to contribute more effectively to the social mobility agenda, removing barriers to participation and ensuring diversity in take-up should be an important area of focus for policymakers, Universities and employers alike.

## Further Information

Dr Katy Jones is Lead Researcher in the Apprenticeships Research Unit (ARU) and is a Senior Research Associate in the Decent Work and Productivity research centre. She has a PhD in Educational Research from Lancaster University and has published widely on topics relating to skills and employment.

[Jones, K. \(2021\) Working Life After Degree Apprenticeships: Key Findings from Employer interviews](#)

[Jones, K. \(2021\) Working Life After Degree Apprenticeships: Key Findings from Apprentice interviews](#)

Contact the author:  
katy.jones@mmu.ac.uk

**For further details about the Apprenticeships Research Unit, please contact [ARU@MMU.ac.uk](mailto:ARU@MMU.ac.uk) or follow us on Twitter: [@ARU\\_MMU](https://twitter.com/ARU_MMU)**