

Finding their Way?

Advanced Apprenticeship as a Route to HE

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Final Report

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Technical Reports:

Business and Management Curriculum Area

Childhood, Youth and Community Studies Curriculum Area

Construction Curriculum Area

Creative Industries Curriculum Area

Engineering Curriculum Area

Health and Social Care Curriculum Area

Retail Curriculum Area

1. Introduction

This is the final report of the project 'Finding their Way? Advanced Apprenticeship as a route to Higher Education', commissioned by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Lifelong Learning Network (HI-LLN). The Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) are an initiative funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). They have a remit to foster progression to higher education (HE) for individuals pursuing vocational routes and attaining vocational qualifications.

The interim evaluation of the LLNs undertaken for HEFCE indicated that the bulk of the Networks' activity was focused on the progression of young adult learners studying full-time for vocational qualifications at Level 3 (the level normally required for entry to HE) rather than on those in work-based learning and apprenticeships (Little et al. 2008). Recent figures indicate that the proportion of 19 year olds achieving Level 3 via Advanced Apprenticeship (AA) and work-based qualifications such as NVQ3 is increasing (DIUS 2008), but little is known about these groups' rate of progression to HE. This project has provided an opportunity to explore the extent to which AA has been a focus in the HI-LLN; to identify the issues which inhibit or facilitate progression from this route, and to establish the pool of Advanced Apprentices (AAs) who could potentially benefit from higher level study.

The aims of the project have been:

- To map and scope the availability and take up of AA across HI-LLN's seven curriculum areas
- To map HE level provision in HI-LLN's partner institutions against AA provision in the curriculum areas
- To examine HE admissions policy, entry criteria and how these fit the sorts of qualifications presented by AAs

1.1 *Background*

Nationally (England) there are, currently, approximately 250,000 individuals participating in the government supported Apprenticeship programme (Level 2 and Level 3). The most recent figures indicate that 81,400 people started an Advanced Apprenticeship (AA) during 2008-09 and 45,200 completed their programme. In the main Advanced Apprentices (AAs) are in employment. They are able to learn in the workplace with the support of their employer at the same time as pursuing qualifications that are relevant to the occupational field in which they are developing skills. There are currently over a hundred sectors offering Advanced Apprenticeship programmes and each is associated with a particular 'framework'. In order to be approved frameworks have to contain various components and specify qualifications. All must include what is termed a 'knowledge-based element' (KBE) usually articulated as a Technical Certificate at Level 3, and a 'competence-based element' (CBE) usually articulated as an NVQ3. Other aspects, such as 'functional skills' and 'Employment Rights and Responsibilities' (ERR), are also specified. Given that the AA is positioned as a 'full' Level 3 programme (equivalent to two A level passes), it is expected that those achieving the framework requirements will be eligible to enter HE, at least in a curriculum area that is cognate to the sector in which they have completed their AA. Little research has been carried out on the rate of progression to HE from the AA route, but the existing evidence suggests that progression is low. Work by Gittoes (2008) and Seddon (2005) which has attempted to track apprentices suggests that only between two and six per cent of those completing an AA enrol in HE even, according to Gittoes, up to four years after they have completed. There has been growing government and policy concern about weak progression and calls for the qualifications available in the frameworks to be recognised in the UCAS tariff. For example, the Department for Innovation, Industry and Skills Select Committee's scrutiny of the draft Apprenticeships Bill concluded:

'...that establishing that all advanced apprenticeships automatically attract UCAS points sufficient for entry into some [sic] higher education for some courses that are cognate to the apprenticeship would be a powerful demonstration of the quality, consistency and currency of the programme.'

(Para 82, seventh report from the Committee Session 2007-08, House of

Commons, Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee, Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the Draft Apprenticeships Bill)

In the most recent expression of the Government's policy intentions in this area, the Skills for Growth White Paper, stated:

'From April 2011, all apprenticeships frameworks at Level 3 and Level 4 must have UCAS tariff points, so that learners' achievements can be compared to other qualifications on application to higher education.'

(DBIS, Skills for Growth Nov, 2009)

A report for Foundation Degree Forward (FdF) focused on the role of LLNs in fostering apprentice progression to HE (FdF 2008). It noted that most LLNs are concerned with their broad target group of 'vocational learners' with relatively few referring to activity specifically targeted at apprentices. Nonetheless, the report suggested that apprenticeship progression is becoming more important to some LLNs, and recognition of the important role that UCAS tariff points can play in facilitating transition from this 'non-standard' route to HE. It should be remembered, however, that apprenticeship is foremost a model of learning whose goal is to prepare the individual to become a productive member of an occupational community (Fuller and Unwin, 2008). The attainment of qualifications forms only part of an apprentice's achievement but is the primary device that is used to select candidates for places on HE courses. The UCAS tariff has been designed to provide applicants and HE institutions with a 'ready reckoner' for establishing whether they meet the entry criteria for particular courses. For this reason the currency of the qualifications that can be attained through completion of an AA framework is likely to be an important aspect of any account seeking to understand apprenticeship progression issues.

It is important to recognise three key factors about the LLN initiative as a whole that are relevant to the topic of AA progression to HE and the context within which HI-LLN and other LLNs have been working. First, the LLNs are commissioned for a fixed term, usually three years. In that time they are expected to set up activities in selected curriculum areas involving a range of institutional partners and to support

and increase progression to HE from learners who have pursued vocational routes. This is a broad goal which encompasses a range of possible target groups and activities. Second, the policy environment in which the LLNs have been operating is dynamic. The general policy area of widening participation in HE has been extremely 'busy' throughout the period in which the LLNs have been running and this has also created a shifting landscape for LLNs and their FE and HE institutional partners to navigate. Finally, as outlined above, there has been considerable and growing attention on policy relating to apprenticeship progression to HE during the lifetime of the LLNs and particularly in the last one or two years (e.g. Carter 2009). This has raised the profile of this issue and highlighted the need to find ways of facilitating progression.

1.2 Methodology and Data Collection

The project aims were addressed through an overlapping two part research design involving both desk research and key informant interviews with a range of stakeholders. The interviews provided the opportunity to contextualise the documentary evidence being gathered and to gain insights into a range of factors influencing the scope and focus of the seven curriculum areas included in the HI-LLN initiative. The first phase of the project was primarily concerned with mapping the AA in terms of:

- The range of AA being offered within the seven curriculum areas.
- The number of AAs starting, participating in and completing the relevant AA programmes and their characteristics – and establishing the potential pool for progression.
- The range of employers providing AA places in the relevant curriculum areas.

The second phase focused on mapping HE provision and admissions policies in terms of their availability to those successfully completing a cognate AA framework:

- To identify provision at Levels 4 and 5 (HNC, HND, Foundation degree) and Level 6 (Bachelor degree) that could be suitable destinations for those successfully completing apprenticeships in cognate areas.
- To identify relationships between specific AA frameworks and specific higher level courses, noting apparent 'best fit' pathways.
- To examine the admissions policies, materials and entry criteria of the relevant HE courses from the perspective of an Advanced Apprentice and considering the extent to which they might feel 'invited'.

The aim of this final report is to provide an overview and summary of our findings and the issues and implications that emerge from the research across the curriculum areas. It is accompanied by seven separate technical reports which provide a detailed account of our findings in relation to each of the curriculum areas.

1.3 Structure of the Report

The summary findings will be presented in two main sections. The first section focuses on the HI-LLN curriculum groups and AA. It sets out the scope of the LLN and seven curriculum groups; maps the curriculum areas on to the AA frameworks; and provides details of the numbers and characteristics of AA in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight area (HIoW) and the potential pool for progression. The second section turns to HE and the possibilities for apprentice progression. It draws out key points in relation to the scope and availability of courses, the associated admissions policies and criteria, progression agreements and progression pathways. It ends by identifying and commenting on the impact of HI-LLN on AA progression up to and at the time of the research. The report ends by providing a range of conclusions and associated recommendations.

2. The Curriculum Areas and Advanced Apprenticeships in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight

2.1 Scope and Focus of the Curriculum Areas and Groups

The HI-LLN began in August 2006 and completed its term in November 2009 (with an extension of one year for limited additional activities). The initiative extended beyond three years to recognise that a Director and team were not appointed and in post until several months after the official start date. The HI-LLN proposal identified seven vocational curriculum areas (CAs) of economic importance to the area and in which there was partner (provider) expertise and willingness to address the goal of improving progression to HE for vocational learners. The seven areas are:

- Business and Management (BMCG)
- Construction (CCG)
- Engineering (ECG)
- Creative Industries (CICG)
- Retail (RCG)
- Childhood, Youth and Community Studies (CYCSCG)
- Health and Social Care (HSCCG)

Each area is represented by a curriculum group (CG) consisting of a lead partner, either an FE college or university, and an institutional network that could also include some employers. Details of the seven groups, their scope and focus are presented in each of the technical reports. The CAs represent vocational sectors which cover a range of sub-sectors, types of occupations and skills. The sectors and often the sub-sectors within them have different historical traditions in relation to skill formation and apprenticeship, the availability and importance of qualifications, the role of higher level study and credentials, labour market entry and career progression. For example, in the creative industries employer recruitment is typically at graduate level; in business and management, people with business or other sorts of educational backgrounds can be recruited to both higher education and the labour market; and in engineering the role of the professional bodies in stipulating

qualification level and experience criteria for membership from Associate through to Chartered status is a major factor. The importance of contextual issues such as these means that HE provision and progression pathways are likely to be more developed and established in some CAs than in others. The differences between the CAs are apparent from the accounts provided in the individual reports. Nonetheless, there are several general points that can be drawn out from the work across the seven groups. These include:

- CGs defined their curriculum area through their partner institutions and course provision.
- In the main, the CGs' primary target in terms of activity to support progression was full-time learners on vocational courses, for example those taking BTEC national diplomas or certificates. Although learners on these courses were the most likely of any vocational group to progress to HE, CGs perceived that there was scope to increase progression rates by helping individuals to understand that their achievement would be recognised (e.g. by creating progression agreements). Learners who were on courses that were seen to lead directly on to particular HE courses were also targeted.
- The extent to which qualifications other than BTEC Nationals were considered in terms of their ability to provide a platform for progression depended on the traditions with regard to established qualifications in the CA and the decisions of the associated CG. For example in the CYCSCG the acceptability of courses specific to the sector (e.g. the Cache Diploma) meant these were included. In addition, this is a sector which has a longstanding experience of training and developing people through the work-based route and through the provision of NVQs which have been developed and refined over the years to the point of gaining some acceptability as an entry level qualification to HE. In contrast, in the BMCG, the group's initial focus was on facilitating progression from BTEC National qualifications before extending attention to other vocational Level 3 qualifications, including NVQs.
- Overall, the development of progression agreements was central to the efforts of the CGs. In similarity with other LLNs, the creation of agreements was seen as a useful and tangible way of demonstrating positive outcomes from the CGs' work

and as a concrete way in which progression for vocational learners could be facilitated. The development of agreements was also perceived to raise awareness between FE and HE partners and to enhance co-operation between institutions. The activities of the HI-LLN CGs also extended to other tasks, including mapping of provision and identifying gaps, focusing on entry criteria, and identifying barriers to progression. A range of development projects was conducted including those focusing on curriculum development. For example, a Foundation degree in Hair and Beauty has been developed.

- For the most part the HI-LLN CGs did not focus on work-based learners (although there were some development projects, including those outside curriculum group work, that did).

2.2 Mapping the Curriculum Areas onto Advanced Apprenticeship Frameworks

It was a significant challenge to map CAs onto frameworks. This is because the concepts associated with both 'units' have been developed for different purposes and by different sources. The CAs relate to a wide notion of vocational sector that can be seen as an umbrella for a variety of sub-sectors and occupations. As mentioned in the previous section, the CGs defined their area from an 'educational provider perspective' through the courses that were being run by the partner institutions within what was deemed a broad field of study. The Apprenticeship frameworks have been developed by the relevant Sector Skills Councils, or others on their behalf, to provide specific pathways to occupational skills that can be certificated via a range of approved qualifications including in the Advanced programme, an NVQ3. Consequently, we adopted a pragmatic approach to mapping frameworks and CAs. On the basis of our prior knowledge about frameworks, reviews undertaken for this project of the focus of AA frameworks and our understanding of the scope of the CAs, we identified those that looked to provide appropriate and viable matches. The table below indicates the frameworks against the CAs and shows that one framework was considered for each of CA apart from Business and Management, where we focused on two.

Table 1 Curriculum areas and AA frameworks

Curriculum Area	AA Framework
Business and Management	Business and Administration Accounting
Construction	Construction
Creative Industries	Creative
Childhood, Youth and Community Studies	Childhood Care, Learning and Development
Engineering	Engineering
Health and Social Care	Health and Social Care
Retail and Commercial Enterprises	Retail

The frameworks developed for AA programmes include a range of qualification components that are conceived to be complementary and which, taken together, offer the apprentice an opportunity to gain credentials that reflect the comprehensiveness of their attainment. The programme usually lasts at least two and often three years. The following general points can be made about the AA frameworks and provide important insights which help explain our findings:

- Frameworks all contain a knowledge-based element (KBE), often referred to as a Technical Certificate; a competence-based element (CBE) normally represented by an NVQ3 and Functional Skills (previously known as Key Skills).
- The extent to which awards have currency as entry level qualifications to HE is an important aspect of whether they will be seen as providing a platform for progression to HE. At the time of the research the only framework component that is recognised in the UCAS tariff is the KBE, which usually refers to the technical certificate. It is important to note that the AA programme as a whole is not a qualification itself; currency can only be attached to the component qualifications (although following the issuing of a new Apprenticeship Blueprint towards the end of 2009 and the publication of the Skills for Growth White Paper in November 2009, work is currently underway which may change this).
- In total there are over 250 technical certificates approved for use in AA frameworks. At the time of the research most of these did not have UCAS points, although this is now starting to change for future entry. In some frameworks,

none of the approved technical certificates are recognised in the tariff. The key issue here is that, although all technical certificates approved for inclusion in AA frameworks are deemed to be *at* Level 3, few of them are of sufficient size to be considered a *full* Level 3 (i.e. equivalent to two A levels such as a BTEC National Certificate) and with the potential to accrue, depending on grade, up to 240 points. Furthermore, where technical certificates have been awarded UCAS points, these are often far fewer than those associated with vocational qualifications attained by full-time learners (e.g. BTEC National Diploma). For example the CACHE Level 3 Certificate in Children's Care, Learning and Development has recently been included in UCAS. It is one of the technical certificate options within the relevant framework and accrues between 35 and 110 points, depending on the grade, compared with the Diploma which accrues between 120 and 360 points. There is also a range of BTEC qualifications at Level 3 that are available in many frameworks, but which have lower currency than the BTEC Nationals. They are being awarded tariff points up to a maximum of 120 points for the first time for the academic year (2010-2011).

- The normal way of indicating the size of a qualification is through the allocation of 'Guided Learning Hours' (GLH). There are certain benchmarks, for example, a full Level 3 BTEC national certificate (equivalent to two A levels) is allocated 720 GLH. Fuller and Unwin (2009) provide a more detailed discussion of GLH as a qualification currency. Suffice it to say here that, viewed in terms of GLH values, the technical certificates available in AA frameworks cover a very wide range but with most clustering at below 360 GLH (i.e. in these terms, less study time than would be expected for the pursuit of one A level).
- A further complexity is that many of the AA frameworks consist of different pathways. In some, such as Construction, there are a small number of main pathways. For others, such as Engineering, there is a very wide range. Each pathway encompasses a specific set of (formal) learning experiences and qualification outcomes associated with more or less currency for progression to HE. So, for example, of four apprentices following the Engineering framework but by different pathways, three might emerge without a technical certificate that accrues UCAS points, whereas the fourth attains a BTEC National Certificate worth up to 240 points. The mapping exercises conducted in each of the CAs and

presented in the separate reports provide a detailed picture (at the time of the research) of the currency associated with each framework and indicate those which are most likely to provide a platform for progression to HE.

- A key point, then, to draw out of our analysis is that the AA does not produce a standard qualification or set of qualifications. There are differences in the potential currency accrued not just between but also within frameworks. There is a danger that the necessity of delving into the detail of the currency associated with the specific components of the pathway through a framework that apprentices are following undermines the notion of apprenticeship as an holistic model of learning and skill formation. It can be argued that this is its particular strength and that this is the characteristic of apprenticeship which is often highly valued by apprentices and employers.
- If, as is currently often the case, only one aspect of an apprentice's achievement for the purposes of entry to HE (the technical certificate) is recognised and taken into account, a very partial view of the worth of the programme is perpetuated. It might be compared to a hypothetical system which only recognises half a candidate's A level achievements.

2.3 Numbers of AA participants in HloW area

In the following section we present quantitative data on the numbers of AAs in the HloW area as a whole which help to contextualise the findings and which provide an indication of the pool of potential participants who could progress to HE. The individual CA reports provide more detailed data on the numbers and characteristics of apprentices participating in their relevant frameworks.

Table 2 (below) presents figures for a four year period which summarise framework success rate (this indicates that the apprentice has achieved all the formal qualification components stipulated in the framework), attainment of the NVQ3 (which has been the mandatory award associated with frameworks), and also numbers of starts, participations (number 'in learning'), achievers and leavers in the relevant year.

Table 2 AA in HloW 2005-2008 (Success and overall numbers)

All Frameworks	2005	2006	2007	2008
Framework Success Rate	66.9%	58.7%	64.1%	72.1%
NVQ Success Rate	77.3%	66.7%	69.9%	72.1%
Starts	1609	1980	2298	2713
Participations	4475	4664	5056	5786
Achievers	893	921	1160	1478
Leavers	1004	1500	1796	1962
Framework Achievers	672	880	1152	1415
NVQ Achievers	776	1000	1256	1415

Source: National Apprenticeship Service: Data Service

Table 3 focuses on AA participation in the eight frameworks associated with the HI-LLN's seven CAs (BMCA has two; accounting and business and administration). It also indicates that participation in these frameworks accounts for nearly four out of ten advanced apprenticeship participations in the area. Detailed data on success rates, framework achievements and so on can be found in the technical reports.

Table 3 AA Participation in the eight CA frameworks, 2005-2008

AA Frameworks	2005	2006	2007	2008	% of HloW participation for 2008
Accounting	103	72	76	107	1.8
Business and Administration	69	96	116	139	2.4
Childhood Care, Learning and Development	234	270	247	277	4.8
Construction	221	220	231	217	3.8
Creative	0	0	0	Less than 5	-
Engineering	761	739	781	815	14.1
Health and Social Care	167	173	331	549	9.5
Retail	83	108	129	141	2.4
All HloW	4475	4664	5056	5786	(approx 39%)

Source: National Apprenticeship Service: Data Service

The data provided in Table 3 shows that participation in six of the frameworks has increased. It has grown most sharply in Health and Social Care and Business and Administration. There is slight fall in Construction. There have been few starts as yet in the Creative AA framework. As the separate CI report outlines, the framework in this sector is new (was only approved in 2008). The largest AA sector in HloW is Engineering. This links to the strong recruitment of apprentices by the Navy and Ministry of Defence, both of which are large and longstanding employers of apprentices.

As Table 4 (below) indicates the number of AAs across the frameworks who achieved all the requirements of their frameworks in 2008 between 2005 and 2008 totalled 1435. The number of completers rose strongly in the two most recent years 2007 and 2008. This provides a good indication of the size of the pool of ex-apprentices that could potentially progress to HE.

There is currently no reliable administrative data available on how many or what proportion of AAs have progressed in to HE nationally or within the HI-LLN area. The LSC's Individual Learner Record is used to collect 'exit data' for learners leaving programmes funded by the 'Learning and Skills Sector' and this provides some figures relating to the destinations for AA leavers. However, the data have very limited, if any, value. First, they show that the vast majority of ex-apprentices are employed on exit. This is to be expected given that the vast majority of AAs are employed throughout their apprenticeships and are highly likely to be kept on completion. Second, the figures are not sensitive enough to reveal whether an ex-apprentice has progressed to further part-time study, which would be the most likely option for someone in employment. Third, it is recognised and also envisaged that someone completing an AA is likely to benefit from a period of consolidation in their post before embarking on a further study, so is unlikely to progress straight into a course. Looked at from the perspective of HEI recruitment, the available HESA data do not distinguish those that progress to HE from the apprenticeship route. The focus in these data is on the entry qualifications of students. Hence, an ex-apprentice might enter HE on the basis of attaining a BTEC National Certificate but this will not show up in the data.

Table 4 AA Framework achievements in the CAs, 2005-2008

AA Frameworks	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Accounting	35	27	23	40	125
Business and Administration	32	39	51	62	184
Childhood Care, Learning and Development	18	27	62	57	164
Construction	30	52	67	74	223
Creative	0	0	0	Less than 5	-
Engineering	129	109	92	112	442
Health and Social Care	38	32	51	104	225
Retail	13	11	14	34	72
All frameworks	295	297	360	483	1435

Source: compiled from tables in CA reports

A profile of 16-18 year old Apprenticeships in Hampshire has been provided by the LSC (September 2009). This shows that amongst this younger age group, approximately 12% take up apprenticeships, which is higher than for the South East as a whole (9%). The higher numbers are attributed to the provision of places in Hampshire by the armed forces. About half all apprentices in the area are 19 or over when they start their programmes. Overall, 27% of all apprentices are female and 98% are white British. The report also indicates that 1850 employers take on apprentices in the area with the vast majority taking on just one apprentice at a time. As part of this project we attempted to discover which employers are taking on apprentices in the eight framework areas, but did not succeed in obtaining this information. Our inquiries revealed that this information is not readily available on the grounds of confidentiality and data protection. The only other way of collecting the data would have been through the training providers who work with the employers to deliver the formal aspects of the programme. However, providers are reluctant to share information about 'their employers' for confidentiality and for commercial reasons. It would also have required time beyond the scope and timescale of this project. The HI-LLN commissioned research specifically on employer engagement in the CAs and this provides a very useful resource for thinking about the ways in which relationships and partnerships between providers and employers can be built.

3. Higher Education Provision and Progression for Advanced Apprentices

The separate technical reports provided for the seven CAs present overview maps of the HE courses at Level 4 (e.g. HNC), Level 5 (e.g. Foundation degree - FdA) and Level 6 (Bachelor degree) that could be seen as progression destinations for AAs. In summary:

- The Business and Management, Construction and Engineering CAs have a wide range of provision at Levels 4, 5 (HNDs and FdAs) and Level 6 and which are offered by both FE and HE providers across the HloW area, although the majority of Bachelor degree courses are offered by universities. Both full-time and part-time modes of attendance are available, but not in all courses and providers. Construction and Engineering have a tradition of HNC provision that endures and which is most likely to target work-based learners.
- The Creative Industries sector has a good level of provision at Level 6 with particular HEIs having expertise in specific areas, such as the performing arts. This fits with the sectoral tradition of recruiting at graduate level. There is some Level 5 provision (FdA) as well as some Dip HE level courses, for example, in Media Studies at both FE and HE institutions.
- In Retail there is a lack of Level 4 and above provision aimed specifically at this sector. Hitherto it has been typical for those achieving Level 3 and wanting to progress to move into generic business and management studies courses. Currently, there is one retail-related Bachelor degree available and two recently developed FdAs. One of these is aimed at those in work and has no formal entry criteria.
- In the Childhood, Youth and Community Studies curriculum area there is a wide range of provision at Bachelor level in HE partner institutions and also at Foundation degree from HE and FE partners. The work-based route to skill formation and management status in the sector is well-established via progression from NVQ3 to NVQ4.
- In Health and Social Care a particular issue with looking at HE provision for Health and Social Care is the diversity of possible routes and therefore courses that might be applicable. For example, those AA who have taken the Health

Pathway might look, not at the more general Health and Social Care Bachelor degree or Foundation degree programmes, but at pre-registration nursing courses which could lead to nursing degrees or more specialised Level 4 courses including professional qualifications. There is provision within this CA at Level 4/5 that accepts NVQ3 as an entry qualification, which is clearly relevant to AAs. Entry at Bachelor degree level without prior attainment of a Level 4 or 5 qualification is unlikely.

3.1 Admissions and Entry Criteria

There are two main sources of information provided by UCAS and institutional prospectuses that individuals can use to explore the availability of courses and the associated entry criteria. From the perspective of AAs (or anyone applying with non-standard vocational qualifications), the information provided by UCAS is very limited. Institutional (usually web-based) prospectuses are generally better in that they may refer to work-based learners, mature students, people with non-standard qualifications and suggest that they can be invited for interview. However, overall statements are inconsistent, are not very clear and rarely mention AAs. Key points to emerge from across the CAs include:

- Our analysis indicates that AAs achieving their frameworks, and who ostensibly then have full Level 3 attainment, are not 'invited' to apply for Bachelor degree courses. In the main the technical certificates available in AA frameworks do not generate sufficient points for applicants from this route to meet the entry criteria. Apprentices who have gained a BTEC National Certificate through their framework (e.g. in Construction or Engineering), perhaps with two Distinctions, could have enough points, but they are not targeted in the admissions material which tends to favour those applying from full-time routes.
- Historically, the HNC has been viewed as a 'natural next rung in the ladder' for ex-technical apprentices and as a qualification which provides a platform through to HND and on to Bachelor degrees. Our findings indicate, though, that even this route is not well sign-posted for apprentices.

- Our scrutiny of the relevant Sector Skills Council information about apprenticeship progression routes revealed that Foundation degrees are most commonly invoked as the next qualification step after completion of an AA programme. However, most information for applicants to these courses does not mention AA or the range of qualifications (e.g. NVQ3 and technical certificates) that might be in the relevant framework. In practice, then, information for applicants does not welcome AAs or other work-based learners. There are some exceptions to this. For example, it is more likely that a course relating to 'early years and childcare' might mention NVQ3. Until recently, a work-based route to skill formation and career development has been the norm in this sector but there is now a government-led push to professionalise the sector by increasing the number of staff qualified to Level 4.
- Although there has been a growth in the number and range of Foundation degrees, they are not widely available in all CAs including sectors which do not have a history of Level 4 and above provision, such as Retail and sectors which previously established traditions involving HNC/D such as Engineering and Construction. There was evidence that the Business and Management area had been fertile ground for the development of FdAs.
- In general, the progression pathways outlined in the AA frameworks are often sketchy and under-developed. There are two exceptions to this. In Accountancy, there is a longstanding work-based route to professional status and progression is linked to a ladder of professional qualifications. Moreover, the NVQ3 in Accountancy is the only NVQ that is currently recognised in the UCAS tariff (it attracts 160 points equivalent to two Cs at A level). In Engineering there is also a lengthy tradition of apprenticeship provision and of the successful completion of a technician apprenticeship providing a platform for progression often via part-time undergraduate and Masters level higher education, to chartered engineer status. In the other frameworks the ladder of progression to HE is not well mapped and the information often consists of a list of Level 4 or 5 courses, with little connection made either to future job roles. Where pathways are articulated, HE may be referenced alongside work-based routes to NVQ4.
- It is clear from the mapping of the AA framework components and qualifications that we have detailed in the technical reports that their ability to act as a

platform for progression is variable. In some cases, there is a significant gap between the currency provided by the attainment of the framework components and that required for entry to HE even at Level 4 or 5. In some frameworks the requirements are limited; in others they are much more rigorous. Added to this, it was suggested by some Key Informants that the process for achieving an NVQ3 can differ according to who the provider is. The variability of the NVQ3 meant that the development of progression agreements linked to this qualification could depend on particular locations.

- Table 5 includes a sample of framework pathways that illustrates, at the time of the research, some of the diversity between the requirements associated with different framework pathways indicate the challenge this is likely to pose for HE providers and admissions staff.

Table 5 Framework components and ‘values’

Framework: pathway	CBE	KBE	GLH	UCAS status
Retail: sales professional	NVQ3 in Retail Sales	City & Guilds Certificate ¹ in Retail Knowledge	106-124	Not in tariff
Business and Administration	NVQ3 in Business and Administration	Edexcel Certificate in Business Administration	320	Not in tariff
Engineering	NVQ3 in Engineering Toolmaking	Edexcel BTEC National Certificate	720	80 points (PP) 240 points (DD)
Health and Social Care	NVQ3 in Health and Social Care	Goal Certificate in Health & Social Care (EDI)	220	Not in tariff

Source: Framework Documents for the different AA frameworks; National Database of Accredited Qualifications (GLH) (<http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/index.aspx>); UCAS http://www.ucas.co.uk/students/ucas_tariff

¹ Five certificates issued by five different awarding bodies are available for this pathway, all include approximately the same amount of GLH and none are in the tariff.

3.2 The Impact of the LLN on Progression to HE from Advanced Apprenticeship

As explained earlier in the report, the scope and focus of the CGs varied and covered a range of activities designed to facilitate progression to HE for those with vocational qualifications. Work, such as curriculum development and improvements to information, advice and guidance, was envisaged to have an indirect effect on increasing progression. Work to negotiate progression agreements (PAs) between specific Level 3 courses and providers and particular HE courses and providers was expected to make learners' progression options more transparent and to help give more of them the confidence to pursue higher level study. Many thousands of PAs have been generated across the HI-LLN, with differences in the role they have played in the work of the CGs.

The purpose of this project has been to explore the extent to which AAs may be benefiting from the LLN's activities, such as the development of Progression Agreements (PAs). This activity could be relevant for work-based learners including AAs but it is not clear to what extent the benefits of this work will have reached them as they were usually not specifically positioned as targets. Some AAs attain a qualification through their framework, such as a BTEC National Certificate that is recognised in the UCAS tariff and which is accepted as an entry qualification to a particular HE provider and course. In these circumstances it is feasible to suggest that a PA could be developed. However, at the time of the research no PAs had been developed specifically to link apprentices achieving a particular framework to a particular HE course. The following summary points emerged from our survey of the PAs (more details are provided in the technical reports):

- ECG: There are over 1500 PAs within the engineering disciplines with around 300 of these being for courses at Levels 4 and 5. The majority of the rest relate to Bachelor degrees, and some, around 70, relate to Masters level. All the progression agreements are for national awards, certificates and diplomas and typically are linked to full-time learners in colleges who may not previously have aspired to participate in HE. There are no agreements that particularly target those with NVQ3 and work-based learners who may consider progression to Level 4 courses, such as HNCs.

- BMCG: The CG focused mainly on negotiating agreements between partner institutions; on those qualifications that are seen as allowing access to Bachelor or Foundation degrees, and on those students who may previously not have viewed progression to HE as a likely option for them. The majority of the PAs refer to BTEC National qualifications. There are around 25 of this CG's (800+) PAs that relate to NVQs and which could, in theory, be suitable for AAs. These agreements link the NVQ3 to an FdA in Business or a related degree at two of the partner universities, with the promise of a guaranteed interview.
- CCG: Currently, the PAs in Construction relate to BTEC National Certificates and Diplomas (i.e. UCAS tariff qualifications); no other qualifications are referred to for Bachelor degrees or Level 4 and 5 provision. There is no mention of NVQs for any of the programmes so the only AAs that might benefit from the way they PAs have been developed are those who are following pathways leading to BTEC National Certificates.
- HSCCG: Progression Agreements for Health and Social Care HE courses did not form a significant part of the HSCCG's work. It is not surprising then that there are few progression agreements that would specifically assist AAs in gaining entry to a course at Level 4. The projects commissioned by the curriculum group were intended to address issues for non-traditional learners within the Health and Social Care arena, but not specifically AAs or NVQ3s. There are a number of progression agreements in allied areas, such as social work, or childhood and early years.
- The CICG has developed PAs spanning a wide range of courses and which mainly focus on progression to Bachelor degrees. As with PAs in other CGs the normal offer is for a guaranteed interview together with satisfying the normal entry criteria. Overall, the PAs do not relate to work-based learners and AAs, or to NVQs. The routes into this sector are primarily at degree level and, as yet there are few following Creative apprenticeships. There is, therefore, considerable development work required if AA is to become a route into the industry in the future.
- CYCSCG: This CG undertook a range of activities to support progression. There are a large number (150) of PAs linked to provision in 'Early Years' but none are targeted at the progression of AAs. Most of the agreements give a promise of a

guaranteed interview and relate to progression to FdAs. There are no agreements relating to NVQ3, although a number of FdAs cite NVQ3 as being acceptable in their course literature. There is no match between the existing agreements and the technical certificates gained by AAs (e.g. the Cache Certificate).

- RCG: As already mentioned, a major issue for this CG was the lack of provision at Level 4 and above. The focus of the CG then was on curriculum development rather than on PAs. It is feasible that retail AAs could benefit from PAs that mention NVQ3 and that are linked to the two FdAs and also courses in the area of Business and Management. An example of curriculum innovation has been the Hair and Beauty FdA where there are PAs that specify the NVQ3 with additional work experience. There is potential then for this to apply to the Hair and Beauty AA framework.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

It was pointed out in the Introduction to this report, that the main purpose of apprenticeship is to provide an employment-based model of learning and skill formation which produces knowledgeable and skilled practitioners in particular occupations. An important aspect of the model is its ability to provide a platform for participants' career development progression as well as their skilled contribution to the workplace. In this regard the Level 3 programme is pivotal. Successful completion can be seen as signalling a) that individuals have 'proven' advanced occupational skills; b) their potential for further career progression and workplace responsibility; and c) that they have acquired the qualification level that will allow them to access and benefit from higher level study (probably in a cognate area). The focus of this project has been solely on this third aspect of the AA and specifically on the extent to which the programme provides a pathway to HE for those who wish to take it.

As highlighted at the beginning of the report, progression to HE from the AA has generally not been prioritised by LLNs. It was innovative, then, that HI-LLN commissioned a piece of work designed to explore this issue within its own focus on seven curriculum areas. The project's findings can make a positive contribution to research, policy and practice debates about the relationship between AA and HE by adding to the evidence-base, understanding the factors inhibiting progression and identifying the areas where development work is needed to facilitate the links. The research has revealed that in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight there is a pool of nearly 1500 individuals who have successfully achieved their full AA framework between 2005 and 2008 and who form a pool of vocational learners who have the potential to progress to HE. In light of the research undertaken, the project has generated a range of summary conclusions and linked recommendations² as follows:

² It is useful to see also the very recently disseminated report by Joy Carter to the Rt Hon David Lammy MP contains a lengthy list of recommendations designed to help facilitate progression to HE, and targeted at a range of policy and institutional stakeholders.

1. It is important that all the relevant policy and practice stakeholders (including the National Apprenticeship Service, Sector Skills Councils, providers and employers) adopt a concept of apprenticeship which recognises its enduring strengths as a model of learning. At its best, it provides a platform for long-term educational and career progression as well as the skills and expertise that can help sustain and grow companies and organisations. From the perspective of progression to HE, the inconsistency of what constitutes an AA across and within frameworks is unhelpful and means that the worth of programmes and pathways within frameworks varies and has consequences for the currency of apprentices' attainments. In the AA, value is currently attached to the programme's component qualifications, some of which are recognised in the UCAS tariff, but many which are not. Currently there is no mechanism for attaching currency to the achievement of the framework as a whole together with the substantial learning involved in completing a work-based programme over (usually) a two to three year period. Although work is being undertaken to draw more of the technical certificates into the tariff, the number of points they accrue is often insufficient to support recipients' progression to HE, even at sub-bachelor degree level. The NVQ3 which is typically used to fulfil the competence-based element of the framework is not routinely recognised for entry to HE in admissions policies and in course entry criteria. As yet, apart from the Accounting NVQ3, the NVQ3 is not in the UCAS tariff. The current approach means that the worth of successfully completing an AA programme in many sector frameworks is judged, in UCAS tariff terms, to be less than that attached to the attainment of two low grade A levels.

Recommendation: Support development work to assign value (in terms of UCAS points) to the achievement of each AA framework (rather than its component qualifications) to recognise that this reflects the completion of a comprehensive and holistic learning and skill formation experience. Differences between the rigour and scope of frameworks would have to be carefully considered and could be reflected in the level of value assigned. Care needs to be taken to avoid creating an unnecessary 'points hierarchy' in relation to AA programmes. More generally, efforts to promote more consistency of value across and within frameworks should be encouraged.

2. The number and range of technical certificates approved for use in AA frameworks adds to the challenge of understanding what the programme consists of and how its currency can be established. This makes it difficult for HE providers and others to make judgements and develop straightforward protocols to facilitate progression.

Recommendation: Research should be undertaken to explore the possibility of rationalising the parameters of what is approved as 'counting' as a Level 3 programme and to help ensure that all AA frameworks yield the currency that will facilitate leavers' progression to higher level study and career development more generally.

3. Current understandings of what is contained in AA frameworks in terms of curriculum content and learning processes are limited. Consequently it is not clear whether and how far the frameworks (or at least some of them) fall short of providing the preparation necessary for individuals to progress successfully to HE level. Work is needed to develop HE stakeholders' knowledge about AA. Helping to generate confidence between providers could lead to shared knowledge about what the frameworks do offer and where, if at all, there is a shortcoming that could be addressed to facilitate apprentice progression. DBIS (2009) indicates that funding could be available for the development of bridging modules.

Recommendation: Research is needed better to understand the curriculum issues between AA and HE courses and to identify the role that curriculum innovation could play in reconciling gaps and shortcomings. Explore the possibility of collaborative AA provider and HE provider bidding for DBIS funding and, possibly also from the National Apprenticeship Service.

4. The UCAS websites and related entry profile information are not presented to attract or welcome individuals from the AA route or from work-based learners more generally. Apprentices would find it difficult to see how their achievements fit and are recognised.

Recommendation: Continue to bring this shortcoming to UCAS' attention and suggest that there is clear information clearly targeted at apprentices.

5. HE admissions policies and materials generally provide very limited information about the possibilities for AA. Entry criteria are not usually written in a way that would make it clear to apprentices that their applications would be welcomed. For example, the terms 'Advanced Apprenticeship', 'work-based learner' and their associated qualifications rarely appear. The material indicates that AAs would be very unlikely to be qualified to enrol in Bachelor degree programmes. It is of particular concern that the Levels 4 and 5 courses that the Sector Skills Councils indicate are the most obvious progression destinations generally have so little information targeting AAs.

Recommendation: HE providers to review and revise their admissions policies and materials to be more 'user friendly' and informative for potential applicants from the AA route. In addition, they should ensure that this material is communicated to AA providers.

6. Currently there are no Progression Agreements (PAs) specifically for AAs. Some of the existing PAs may implicitly include those AAs who have the requisite qualification e.g. a BTEC National Certificate. However, the PAs often link a particular Level 3 course e.g. undertaken by full-time learners in a particular FE college to a particular HE course at a particular HE institution, and hence AAs will be excluded. The work undertaken for this project indicates the challenge of mapping the AA frameworks to curriculum areas and HE courses, but has revealed a wide range of potential matches.

Recommendation: Undertake research to identify the advantages and disadvantages of developing PAs for Advanced Apprentices, the best way of scoping the agreements and the likely positive impact they may have on progression rates.

7. Currently, the information provided by the Sector Skills Councils about progression to HE is patchy and often limited. This is surprising given that these

bodies are the guardians of the apprenticeship frameworks and have been asked by government to improve clarity about the potential for AA progression to HE. In addition, professional bodies are often important gatekeepers to their profession and who play a key role in formulating entry criteria. The information provided about apprenticeship by these bodies is also often weak.

Recommendation: Providers could develop relationships with the relevant SSCS who are providing frameworks in the CAs and also the relevant professional bodies to encourage clearer articulation of progression pathways to Level 4,5 and 6 programmes.

8. From the perspective of ex-AAs who are likely to want to pursue higher level study part-time whilst remaining in employment, the availability of flexible modes of attendance is important. It was originally envisaged that Foundation degrees would mainly provide a new option for learners to study part-time in HE and would help to widen participation by providing more flexible opportunities for people in work to participate.

Recommendation: It is crucial for ex-apprentices that HE provides plentiful opportunities for part-time attendance at Levels 4, 5 and 6. Research is needed to establish whether the introduction of Foundation degrees that include models which expect full-time modes of attendance has diminished the availability of options for work-based learners to get on the first rung of the HE ladder via HNC and its established incremental progression route to HND and then Bachelor degrees.

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Additional Sources

- HI-LLN Progression Agreement Database (provided by the LLN)
- HI-LLN website for links to the curriculum groups: <http://hi-lln.co.uk/home.aspx>
- National Apprenticeship Service: Data Service, www.thedataservice.org.uk special runs requested
- UCAS (information on tariff, courses, entry criteria) www.ucas.ac.uk

National database of accredited qualifications:

<http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk>

Apprenticeship Framework information, initially accessed at:

www.apprenticeship.org.uk