



# Building Pathways: Advanced Apprentices' perceptions of Higher Education

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## **Abstract**

In May 2004 a study was conducted by researchers from the Centre for Research and Evaluation (CRE) at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) into barriers faced by Advanced (Modern) Apprentices (AMAs) progressing to higher education. Interviews were conducted with apprentices nearing completion of the apprenticeship schemes. The research was conducted in colleges in South Yorkshire and at a North Derbyshire college. The research is part of a larger "Building Pathways" Project concerning the Widening Participation agenda, part of the remit of which is to define, clarify and articulate pathways to progression in higher education for students on vocational post-compulsory courses.

The research highlights the level of awareness that apprentices in the region have of opportunities for progression to higher education, the opinion of apprentices on the issue of progression and the potential barriers that would prevent them from continuing to higher levels of education.

## **Background**

The Building Pathways Project is designed to explore vocational pathways to higher education. It is a Widening Participation project which includes the Further Education Colleges and Higher Education Institutions in South Yorkshire, there are also colleges from the neighbouring areas participating. Sheffield Hallam University is the lead institution for the project.

The Building Pathways project began in 2000 and was funded jointly by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) until 2002. Since 2003 the project has secured funds from the South Yorkshire Aim Higher-Partnerships for Progression strategy.

A key function of the Building Pathways group is to develop progression routes to higher education for Advanced (Modern) Apprentices. The Advanced (Modern) Apprenticeship offers young people, in their words, the chance to 'earn while you learn'. The scheme involves both workplace and classroom learning. The apprenticeship is a multi-stage programme in which students can build up skills to NVQ level-3 at Advanced level. All apprenticeships lead to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Key Skills qualifications and, in most cases, a technical certificate such as a BTEC or City & Guilds. Where students complete the level 3 Advanced (Modern) Apprenticeship they are sufficiently qualified to gain entry to higher education.

In 2003, research was carried out by EKOS Consulting for the South Yorkshire LSC with Building Pathways to identify opportunities to progress to Higher Education for Modern apprentices in South Yorkshire. The research identified that progression to higher education for Advanced (Modern) Apprentices except in the areas of engineering, construction and care was scarce. However, the research did not explore the apprentice perceptions of their opportunities for progression. In May 2004, the Centre

for Research and Evaluation was appointed to conduct research into the progression barriers faced by Advanced (Modern) Apprentices when considering progression to higher education.

The research is particularly relevant to the government's agenda of expanding and widening participation. Participation in higher education in the United Kingdom has increased dramatically over the past 30 years. The proportion of 18-30 year olds that have studied for a higher education qualification has reached 44% with a Government target set at 50% by 2010. The increase in participation has done little to balance rates of participation by socio-economic group; students from socio-economic groups IV and V are still less likely to participate in HE than those from more advantaged groups. Recent figures from the Department for Education and Skills show that although there has been an increase from a participation rate of 11 per cent in 1991/92 to 19 per cent in 2001/02, participation remains well below that of the non-manual social classes whose participation increased from 35 per cent to 50 per cent over the same period<sup>1</sup>.

Students taking vocational post-compulsory education are more likely to be from lower socio-economic groups. The Youth Cohort Study (2002) showed that, of those students aged sixteen studying for an Advanced (Modern) Apprenticeship, 9% were from the highest socio-economic group whereas 16% were from semi-routine and routine occupational backgrounds. For Foundation (Modern) Apprentices the figures were 7% and 22% respectively<sup>2</sup>. When looking at full-time A-level take-up (AS/A2), over a quarter (26%) of students was from higher professional backgrounds with only 7% from lower qualified occupational backgrounds. Although the apprentices in this study were not asked specifically to give details about their social class, they were asked to provide information about their parents/ family members qualifications. Many students also offered information about their father's occupation. It was, therefore, possible to conclude that a number of the apprentices interviewed would be classified as non-traditional higher education students in terms of socio-economic background as well as qualification. However, it should be noted that there were exceptions; for example one of the apprentices had attended public school.

The research also fits the desire for expansion of higher education to meet the need of employers. The White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* (2003) asserts the requirement for 'more work-focused degrees—those, like our new foundation degrees, that offer specific, job-related skills.' (2003:60). The White Paper *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills* (2003) set out the need for employers to 'have the right skills to support the success of their businesses, and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled.' Engineering and Construction apprentices were chosen to participate in the research project. These subjects offer the specific, job-related skills to which the White Papers refer.

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<sup>1</sup> Source DfES

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/trends/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.showChart&cid=4&iid=23&chid=90>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Youth Cohort Study, Cohort 11 sweep 1, England and Wales Spring 2002.

The overall number of Advanced (Modern) Apprenticeship participants in October 2003 was 102,700<sup>3</sup>. The government has indicated that it is at further education level that expansion needs to occur and where expectations need to be raised to meet the higher education target by 2010. The (Modern) Apprentice programme is seen as a core area in which the government plans to widen opportunities. The government has set a target to ensure that by 2004, 28% of all 16–21 year olds are on a (Modern) Apprenticeship scheme. In his 2004 conference speech, the Prime Minister acknowledged the importance of vocational education stating that if the Labour party is re-elected it will:

Put the same commitment to quality vocational skills as we do academic education, with new vocational courses at school, every adult given skills free of charge up to level 2 and further support for level 3, and 300,000 Modern Apprenticeships at the workplace<sup>4</sup>

This indicates the emphasis and importance of the Modern Apprenticeship to the government and in seeing the apprenticeship as a key route in widening and expanding higher education.

## **Research Aims**

The aim of the research was to obtain Advanced (Modern) Apprentice views and perceptions on progression opportunities and routes to higher education. Specifically, whether apprentices would progress, whether they could identify any barriers to progression and what would help them overcome these perceived barriers. The following research was asked to be undertaken:

- Identify the AMAs ready to progress
- Survey their opinion/understanding and knowledge of HE
- Find out if they would progress
- Identification of barriers as they perceive them
- What sort of HE they would be interested in
- Activities/resources needed to support progression/remove barriers as perceived by AMAs

## **Method**

The South Yorkshire colleges of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham College of Arts and Technology as well as the Chesterfield College in North Derbyshire offer Engineering and Construction (Modern) Apprenticeship programmes. These colleges have representatives on the Building Pathways Engineering and Construction Group. The colleges, as part of the Building Pathways team, agreed that the research should be conducted at the college sites. Apprentices would be interviewed during class time.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000452/ILRSFR03.pdf> Further education and work based learning for Young people – learner numbers in England on 1 November 2003

<sup>4</sup> <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/labour2004/story/0,14991,1314772,00.html>

Although it was originally planned to use focus groups to gain qualitative information from the apprentices, it was later decided that apprentices would be more likely to speak openly if they were interviewed individually. Interviews were held at the colleges so that apprentices felt comfortable in an environment with which they were familiar. However, it was ensured that the interviews were conducted in privacy, away from the tutors so that the apprentices felt free to speak openly. Apprentices were approached by their tutor who informed them that they were to be interviewed by researchers from Sheffield Hallam University.

Each apprentice was advised by the researcher that they were being interviewed to find out their views about the apprenticeship scheme and opportunities for progression. The apprentices were assured that everything discussed would remain confidential; tutors would not be told what they had said. Apprentices were advised that their comments may be reported anonymously as part of the research report. The research was not seen to be intrusive as apprentices did not have to agree to be interviewed, the apprentices were not asked to give their name or personal details unless they wished to. The interviews were conducted by Rachel Ibbotson (Research Fellow) and Tamsin Bowers-Brown (Research Associate) from the CRE. All of the interviews were audio taped (with the permission of the respondent) and transcribed in full before being anonymised and analysed for the purposes of this report.

A total of forty-four interviews with apprentices were conducted. The apprentices were interviewed on a basis of who was available from the Advanced Apprenticeship courses rather than by selection. There was no attempt to ensure that the group was a representative sample. However, all the apprentices interviewed were white males; this is representative of the Engineering and Construction Advanced Modern Apprenticeship nationally. The Department for Education and Skills reported that in construction, engineering and motor industry sectors the proportion of females and minority ethnics are only 1-3% of the total training in each sector<sup>5</sup>. The breakdown of respondents by course and level are shown in table 1.

Table 1

Level	Engineering	Construction
Foundation Apprentice	5	
Advanced Apprentice	22	17

For the purposes of the report the main body includes data from the interviews with Advanced Apprentices. The data collected from the interviews with Foundation Apprentices can be found as a separate section at the end of this report.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000271/sfr28-2001.doc> Work-based training for young people and work-based learning for adults: volumes and outcomes (2001)

## **Key Findings**

### **Progression**

- Many apprentices wanted to go straight to work once they had finished the apprenticeship.
- Some apprentices wanted to progress to higher education immediately, for others it was something they thought of as an opportunity they may take up later on in life.

### **Advantages of Higher Education**

- Some apprentices thought that higher level qualifications would give them the opportunity to become managers; others thought it would qualify them to become foremen.
- Others thought higher education would open up opportunities for working abroad.

### **Difference by company**

- For apprentices employed by the larger companies it was often the case that apprentices were on a route in which the HNC was encompassed.
- In certain cases, apprentices had been advised that progression to a degree was an option.

### **Barriers**

- Time, income and employer support were identified as the key barriers to progression.
- However, some apprentices did not feel they had the ability to progress to higher education.

### **Family Support**

The majority of apprentices had support from their families in taking the Apprenticeship and many said their family would support them if they decided to continue with higher education.

### **Which qualifications are apprentices aware of?**

The Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Diploma (HND) was the qualification that most apprentices mentioned although a few mentioned studying for a degree. Interestingly, none of the apprentices mentioned the Foundation Degree.

## Results

Initially the apprentices were asked about their course and what it involved. Although this question was generally seen to be a starter question to help the apprentices relax, it was quite revealing. The majority of apprentices stated they were studying for an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship, although some were not clear about the name of the qualification:

### **Question 1: Tell me a bit about the course you are doing and what it involves:**

I honestly don't know what it is NVQ-2800 course in engineering or something.

I think AMA.

Others were more detailed in explaining what the course involved:

I am doing operations and maintenance. I have also done performance engineering operations NVQ level 2. Basically NVQ is a basic skill, making how machines work, and there is stuff like health and safety there.

It's a 214 City and Guilds qualification, with loads of different sets it leads up to an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship and there's about five main topics in it- maintenance organisation, general maintenance, pneumatic systems, hydraulic systems and another one.

Mode of attendance varied by college and by the year of study. Some apprentices were working four days a week and spent a day in college whilst others were on block release. Block release involves several weeks at work followed by several weeks in college. The apprentices were asked how many days they spent in college and how many days they spent in work:

a. How many days are you in college?

The first year we do it one day a week, because we are here all year in the workshops and this year we have done six weeks first, then four weeks and we're doing three weeks now.

b. How many days are you in work?

This is the final year, you do like Monday, Tuesday at work, then you're in (college) on a Wednesday night, then you're in all day Thursday and you're back at work Friday.

Not all apprentices were from the area; some apprentices had been recruited by a national employer with sites throughout the country. The apprentices were sent to study at one of the colleges in South Yorkshire,

which had a specific apprenticeship that met the employer requirements. Therefore, mode of attendance at college is through block release:

My company's Innogy based at Aberthaw power station, which is in South Wales. They send us up here to do BTEC, PEO and BET. We train up here and then we go on block release next year.

## **Question 2: Did you start the apprenticeship straight from school?**

There was a mixture of responses to the question *did you start the apprenticeship straight from school*; approximately half said that they had started straight from school:

Yes. I applied straight to here and I think it was a September start.

Very few had experienced other types of education, three apprentices had completed A-levels and one had started A-levels but had dropped out:

I went to college and then went to Sixth Form and then came onto this job. I did Highers and then I did A-Levels when I got down here, because I moved down from Scotland.

It wasn't for me, so I dropped out. **(What were you doing?)** Maths and physics A-Level. **(How far did you get?)** About two months before the exams I dropped out. It was just when the AS Levels came up. It just wasn't for me. I could have passed maths, but physics was daft, I didn't understand any of it, so I dropped out.

Some apprentices had started apprenticeships in other subjects:

No, I did something else first. Horticulture and I moved from that into engineering.

Others viewed the Foundation course as independent from the Advanced apprenticeship:

No, NVQ-2 full time and BTEC-first.

No. I came to college when I left school. I did an NVQ2 and then went to work and they sent me a bit later on to finish off.

Other apprentices had gone into employment before choosing to become an apprentice; however these were in the minority:

No. I was working on fitting windows and things like that.

No. Straight from school I went to play football for Barnsley for three years and then obviously nowt [nothing] come of that so I had to come back to this. I did originally plan on doing this on leaving school, but I had the opportunity to play football for three years and I couldn't turn it down, so this were like me back up and it's worked all right for me.



No. I went into army.

### **Question 3: Why did you choose to do this course?**

Many of the apprentices indicated that they had chosen an engineering or construction apprenticeship as it was something a member of their family knew about. These findings support both the ideas of cyclical job patterns and family understanding of education:

(My dad) is a tradesman himself; he wanted me to follow him. Not follow in his footsteps but he's sent me down the right lines, guided me a bit and said whatever you do I'll back you up and obviously your mother will as well.

My Dad's an engineer, so I thought I'd keep the chain. I suppose I could have done physics, but decided to be an engineer.

My grandfather did an apprenticeship when he was very much younger and he ended up being the chief designer at Rolls Royce.

My granddad was a joiner, so I thought it would be a good basis, having a trade. Even if I don't stay with joinery it's like a base, isn't it to work off.

My Dad works on building sites and I'd been working with him a bit and I'd got talking to the plumbers that were there and kind of got interested in the job through that and thought I might go for it. All that started off with the money they can earn and it kind of pushed me. It's all money and that, isn't it, and I thought I can do that. I enjoy the work.

For two of the apprentices, geographical location influenced their choice of study:

Where I live the only jobs are in engineering. Other than that you have to drive into Sheffield or drive into town.

Power station near where I live offered the apprenticeship and basically what I want to do. Basically, employed training.

The knowledge that a progression route to higher education was available helped one apprentice make the decision to take an apprenticeship:

I decided at the time when I was 17 doing my final year of A-Levels that it would be a good idea to find a company as soon as possible, so I applied to several different companies including the Navy and the Army and this was the best offer I got and so I decided to join here. As I'd planned, they've got progression ways in place that you can move up. They also support us if we want to do a degree

afterwards, which in my interview was one of my questions. They give you block release again, day release.

**Question 4: What made you decide on an apprenticeship rather than going straight to work or enrolling on another type of college course?**

Apprentices were asked why they had chosen an apprenticeship rather than going straight to work or enrolling on another type of college course. The prospect of earning a wage was seen to be a major attraction:

Suppose money is the major fact. I'd rather earn money by doing apprenticeship than spending it to get a qualification. Once I've finished the apprenticeship, I still get the opportunity to go to the university if I want to.

Basically because I don't want to go to full-time college without money. Going to the college 9-3 and then work for 4 hours in Burger King or something. I'd rather get paid to learn, of course.

Others expressed that the advantage was getting a qualification as well as working:

Instead of going straight to work, this gives a bit more chance to get higher up in your education with NVQs and National Certificates and things, so it'll lay it on your lap. If you start and come out with nothing, you've got less chance of getting a job than someone else who has got a National Certificate.

For some apprentices it is the vocational element that is crucial, the qualification was seen as an ideal route to earning a better wage and remaining employable through gaining the relevant qualifications. It was seen to be necessary to get more than compulsory educational qualifications to get a better job. The training element was seen to be paramount:

Most places ask for basic training or experience which you can't get from schools. You can get money and training at the same time in the apprenticeship.

If you just go straight into a job it's a dead end unless you get proper training. In College, there's that many people go and they're getting all these, whatever they get, but they're not getting the jobs out of them, most of them. Some do, but there's a lot just getting these A-Levels or whatever and they just end up stacking shelves.

Some apprentices indicated they had chosen the apprenticeship route as they did not feel they were suited to sixth-form College, where most students would study A-levels:

I didn't fancy going into sixth form, it's not my thing. I'm more practically minded, I fancied doing engineering; all my family is involved in it.

I didn't fancy being stuck in College all week.

One apprentice mentioned that he had done an engineering course at school, which helped him decide to take an apprenticeship:

My school is one of the few schools in this area that did an actual engineering course. Just GCSE which I quite enjoyed doing in school, [I thought I'd] have a go, it's open to everybody. But only a few schools run it.

### **Question 5: What was your aim when you decided to take the AMA?**

Apprentices were asked "What was your aim when you decided to take the AMA?" For many of the apprentices the benefit of taking an Advanced (Modern) Apprenticeship was that it provides the necessary qualification for the industry and is a route to earning money or getting employed in the profession of choice:

To learn as much as I could while I'd got the chance and get through it as soon as, so I can go out and earn some big money.

To finish off the course and earn some money.

Just to do the best I could actually and get as much out of it as I could. Obviously it'd help me later on in life, if I don't want to go on to higher education - I don't think I plan on going on to higher education because I'm not very student material kind of thing.

Get it done as quick as I can, get some money in.

Just finish my three years, become a bricklayer and then that's it.

One apprentice stated that he saw the apprenticeship as a step on the route to higher qualifications as well as becoming qualified for the profession:

To complete my course and become a qualified joiner which I am doing now. It opens up to lots of stuff like HNC. Apprenticeship seems to be step one.

### **Question 6: Where did you hear about doing a Modern Apprenticeship?**

Various sources were given when the apprentices were asked about where they had heard about the Apprenticeship. Media advertising seemed to have been successful:

We heard a lot about it at school, but I saw this particular one in the paper.

I found out on TV. School didn't help at all, they're rubbish.

My parents told me. I'd heard it on the radio but I didn't take any notice of it, then my parents said I should go for that and I did and got in, so it wasn't that bad.

School and in particular the careers advice at school was mentioned by several apprentices as was Connexions. One student mentioned that he had received advice from the Chamber of Commerce:

I went to the Chamber of Commerce and they advised me on courses and what qualifications I'd get at the end of it.

Another source of information about the Apprenticeship was the employer. Some apprentices had gained employment and the employer had then offered the opportunity to gain qualifications through the apprenticeship:

Just through the employer really. I'd heard about them, but not really thought about going for one or anything, just wanted a job.

The college recruitment process was also referred to by some of the apprentices. One apprentice stated that it was through school that he had found out about the apprenticeship which prompted him to attend the college open day:

I think it was an Opening Day at a college that I'd come to, just on the off-chance to see what it were like and that's how I got introduced to it, plus all my friends as well.

Through school, your careers bloke comes round and he tells you all about what you have to do and how you go about doing it. Then I heard about the Open Evening here so I come to the Open Evening and they told me all what I needed.

### **Question 7: Did your family support your decision to study for a Modern Apprenticeship?**

Apprentices were asked about the family support they received in taking their course. It is widely acknowledged that family support plays an important role in determining whether young people progress in education. As the question *why did you decide to take an apprenticeship* indicated, the advice from the family was often an influential factor. The responses to this question are, therefore, perhaps of little surprise. Most of the apprentices answered that their family did support their decision to pursue an Apprenticeship; few said that they did not have family support:

Yes it was my dad who told me what to do anyway, because when I was at school I didn't know what I were doing and he just said go into engineering so I did.

I spoke to my father and asked him is it good to do a degree or an apprenticeship. He came to the idea that apprenticeship, as you learn physical and theory aspects at the same time, is more appropriate. If you want to do law and become a solicitor, there is only one way to do it. But engineering you can do it by several ways.

Yeah, very supportive.

One apprentice stated that he did have family support, but ultimately the decision was his responsibility:

Oh yeah. Well, to be fair, I wanted to do it, but in a way — it would be my responsibility if I had to do it.

The fact that the apprentice also earned a wage was seen to be an advantage and helped the apprentice to maintain the support of his family:

Yes, they prefer to find that I'm earning. That's made it easier for them, for not supporting me much [financially].

Other apprentices felt that their families were disappointed that they had chosen an apprenticeship:

I think they'd rather I'd gone to College full time.

My Mum wasn't too happy, she wanted me to go back to Sixth Form, but I didn't fancy it. The rest of my family said do what you want.

### **Question 8: What do you plan to do when you finish your course?**

Some apprentices had clear ideas about their progression routes to higher education and this was largely due to the 'package' they had from the employer. Some of the larger employers had set out a pathway in which progression to the Higher National Certificate (HNC) is included:

In two years time, when we've completed this course, we can go onto HNC and stuff like that. We're not being forced to do that, but it's good.

I can get the HNC at the end of the fourth year. Then move on to the degree if the (power) station feels like I need some qualification.

I'm hoping to do my HNC, or HND, whatever it is, next year. If I don't fancy doing it next year I'll have a year off and then do it, it just depends how I feel next year.

Other apprentices planned to go straight into full-time work; the prospect of earning a full-time wage was seen to be a major pull-factor:

I'm going to stop where I am for a couple of years and get some experience and then go chasing the money. I'd like to work abroad – that's the main aim of it.

Some apprentices wanted to continue studying, but the control was seen to be in the hands of their employer:

I wouldn't mind moving on. I've had a chat with work but they say if they do let me it's going to be about three years, but I'll have to sign a contract saying I'll stop on for five years, but that's only if the bosses let me.

**Question 9: Would you be interested in doing other courses with higher levels of skills or higher education after this course?**

Apprentices were asked whether they were interested in further study. Nine of the Construction apprentices and sixteen of the Engineering apprentices stated that they would be interested in doing other courses. Many of the apprentices were unsure about whether they would progress to higher education but showed an interest in the idea of progressing:

I'd consider it, yes, but the downside is I don't like the theory side of it and obviously if it was all practical then I'd consider it a lot more, but it's the theory side that gets me.

We were talking about this the other week. It takes you to NVQ Level 4, you do all the management part of it, you can go to university for that, but I was thinking about doing that but I don't know whether to or not yet, I'll see what it's like when the time comes.

I have a little bit, but it depends if they put the wages up enough to do it or if I just stay on the same wage.

I have thought about it, it's just being able to pay for it. It's having time off work, if I need time off work for it.

Others were more conclusive, they had already made the decision that they were going to progress:

Yes. HNC Diploma and part time courses.

The employers have signed us up already, me and two other lads, to do the HNC, starting in September.

**Question 10: Have you considered further study and if yes, where?**

If the apprentices had thought about continuing to higher education they were then asked where they would study. The majority of those that were

going to take a higher-level course were going to study at college. Few indicated that they would go to university:

Yes, here I think [college]. There's that bridging course, because I don't want to do ONC to HNC, because there's a bridging course that only takes a year, and then move on to the HNC.

Rotherham College. They still do it here. It will be nights with full-time job.

I'd have to come to College for it, there's no work-based qualifications I can get. I'd have to come and study either at College or University.

An apprentice who had already completed A-levels stated that he would progress to a degree:

Yes, a few years after I've been working I'm going to do my degree and probably do a second one if I get the chance, so I can multi-skill, but we'll see if that happens at the end of the course, because my views might change afterwards, but hopefully I'll be doing my degree.

If apprentices were not interested in taking further study they were asked why. These answers were detailed more fully when the apprentices were asked later on about the barriers to progression. One apprentice mentioned the cost of studying:

It's very expensive. I probably would if I have the chance.

### **Question 11: Are you aware of the opportunities for further study after your course?**

Apprentices were asked whether they were aware of the opportunities for further study once they had finished their Apprenticeship. Apprentices had become aware of the opportunities through various sources such as college, the employer or friends (see question 12). However, many apprentices seemed quite vague about the details of the courses that were available to them:

We were just in the classroom with the lecturer. He was telling us how you can go up to the advanced ... well, it's something different to the advanced.

Yeah. From conversation at work, I learnt that there are plenty of opportunities to go to management and things like that. But like I said I am not interested at the moment.

**Question 12: Apprentices were asked how they had found out about further opportunities to study after they had finished the Apprenticeship.**

Apprentices working for one of the larger companies, as stated earlier, had a package in which the HNC was seen as a natural progression from the AMA. For these apprentices, their options were laid out when they took the Apprenticeship so that they were aware of what they could work towards. Other apprentices had been made aware of the apprenticeship through work, the college or a training provider:

Yes, I was informed when we first started by my Training Officer that we can go on and do our HND, degrees and further courses if we want to, if we have the ability, but that will be under the words of the company. They make the final decision: if you say can I do it, they'll look at what you've done, how well you've done it and they'll say yes or no, but they'll give you the opportunity to do other courses too.

Teachers, staff in the college, handbook.

**Question 13: Is there anything that would stop you from going on to take further study in HE after completing your AMA?**

Apprentices were asked if there was anything that would stop them going on to take further study in HE after completing their AMA. There were four key issues identified; time, the employer, finance and ability.

Time was a barrier for some apprentices who felt that they would have to put in long hours. This was largely because apprentices saw the qualification as something that they would do part-time in addition to working, rather than full-time. Some apprentices already felt that the workload of the apprenticeship was demanding:

The time limit, the hours I've got to spend at college because I'm doing from 9 in a morning until about 8 at night here, so it's a bit of a long day and then I've got to travel all the way back home on a bus.

Night school, that's it. Having to go to work and then go home and having to come here [college].

Some apprentices recognised it would require a time commitment, but it would not deter them from progressing:

I think I'd do it. It may be a bit tiring later, I think I might get a bit fed up halfway through it like, coming in every night and that, but I don't think it'd bother me that much.



Hopefully, I'll do it within the next couple of years, but the only thing that could stop me is depending on what jobs I've got, because I work away quite a lot. In my second year, I missed college, we did a six month job in Scotland, so I missed a college block then, and after I came back, when the others weren't here, I worked it back then. So if I knew I was going to miss a big block of it then I'd wait while the next year and do it.

Finance was also paramount in whether the apprentices felt they could progress in higher education. This was due to the loss of potential earnings, the desire to earn more as soon as possible, as well as the cost of the course:

I just think it's being able to pay for it and having time really.

I think after this I will be straight at site. Try and earn money.

I don't know if it'd be day release because I'd still need money coming in, so that's probably the only thing that would do it for me.

It's time, isn't it? I'm not sure who pays, I thought it were us who had to pay for it, I'm not right sure. It depends, because a lot of people are subcontracting now, so if you're subcontracting, you have to pay yourself.

For many of the apprentices higher education was something that they thought they would return to later in their career, after they had experienced a few years working full-time on site and having earned some money.

I just want a break from education and like go out on sites, learn more on sites instead of coming to college. In a few years time, something like that, I might be interested.

Another factor was whether apprentices felt it was something they were capable of academically. For some apprentices, further education was as far as they wanted to progress, due to expectations or ability:

I don't intend to go into the management side because I don't think I'm management material, so I'll just stick to being on the tool side of things. So, obviously, I think it (higher education) would help me if I wanted to go that way later on in life.

Basically, my level of understanding things.

I don't really want to go for a higher course, because I'll find it a bit more difficult and I'm finding it quite hard wit' [with] one I'm on already, so I think it would be a bit too complicated for me to do the next course up.

I hate coming to college.

For some apprentices the employer was also seen as a potential barrier to progression, this was expressed in greater detail when apprentices were asked about whether their employer would support them if they wanted to progress. Many of the apprentices could not see that there would be any barriers to their progression, for some this was because they had not thought about progressing to higher education.

**Question 14: Apprentices were asked *what would help you to get past this barrier?***

One of the apprentices who was unsure of his ability to progress suggested that he could use the college learning zone to study more, another indicated he needed to pay more attention in class:

They have got a learning zone up there, but I find it hard to come down with working through the week and then I have to come down at night times. It's messing about.

Listen more in lectures.

One apprentice was asked whether day release rather than evening classes would make it easier for him to study for higher qualifications, he agreed that it would. However for some apprentices the advantage of evening classes for the Higher National Certificate were seen to be that they could continue to earn a full wage:

I'd do it because it's only a night course, you see, so I'd be working through the day, so I'd be working on my own, so I'd be earning my own money by then.

There was an indication that apprentices were unsure about the funding and clearer information about fees would help them to make a decision on progression. Fee payment by the employer was also suggested:

I know most people pay the fee by working. But I don't get how to get the funding sources. I know North-East Derbyshire used to fund but they are no longer funding.

I would prefer for the employer to pay for the course.

**Question 15: *Would your family support you if you decided to continue studying?***

As with family support for the apprenticeship, it is often important to have family support when progressing to higher education. Young people (16–18) who receive strong encouragement from mothers are four times more likely to plan to enter higher education as opposed to not enter higher education than those who receive no encouragement, or who are

discouraged (Collier *et al.* 2003:253). Apprentices were asked would your family support you if you decided to carry on studying by taking a higher level course?

Yeah, definitely. They'd have no choice. I'm old enough now to make my own mistakes, no problem.

One of the apprentices stated that he did not have the backing of his family when he started the apprenticeship. However, the course had suited him and his Dad had changed his opinion:

I wasn't one of the best favourites at school, I got suspended and kicked out like and they thought [parents] that with it being college and therefore it were like school and that, they didn't think I were going to do it, they thought it would just be a waste of time. So my dad didn't want me to do it at first, but I'm proving him wrong and I'm on my way now and he's pleased for me, I've worked hard.

**Question 16: Has anyone in your immediate family taken a course at university or a higher education course?**

As well as family support, family understanding of higher education is often an influential factor on students aspirations to progress. Forsyth & Furlong (2004) conducted interviews with students as part of a Joseph Rowntree Research project, they assert the cultural disadvantage students face when there is not a history of participation in higher education in the family:

Many (respondents) came from family backgrounds in which both taking on debt to invest in one's future and participation in higher education were alien concepts. In such families, historically, children had left school to get a job and contribute to family income. Indeed some interviewees felt aware of some pressure from their families and friends to do likewise (Forsyth & Furlong, 2004:43).

The attendance at college or university of people in the family makes the option seem less alien, it was hoped that by asking apprentices about the family participation in higher education we could determine whether there would be differences in the responses about family support of higher education or aspirations. We asked apprentices whether anyone in their immediate family had been to university or studied for a higher level course, if yes we then asked which member of the family, the level of study they had taken and the subject area. Apprentices were asked: Has anyone in your immediate family taken a course at university or a higher education course?

Everyone of them, cousins, brothers, mum and dad all went for university. Some of them went to Oxford and Cambridge.

My sister. She's a teacher.

My sister's done one in the past; she was at university for three years. I've got a younger brother, he's that age where he could go if he wants to, but up to press he hasn't done anything about it.

Many of those who had members of family or friends that had attended university said they would like to progress to higher education. However there were also apprentices who had siblings that had been to university, but they did not feel it was an option they wished to pursue. In one case, where there was no history of participation, the apprentice indicated that if the employer wanted him to progress he would do so:

[I will do] whatever work tells me to do. I'd be happy with what they tell me to do. I like what I do. Where I work there's a lot of people who have done that, like done what I've done and gone on to do HNCs and stuff.

Colleague/peer support was also beneficial for one apprentice with no family history of participation, who said that he wanted to continue, even without employer support:

Yes but I don't know if the power station wants us to do that, but if they don't, there's me and two lads that work at the station and me and one of the lads want to do an HND, so we'll do it together.

Twelve of the apprentices stated that none of their family had been to university. An additional four said that their family members had not been to university or done higher level qualifications but they had friends that had studied at university or college (although the college courses were not always at a higher level):

Me work friend has, who I work with. He's done his Level 3, but I'm not doing Level 3.

Two apprentices mentioned that other members of their family had studied but not for a higher education qualification:

My mum's a manager now. She actually sat an NVQ Level 2 in Customer Services, but I think it was Stoke-on-Trent that did it, their University

Fifteen of the apprentices had a relative that had studied higher level courses; of these two said their uncle had been to university, nine said that a sibling had studied higher level qualifications and four said that a parent had studied for higher level qualifications. Interestingly for two of the students who had parents with higher level qualifications they had been gained recently:

My father, he's an engineer in a steelworks, he completed a degree in maths last year, I think.

I think my Mum's got HNDs, I don't think she's got a degree yet. She was aiming to try to get one in Health and Safety or something, but I don't know where she's at with that at the moment.

**Question 17: Would your employer support you if you decided to continue studying?**

As apprentices were working for different employers the answers varied greatly. Some apprentices were working for large companies in which the HNC would be a natural route after completing the AMA. Others worked in SMEs, some were family run business and there would not be the immediate option to progress.

We come up here for 4 years course for the National Certificate which involves operation and maintenance, engineering processes, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering and CNI which controls limitation. We study for four years and get it into higher standards at the end of this. For first two years — National Certificate, end of the fourth years HNC we can go on to degree.

Yes, I think they would, because they're having to pay for us to be educated and get the skills, so they'll be encouraging you and putting support behind you because they want the best out of you, so I think they'd give you all the support you needed to get you through it. If they don't think you're able enough to do it, they won't make you try and do it.

One apprentice stated that his employer had already offered him the opportunity to study for an HNC, however if the employer had not offered to pay for the course the apprentice would not have chosen to continue. Another apprentice indicated that others had been given this opportunity but this was due to funding that was available at the time:

I don't know, I think they're quite a lot aren't they? I don't think I'd pay for it myself.

Yes. One of the guys has done the same as me. He has done all the way through and finished higher nationals. He was around when Chamber funded students. Government has decided Chamber to help basic training courses like computing, dentistry before they helped for the courses for longer term. It is about what government's telling them.

For other apprentices the opinion was that support for continuing education was not something that their employers would offer. This was perceived to be because employers needed the apprentices to be working once they had qualified as well as preventing them from becoming equally qualified:

No, they want you at work earning them money. They don't want you studying or doing something that's going to lead to you walking

out on them once you've finished your studying, because that's how they see it, you taking their job.

They don't want you to take their jobs, so no, they won't support you, they won't pay for it or anything. If they found out you had to have a day off in the middle of the week they'd definitely be like, no way.

**Question 18: Has your employer been supportive of you whilst you have been doing the AMA?**

The majority of apprentices stated that they had received support from their employer during the Apprenticeship. The support ranged from time off for exams to help in completing tasks:

Yeah, absolutely sound, you can't fault them at all. Whatever I want they've just let me have it and told me what to do.

They are always there for me. They always guide me right and they offered a lot of help.

Yeah. They give me the opportunity to do the job which benefits the course study. It gives me experience in various things.

Well, coming to college I don't lose a day's pay. If exams come up I'll let them know that I'm going to college for a day and they trust me, they'll not make any enquires or anything, just tell me to do my best and get sent back to work as soon as possible.

**Question 19: Do you know who your training provider is?**

Not all apprentices could answer this question. The apprentices who did respond generally knew the name of the provider; others knew the name of the representative from the provider who visited them onsite. Out of the thirty-nine Advanced Apprentices, thirty-three were able to identify their training provider.

Apprentices were also asked whether their training provider had discussed opportunities for progression after they had finished the AMA. Thirteen of the apprentices stated that they had not been told about the progression routes another thirteen said that they had. For some of the apprentices who had received information about progressing from their training provider, they did not feel it had been sufficient:

Yeah, they told us about other things we could be doing. But not really in detail what it is about though.

He's (training provider) mentioned it to us in the past, but I haven't really sat down and discussed it, it's just when he's been at on-site interviews to see how I'm going on like, he's mentioned it.

Some of the apprentices said that they had a new representative from the training provider but not all of these apprentices had met her yet. One stated that he had received a visit in the past fortnight to discuss the opportunities for progression.

**Question 20: Do you think your job prospects would be better if you took a HE course?**

A number of apprentices felt that the job roles open to them would be different if they gained higher qualifications:

It'd be more qualifications; I could get a higher paid job I think.

Yes I could go on to design.

I think so. My dad's company is quite bigger now. When he started there were only 6 of them. It is getting more management and stuff like that. I could help with that, someone has to do it.

Another apprentice thought that he would be more desirable to employers if he had a degree in addition to an apprenticeship:

Yes. I think if you go for an interview and you've got a degree, then you're more likely going to get the job. If you've got a few other courses as well it might help, but if you've got a degree in the subject they want and you've also done the AMA – most people know that you get really well taught on them. This is one of the best in the country that I've heard of, because of the way they treat you and the support they give you.

There was an association between higher-level skills and becoming a foreman as well as a manager. This was not always seen as a positive thing, some apprentices felt that the earning capacity as a labourer would be better than that of a manager. Some apprentices felt that they would have to take a pay cut before qualifying for the jobs that required higher qualifications:

Well, yes, if you come on to be a site manager or something like site foreman or something. You can make more money out of just being a bricklayer.

Well yes, I can go higher up in the company like site manager, things like that, but it's dropping down in money. So it's less money before I do that.

The prospect of working abroad was also seen to be something attainable with higher-level qualifications:

Working abroad maybe, because I've got a Diploma. Job promotion's a lot easier. Just all things like that, it's a lot better

I could leave the country and go to America to work. I'd need higher qualifications to go over there.

One apprentice mentioned he would be able to become a technician:

You are qualified to do main technician jobs. Engineering manager post can be got with a degree and that.

Two more of the apprentices stated that he would be able to take more skilled work:

You can branch off and do more specialised areas depending on what you want to go into.

I'd be able to operate different machinery, do different things, be a bit more useful to an employer.

**Question 22: Is there anyone working for your employer who has progressed from an AMA into higher education?**

Some apprentices stated that their employers or managers had started out through an apprenticeship:

There are a lot of managers who have done the apprenticeship and went to university and come for the job.

There were few specific examples of apprentices that had progressed to higher education and were working for the same employer. Some apprentices claimed that there had been other apprentices who had progressed but they did not know them or what they had gone on to study:

There was a guy who left last year, has gone to Leeds University. But don't know what he is doing.

Others said that there had not been anyone else that had progressed. One apprentice stated that he was the first apprentice the company had taken on:

No, I was the first one to start the ball rolling. I was the first apprentice they'd ever had.

**23. Are you aware of any other AMA's who have progressed into HE? Do you know how they got on?**

The responses for knowledge of other apprentices that had progressed was similar to the knowledge of apprentices who had progressed in HE within the same employer. The majority did not know of others who had progressed, others stated that they had friends who had gone to university.

I think they're pretty much same as me because I've three or four mates have done what I've done and they've just gone onto the tool-



side of things. I think Kev, who I were with last year, he were on about doing it, but when he started working full-time and saw the sort of money he were earning, it just didn't take his fancy.

Yes, one. He's a joiner.

#### **24. Do you have anything else you would like to say about Modern Apprenticeships?**

There was a very positive response overall to the Apprenticeship programme. Apprentices differed in their reasons for seeing the apprenticeship as a positive scheme. The key benefits were seen to be the mix of classroom and workplace learning, learning 'hands-on' practical skills:

It is a good thing really. It gives you a lot of freedom that no need to sit in the classroom and read. I can go to work and don't get fed up going to college everyday. It is very useful and you get an experience. Things that you can do in the college which never get a chance to do it. Also learn things from the work.

It is good to start your career as apprenticeship and I enjoy it.

It's been well worth it. It is been an experience and lot of hard work. When you come to this stage its worth all as you see the light.

#### **Foundation (Modern) Apprentices**

Of the five interviews conducted with Foundation (Modern) Apprentices studying Motor Vehicle Engineering, four apprentices stated that they wanted to continue to the Advanced (Modern) Apprenticeship. Most were able to identify people in their workplace who had taken their study to a higher level than Foundation. One apprentice stated he would use the internet if he was looking for a higher level course.

## Conclusion

Although many of the apprentices wanted to progress, some felt that it was something they would do after spending a few years solely in employment. The majority of those who were planning on progressing immediately were going to do so part-time as well as working. Some apprentices did not wish to progress to higher education.

The interview data varied greatly depending on the employer for which the apprentices worked. One employer, that employed several of the apprentices at different sites nationally, offered the higher-level qualifications as part of its training package. In this instance, apprentices were very informed about the choices they had after completing the Apprenticeship. Other apprentices indicated that they had heard about higher qualification opportunities from their college tutors. In many cases the apprentices were not able to articulate clearly the options about which they were aware; this indicated that more and clearer information may be necessary.

The value of higher education was seen to be in the job opportunities to which it would lead, these were becoming a foreman or a manager. Only one apprentice mentioned technicians' jobs as an opportunity that would arise through taking higher level qualifications. Other apprentices indicated that it would help them gain employment abroad. Many of the apprentices felt that they would earn more in non-managerial roles and were, therefore, unsure about taking higher-level skills as they did not relate it with monetary gain.

The barriers to progression were seen to be time, finance, employer support and ability to progress. Although many of the apprentices were able to identify the barriers to progression they did not find it as easy to think of a solution. Those who had not considered progression also found it difficult to identify potential barriers.

The majority of apprentices mentioned the Higher National Certificate or Diploma when talking about higher level skills. Few apprentices mentioned a degree and none mentioned the government's flagship Foundation Degree.

This research highlights the need for clearer information for apprentices across the region, which offers information about all the progression routes that are available to them.

Although this report focuses on the engineering and construction apprenticeships the implications and findings may be pertinent to other apprenticeship programmes.

## Recommendations

The involvement of employers in providing clear information to apprentices about the pathways for progression is paramount. However, the responsibility should not be left solely in their hands; colleges should work in partnership with the employers to ensure that the information available to apprentices is 'joined-up' and consistent. The benefits that greater skills bring to the employer should be emphasised.

The Learning and Skills Council in working closely with training providers should ensure that knowledge about higher education is given to apprentices.

Information and guidance before post-compulsory education needs to emphasise the apprenticeship as a route to higher education rather than as a route solely to employment. This will help to draw in a full range of learners of different abilities. It is recommended that information about progression routes is shared with Connexions and Careers Education and Guidance providers

The LSC needs to work with employers to identify the job roles where higher level skills are required and promote the advantages to the business of developing apprentices' skills to a higher level. It is important to place higher level learning within a lifelong learning strategy rather than just as a post-school/college destination

It is recommended that employee profiles are developed to feature as a part of the Apprentices marketing materials to raise aspirations and knowledge about intermediate skilled jobs

The LSC needs to clarify the opportunities available for apprentices to secure funding for their further studies by exploring joint activities with employers and employer representative bodies as well as other agencies working to regenerate the region.

A promotion event with an open invitation to all apprentices in the colleges in the area is recommended. This event could be used to promote the courses that are available at the colleges as well as those at the university. If this event were to be held in class time it could encourage attendance.

A database of all apprentices in the region would be useful. Promotional and factual information could be sent to apprentices at their home addresses. A contact name should be given to answer any queries about higher education.

Information about Foundation Degrees in construction and engineering need to be promoted as soon as they have been developed. None of the apprentices mentioned this qualification.

Given that for some apprentices, *time* is seen as a barrier to progression it is important that the Sector Skills Council ensure that apprenticeship

frameworks provide the relevant level of academic skills needed to progress apprentices into HE or support the development of bridge programmes that require the shortest time of study needed to progress into HE. In addition local FE Colleges should work closely with SSCs to promote and implement such developments

Local universities should continue to work with college partners to ensure admission policies value the advanced apprenticeship as an entry qualification onto undergraduate degree programmes. In addition a full recognition of credit achieved on sub-degree qualifications will widen participation and bring diversity into the university

Further research with employers is needed to see whether their perspective is different to that of the apprentices. It will also help ascertain the issue for employers in respect of training requirements, imperatives and opportunities offered to apprentices. An analysis of the costs and benefits to SMEs would also be revealing.

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## **Appendix 1: Questionnaire**

### **Building Pathways**

#### **Interview Schedule**

#### **Advanced Modern Apprentices**

Intro: I am Rachel/Tamsin, I'm a researcher from the Centre for Research and Evaluation at Sheffield Hallam University. I am here today to have a brief chat with you about the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme. I am trying to find out what you know about the opportunities for you to go into higher education and more specifically the barriers that stop apprentices progressing to HE. Everything that we discuss will remain confidential and your tutors will not be told what you have said.

(Check Recording of interview okay?)

So to begin, if you could just.....

**1 Tell me a bit about the course you are doing and what it involves....**

**c. Is it a modern or an advanced modern apprenticeship?**

**d. How many days are you in college?**

**e. How many days are you in work?**

**2. Did you start the apprenticeship straight from school?**

**3. Why did you choose to do this course?**

**4. What made you decide on an apprenticeship rather than going straight to work or enrolling on another type of college course? (Did you consider other options such as study at school, other college courses, other MAs?)**

**5. What was your aim when you decided to take the AMA?**

**6. Where did you hear about doing a Modern Apprenticeship? (School, parents, Careers adviser, Connexions, employer, job centre, other)**

**7. Did your family support your decision to study for a Modern Apprenticeship?**

**8. What do you plan to do when you finish your course?**

9. Would you be interested in doing other courses with higher levels of skills or higher education after this course?
10. Have you considered further study?
  - a. If yes, where? – College, Work based learning, University?
  - b. If no, why not?
11. Are you aware of the opportunities for further study after your course?
12. How did you find out about them?
13. Is there anything that would stop you going on to do further study in HE after completing your AMA?
  - a. Anything else?
14. What would help you to get past this barrier?
15. Would your family support you if you decided to carry on studying by taking a higher level course?
16. Has anyone in your immediate family taken a course at university or a higher education course?
  - a. Who in family
  - b. Level of study
  - c. Subject area
17. Would your employer support you if you decided to continue studying?
18. Has your employer been supportive of you whilst you have been doing the AMA?
19. Do you know who your training provider is?
  - a. Has your training provider discussed opportunities for progression after you have finished your AMA?
20. Do you think your job prospects would be better if you took a HE course?

**a. Why do you think that?**

**21. Is there anyone working for your employer who has progressed from an AMA into higher education?**

**22. Are you aware of any other AMA's who have progressed into HE? Do you know how they got on?**

**23. Do you have anything else you would like to say about Modern Apprenticeships?**

Thank you very much for your time. All your answers will remain strictly confidential. The information you have given will only be used for a report on how the Modern Apprenticeship scheme is working and no individuals will be identified. Comments will be made anonymous.