

Degree Apprenticeships at the University of Chester

Background

Since 1839 the University of Chester has been transforming lives through education. Our foundational values emphasise the importance we place in developing the knowledge and skills of each of our students so that they are empowered to serve their communities and play a full role in the economic life of the UK. Today, these values are encapsulated in our Citizen Student Strategy which is ensuring that our graduates are ready to take on challenging, rewarding careers and contribute to the economic prosperity of our region and the country.

Work-based education has been at the heart of the University's mission since its foundation. As well as preparing students for careers dedicated to the service to others in schools, hospitals and countless other public institutions across the country, through our research and teaching we are at the forefront of Cheshire's economic development. The most recent independent report commissioned by the University (in 2019) revealed that our total economic contribution to the UK economy was £410million (GVA); equivalent to almost 6,000 jobs.

Through our degree apprenticeship provision, the University continues to innovate in education which places the learner at the heart of everything we do, meeting the skills needs of local employers and raising the aspirations of our students.

Strategic overview

The Citizen Student Strategy encompasses every part of University life. Each of our students, irrespective of the programme they have chosen or the way they choose to study it, benefit from world-class higher education delivered around the key skills of sustainability, resilience and personal development. The three strands of our strategy are deeply ingrained in each of the University's degree apprenticeship programmes:

1. **Building Social Capital**

Developing the UK's knowledge economy requires graduates who have the confidence to influence decision makers and lead change, whether in the organisations they work for or in society more generally. Alongside the development of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers need now, our degree apprentices are being equipped with the soft skills they need to become agents for change and innovation.

2. **Holistic Student Experience**

Our vibrant community of learning is drawn from all walks of life. By bringing together people with diverse cultural, political and economic perspectives, we live, learn and research with each other to create new knowledge and develop the skills that will power the UK economy in the years ahead. Our degree apprentices are at the centre of our community; they benefit from the insights of others, but also enrich the understanding of our staff and non-apprenticeship students through their unique perspective from the world of work as it is today.

3. Lifelong Learning

The University is committed to supporting learners at all stages of their lives and careers. Whether it's to take a step-up in industry or re-skilling for a career change, our leading-edge research and our innovative, flexible approach to learning means that the University's high-quality education and training is available whenever it is needed. We offer apprenticeships encompassing degrees at Foundation, Bachelors and Masters levels, each tailored to the needs of employers and to learners.

Serving our region

The University has been serving the local and regional economy of Chester and the North-West since our founding over 180 years ago. In more recent times, through our pioneering Work-Based and Integrative Studies framework, we have meshed the world of work and world-class higher education and enhanced the life chances of countless hundreds of students. Our current apprenticeship provision in the fields of public service (healthcare, social work and policing), engineering and business and leadership, is a natural extension of that work.

Today, we work with local authorities from Merseyside, Cheshire and Shropshire, our regional NHS Trusts and the Cheshire Constabulary, along with leaders in science, technology and manufacturing such as Unilever, Cogent Skills and EA Technology. Partnering with these leading employers places the University in a strong position to respond to the UK government's *Skills for Jobs* whitepaper and its levelling-up agenda. Similarly, the University is fully engaged as a partner in the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership to support delivery of its Skills and Education Plan.

We believe that success in delivering degree apprenticeships will be realised through the recognition of their high quality and the way that they respond to the needs of the local economy. For that reason, rather than seeking uncontrolled expansion of provision, the University's approach is to draw on our existing academic expertise and apply that expertise in new and innovative ways to address skills gaps in our local economy as well as contributing to wider workforce development.

Delivering Quality

Each of the University's degree apprenticeships are co-created by our academic experts, employer partners and our Citizen Students. Our rigorous approach to quality is designed to ensure that learners are admitted to programmes only when we are assured that they align with the relevant degree apprenticeship standard and other national reference points and benchmarks.

Drawing extensively on the University's ethos of quality assurance for quality improvement, our degree apprenticeships are fully embedded in the Educating Planning and Continuous Monitoring for Enhancement processes. Action planning in response to student voice and outcomes data is at the heart of our approach, with quality evaluated at module, programme and institutional level so that feedback can be responded to quickly and improvements carried out by the most appropriate part of the University.

In the coming months we want to further strengthen our approach to quality by amplifying the voices of our degree apprenticeship learners and their employers. In addition to the regular feedback approaches that apply to all provision, the University is developing an approach which will enable us to quickly identify the things that matter most to degree apprenticeship learners so that we can tailor their experience of the University.

Confident Leadership

Delivering excellence in degree apprenticeships requires good management and assured leadership. We have developed an effective approach which promotes transparency and accountability at all levels:

- The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost holds strategic responsibility for all the University's education provision, including degree apprenticeships.
- The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) has senior responsibility for the operational effectiveness of apprenticeship provision, which is coordinated through the Directorate of Access, Skills and Apprenticeships.
- Academic leadership and management of our apprenticeship programmes sits within the structures of our academic faculties and departments.
- The Academic Quality and Standards department supports the activities of all these areas by having oversight of the systems used to ensure standards and the quality of learning and teaching. The department also oversees the management of End-Point Assessment in integrated degree apprenticeships.

We have continued to evolve our approach to management and leadership of apprenticeship provision most recently through the establishment of separate operational and strategically focussed committees dedicated to continuous improvement. The University's governing body is also fully engaged in this work through its Academic Governance and Student Outcomes committee.

Recognising the growth of our degree apprenticeship provision in recent years, the University is taking an iterative approach to developing its governance framework. Through our deliberative and oversight committees we are committed to ensuring that all University policies take account of the unique nature of degree apprenticeships as we work towards publishing a bespoke framework.

Key Priorities

As a community dedicated to the vital role of education in service to society, we believe that our provision can always be enhanced and improved through the acquisition of new knowledge and the development of new skills. For our degree apprenticeship programmes, this means seeking continuous improvement through the following core priorities:

- Ensure consistent high-quality delivery across the full portfolio.
- Enhance the opportunities to hear feedback from degree apprenticeship learners and their employers.
- Develop the operational organisation of apprenticeship delivery according to a sustainable business model.
- Enhance opportunities for skills and learning progression.
- Create a dedicated quality management framework for degree apprenticeships.

Owner: Academic Quality and Standards

Approved by: University Council

Date: 29 March 2022

Review due: November 2022