

Degree Apprenticeship Blog

Whether you are leaving school, leaving the Armed Forces or looking for a change, making a decision for the next steps of your career can be daunting. For many people it is a choice between academic study or the world of work. Do you get the qualification you always wanted, which will also aid in getting that all important job in the future, or do you start work in your desired field and build your career up through experience?

But what if you could do both?

With the introduction of Degree Apprenticeships this offers a very real and exciting opportunity. This type of programme allows you the best of both. The chance to combine full-time paid work and part-time university.

In this blog, I am going to look into Degree Apprenticeships, what they involve and the benefits of this route of study. This is based on my experience of working with over 160 students over the last 4 years at Barratt Developments who are going through a programme like this.

What would a Degree Apprenticeship involve?

A Degree Apprenticeship means that from day one you are working full-time in a role of your choice. As the old saying goes you get to 'earn as you learn'. Learning the practical day to day elements of your role whilst also having financial freedom.

This doesn't however happen by chance. A Degree Apprenticeship means that your practical learning is mapped out to ensure that you are achieving all the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviours to be successful in your current role and long term career. This is part of your off-the-job learning which encourages you to not only learn new tasks and activities but reflect on what you have learnt, how you can implement it in the future and the benefits to you.

Alongside this you complete part-time studies with a chosen university to achieve an academic Degree qualification. Depending on the employer and university this might look like a day release where you study for 1 day each week or blocks of study throughout the year. At Barratt Developments our students complete a week of study every quarter, usually January, April, July and October. This may take place in Sheffield or online with Sheffield Hallam University who deliver our bespoke Degree Apprenticeship.

In addition to the above a big part of the Degree Apprenticeship programme is the mentoring you will receive, both from the workplace and your university. At Barratt Developments for example we assign a Senior Manager or Director in your chosen discipline as your mentor. This means you have someone who can fully support you and ensure you have access to everything you need for your learning but can also discuss your long term career plans with, to help you achieve these.

At your chosen university there will be Academic Advisors who can offer guidance with regards your studies and you will also have an assigned Work-Based Learning Coach who combines all the elements of learning and keeps regular contact with all involved including your workplace mentor.

Adapting to change

2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic brought a very real challenge to education and personal development. With Degree Apprenticeships being delivered through a partnership between employers and universities it has made it possible for these qualifications to continue. At Barratt Developments we worked closely with Sheffield Hallam University to deliver the teaching through online means. Gaining feedback from our students along the way the delivery has been adapted to contain a mix of private reading and study, pre-recorded lectures, individual and group activity work and live online seminars. This combination ensures that the learning is varied and mirrors what would take place in the classroom as close and possible.

Although, this is a very new style of learning and hasn't been without its teething problems, these were overcome along the way and the grades we are seeing from our students continue to remain high. This is a credit to their determination to succeed.

We look forward to our students being able to attend university again however in the meantime this has shown us that this type of study can also be flexible where necessary. It has also given an opportunity for reflection and enhancement of the programme.

What are the benefits?

It goes without saying that being able to achieve a Degree qualification whilst working and earning money is a key benefit to a Degree Apprenticeship. I have however seen first-hand that there is so much more to it than this.

This type of blended learning lends itself to a deeper understanding of the present and future of your role. Being able to see and apply the technical knowledge gained from the studies back in the work place becomes relatable and tangible. In addition the research skills learned at university ensure that your learning and ability to keep up to date with new and upcoming practices and processes in your given field go beyond your Degree qualification. You now know how and where to look for this information.

The knowledge, skills and behaviours you are learning, coupled with your drive and determination to better yourself provide a great platform for your career development. At Barratt Developments we see about 73% of our students are promoted during their time on programme and approximately 32% are into managerial positions.

The Degree Apprenticeship also supports in your ongoing professional development. The work you do towards the apprenticeship itself can open the doors to achieving your relevant industry accreditation/membership.

Depending on your employer and specific programme you are also likely to create a network of peers within your business or industry that you can turn to for support throughout your career. At Barratt Developments for example our students study alongside others from across the business and country as well as individuals from other disciplines i.e. Construction, Quantity Surveying and Technical Design. They also have the opportunity to join industry networks such as the HBF Future Talent Network.

One of the nicest things I have seen along the way is how these relationships can also turn into special friendships. People who become your support both in work and in your personal life. Over the years we have seen people get promoted, move house, get married, get pets, have children and so much more and their class mates become best man or bridesmaid, godfather or godmother. And all whilst completing a degree and earning.

So, why should you go for it?

There is no doubt that a Degree Apprenticeship takes hard work and dedication however the benefits far outweigh this. Since 2016 we have seen 29 students graduate with a Foundation Degree and 43 with a BSc (Hons) Degree. Every single one that I have spoken to will testify to the workload however will also tell you that it is absolutely worth it! The smile and pride these individuals have on their Graduation day, with their family and friends present to witness their amazing achievement, is a touching to see and be a part of.

For those of you thinking of the possibility of a Degree Apprenticeship hopefully this blog has provided some food for thought. Given my time again a Degree Apprenticeship would have been the choice for me. As someone who learns from what they see and experience, being able to put into practice on a daily basis what I was reading or being taught during my university studies would have concreted my understanding and been nothing other than a positive addition.

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