

# Cylchlythyr | Circular

## Degree Apprenticeships in Wales and Proposals for Funding 2021/22

**Date:** 23 June 2021  
**Reference:** W21/18HE  
**To:** Heads of higher education institutions in Wales  
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales  
**Response by:** 12 July 2021  
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This circular invites HEFCW-funded institutions to submit proposals for funding for Degree Apprenticeships in 2021/22. The call for bids covers the priority areas of Digital on the *Digital Degree Apprenticeship Framework Level 6*, and *Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing*, on the *Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Degree Apprenticeship Framework Level 6*.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



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## Introduction

1. This circular invites HEFCW-funded institutions to submit proposals for funding for Degree Apprenticeships in 2021/22.
2. The call for bids applies to new apprentices on the [Digital Degree Apprenticeship](#) issued on 29 April 2018, and the [Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeship](#) issued on 1 August 2019.

## Background

3. In February 2017, Welsh Government (WG) published its Apprenticeship Skills policy plan, [Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh economy](#), and exceeded its target of 100,000 apprenticeship starts. WG also pledged to create 125,000 all-age apprenticeships during the next Senedd term<sup>1</sup>.
4. WG also set out a commitment to develop Degree Apprenticeships, which was confirmed in a letter to HEFCW by the Cabinet Secretary for Education, with a commitment to allocate budget for a Degree Apprenticeship pilot programme for a three-year period from 2018/19 to 2020/21. Initial priority areas for Degree Apprenticeships were confirmed as Digital, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Level 6.
5. In a letter to HEFCW dated 2 March 2019, Welsh Government confirmed in principle its commitment to fund continuing apprentices from 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 to programme completion.
6. In a revised [remit letter](#) in June 2021, Welsh Government made a further commitment to support the Degree Apprenticeship programme in Wales for an additional year, 2021/22. Funding for 2021/22 has been confirmed as £9.5m for existing and new apprenticeships, and will be allocated to HEFCW-funded institutions during this period, in the continued priority areas of Digital and Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Level 6.
7. Degree Apprenticeships in Wales include an integrated bachelor's degree qualification as part of the requirement of an apprenticeship framework and provide opportunities:
  - for individuals in Wales to complete a programme of learning and training resulting in them gaining an apprenticeship and degree level qualification demonstrating the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers in Wales recognise and value;
  - to strengthen pathways from higher level apprenticeships into degree level qualifications;
  - to further meet the skill needs of Wales and improve innovation and productivity through the skilling and upskilling of new and existing employees in Wales;

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<sup>1</sup> [Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: A Fit for the Future Programme for Government](#)

- to break low skills trap, where a low supply of skills is combined with a low demand for skills;
  - to improve the diversity of the workforce in digital and engineering and advanced manufacturing sectors in Wales;
  - to increase collaboration across education sectors in Wales and reduce nugatory competition.
8. As of 1 May 2020, the Welsh Government became the [apprenticeship issuing authority](#)<sup>2</sup> for framework/pathways in Wales. This role was previously being undertaken by Sector Skills Councils and sector bodies. Frameworks must meet statutory requirements as set out by the [Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales](#) (SASW), and follow recommendations and priorities of the Welsh Apprenticeship Advisory Board. Qualifications are key components of [apprenticeship frameworks](#) and a Framework must consist of an occupational competency qualification, a technical knowledge qualification, other qualifications or requirements as specified by the occupation, and an [Essential Skills Wales \(ESW\) qualification](#) where relevant.
  9. An ESW qualification is not a requirement of the Degree Apprenticeship programme, but HEFCW expects assurance that apprentices' learning is being supported and HEFCW-funded institutions are required to confirm that this requirement is met as part of the proposal. This means that apprentices will be awarded a qualification from their Higher Education provider, and will not receive an apprenticeship certificate. Each qualification is part of the [Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales \(CQFW\)](#), and must follow [National Occupational Standards \(NOS\)](#).
  10. [Regional Skills Partnerships](#) (RSPs), labour market information and sector reviews by Qualifications Wales inform Welsh Government priorities for apprenticeship funding. The [Wales Employment and Skills Board](#) (WESB), informed by the Wales Apprenticeship Advisory Board (WAAB), considers apprenticeship developments as part of its remit and advises on framework development.
  11. Welsh Government has commissioned Degree Apprenticeship frameworks in the initial priority areas of digital and engineering and advanced manufacturing. The [Digital Degree Apprenticeship Framework](#) issued by the Sector Skills Council Instructus, was published on 29 April 2018, and the [Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Framework](#) issued by the Sector Skills Council Semta, was published on 1 August 2019.
  12. Welsh Government confirmed support to HEFCW for Degree Apprenticeships at Level 6 in priority areas of digital, engineering and advanced manufacturing, during the three year pilot programme. HEFCW-funded institutions were allocated funding via HEFCW, up to £27k per apprenticeship pro-rata over the duration of the qualification.

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<sup>2</sup> [Welsh Government: Apprenticeship Issuing Authority for Wales](#)

13. The QAA has published guidance on apprenticeships, including a [Characteristics Statement, Higher Education in Apprenticeships](#). Those wishing to offer Degree Apprenticeships are expected to take account of QAA guidance in their Degree Apprenticeship programmes.
14. The Welsh Government's [Inclusive Apprenticeships, Disability Action Plan for Apprenticeships](#) 2018-19 offers guidance on developing an inclusive approach to disability. Those wishing to apply to offer Degree Apprenticeships should ensure that they take account of this within their institution's Degree Apprenticeship programme.
15. Welsh Government also published an Employer Toolkit, '[A More Equal Wales: A practical guide for employers to employing disabled people](#)'<sup>3</sup>. The toolkit provides practical advice on how to attract, recruit, develop and retain disabled employees, as well as what support and resources are available to help employers create a workforce that is representative and open to all. HEFCW-funded institutions should ensure this is disseminated to employers who are interested in recruiting a Degree Apprentice.
16. Welsh Government's Social Research team has commissioned an independent research company to undertake an evaluation of Welsh Government's Degree Apprenticeship programme. The overall aim of the contract is to conduct a formative evaluation of the initial phase of the programme to assess its effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The evaluation objectives have been jointly developed with HEFCW and the focus is on employers, apprentices and Higher Education providers, their motivations and views of the programme. A key part of the evaluation will be to develop an evaluation framework that can be used in the future to make impact and value for money judgements, and inform future programme development. The evaluation is due to report in Autumn 2021.
17. In February 2021, HEFCW commissioned Advance HE to deliver a workshop on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). This was designed to provide support for HEFCW-funded institutions to develop their knowledge of legal and organisational rights and responsibilities in this area, and to assist in the completion of EDI Impact Assessments for the Degree Apprenticeship programme within their institution. EDI Impact Assessments for the Degree Apprenticeship programme must be submitted with HEFCW-funded institutions proposals for funding, and will form part of the quality criteria for assessment.
18. HEFCW is working jointly with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to support HEFCW-funded institutions to develop a robust approach to Welsh language and bilingual provision within their Degree Apprenticeship

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<sup>3</sup> [Business Wales Skills Gateway: Disabled People's Employment](#)

programmes. In March 2021, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol shared its Welsh-medium Action Plan 2050<sup>4</sup> with HEI Degree Apprenticeship leads. This provides a strategic approach to skills development modelling for apprenticeship providers, designed to increase rates of progression, and support for Welsh language skills development socially, and in the workplace.

19. To ensure the effectiveness of this strategy, HEFCW will measure success in Welsh Language and bilingual provision under six key headings, as part its monitoring process:
  - Learner Experience
  - Staffing Capacity
  - Provision
  - Resources
  - Assessment and Qualifications
  - Employer Engagement
20. HEFCW-funded institutions are required to share guidance documents referenced in this circular, and HEFCW's expectations for Degree Apprenticeships, with their delivery partners.

### **Degree Apprenticeships 2021/22**

21. Circular [W18/29HE](#) Degree Apprenticeships 2019/20: Consultation on the Funding Methodology and Request for Expressions of Interest, invited HEFCW-funded institutions to express their views on the allocation of funding in the event that demand exceeded available funding, together with providing indicative numbers for 2019/20.
22. A summary of key points received in response to the consultation can be found in our circular [W19/03HE](#). This includes an outline of HEFCW's workshop on 14 January 2019, designed to support institutions in submitting bids that meet quality thresholds for the first year of the pilot, 2018/19, and to consider the funding methodology. The priorities and methodology by which funding is allocated identified in this Circular will also apply to proposals for 2021/22, should demand exceed available funding for this academic year.
23. Priorities for Degree Apprenticeships in 2021/22 are that:
  - HEFCW-funded institutions comply with relevant legislation and regulatory documents published by Welsh Government;
  - There is collaboration across the HE and work-based learning sectors to best meet the needs of employers and to avoid nugatory competition. HEFCW-funded institutions must include evidence of this within their submission;

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<sup>4</sup> [Towards Cymraeg 2050](#)

- Individuals from groups under-represented in HE, apprentices and the occupations that degree apprenticeships are aimed at are supported to undertake Degree Apprenticeships;
- Degree Apprenticeships contribute to Welsh Government's Welsh language strategy, to achieve a million Welsh speakers by 2050<sup>5</sup>;
- Degree Apprenticeships comply with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) [Characteristics Statement, Higher Education in Apprenticeships](#)<sup>6</sup>.

## Call for proposals

24. The call for proposals will provide opportunities for funding of the requirements on one or more of the pathways identified on the [Digital Degree Apprenticeship](#), Level 6 issued on 29 April 2018, and the [Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Degree Apprenticeship](#), Level 6 issued on 1 August 2019.
25. Funding is subject to confirmation that HEFCW-funded institutions submitting proposals have successfully had their qualifications accepted on to the Digital Degree Apprenticeships Framework and/or the Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Framework.
26. Higher Education delivery partners and/or employers can partner with more than one Higher Education Institution (HEI) for the same provision. Bids will need to state clearly whether or not each partner has applied for the same provision in more than one submission to avoid double counting within the allocation of apprenticeship numbers. Where a HE delivery partner or employer is engaged with more than one bid for the same provision, HEFCW will determine the bid to which the numbers will be allocated. This means that where a HE delivery partner or employer is partnering with more than one regulated institution for the same provision, the numbers allocated to the HEFCW-funded institution may vary from the application.
27. Applicants are expected to apply for provision to be delivered on a regional basis with partners and employers. Applicants that submit proposals to work outside their region will need to make a very clear case to support this. That case will need support from the employer, together with evidence that the providers in the region were unable to meet the employer and apprentice needs. Any approval will be on an exceptional basis.
28. HEFCW-funded institutions can recruit apprentices internally from their own staff. We expect this to be a minority of applications, and it must be supported by a clear case for each individual, demonstrating that the recruitment is based on genuine need.

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<sup>5</sup> [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers](#)

<sup>6</sup> [QAA: Characteristics Statement Apprenticeships](#)

29. HEFCW-funded institutions are invited to submit proposals for the funding of Degree Apprenticeships by 12 July 2021. All proposals submitted by HEFCW-funded institutions will need to be supported with evidence of how the provider will deliver against a set of criteria. These are set out at **Annex A**.
30. Proposals for apprentice numbers must be based on realistic projected new recruitment numbers in 2021/22. HEFCW-funded institutions must be in a position to deliver, should proposals be accepted. The total estimate of new apprentice numbers in the proposal template is set out at **Annex B**.
31. Submission of a proposal will be taken as agreement that the provision will meet the following requirements should numbers be allocated:
- All apprentices are employed in a job role that allows them to fulfil the requirements of the Framework identified for delivery, and their salaries will be met by the employer;
  - Apprentices will spend 51% or more of their time working in Wales;
  - Employers interested in recruiting a Degree Apprentice should be provided with access to Welsh Government's Employer Toolkit, A More Equal Wales<sup>7</sup>;
  - An apprenticeship agreement<sup>8</sup> is in place;
  - An initial assessment is undertaken with the apprentice;
  - Previous experience and learning will be recognised where appropriate;
  - Apprentices' additional learning support requirements will be identified and supported;
  - Apprentices will receive on and off the job work based learning;
  - Apprentices will have their progress reviewed at least every two months. Reviews must involve the HEFCW-funded institution, the apprentice and the employer;
  - Apprentices will have access to the full range of student services offered by the provider, and its student union;
  - Data will be submitted as required by HEFCW;
  - Apprentices can have equivalent level qualifications to those included on the apprenticeship framework as identified on the [Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales \(CQFW\)](#), but not in the same pathway;
  - Degree Apprenticeship marketing and communications will align with Welsh Government marketing and communications;
  - Student and learner protection measures<sup>9</sup> as set out by HEFCW for regulated institutions will be applied in the standard way to the treatment of apprentices;

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<sup>7</sup> [Business Wales: An Employers Guide to Employing Disabled People](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Welsh Government: Apprenticeship Learning Agreement](#)

<sup>9</sup> [HEFCW: Students webpage](#)



- An apprentice can exit the qualification with accreditation/certification of learning achieved. This will not constitute successful achievement of a full apprenticeship.
32. Sign up to these requirements will provide assurances to HEFCW that there is close alignment to the broader apprenticeship programme in Wales, and that the relevant legislative requirements are met. HEFCW will expect HEFCW-funded institutions to document evidence that they are meeting these requirements, and reserves the right to audit that information.
33. There will be an expectation that Degree Apprenticeship providers will participate in:
- Welsh Government marketing activities and national campaigns;
  - Skill competitions such as [World Skills](#). These competitions provide apprentices with additional experiences and challenges that will serve them well in their careers. Additionally they provide opportunities to demonstrate the strength of Wales's performance in national and international competitions. Further information is available from the Pan Wales Coordinator, Paul Evans ([Paul2.Evans@colegsirgar.ac.uk](mailto:Paul2.Evans@colegsirgar.ac.uk)), or Claire George, Digital Innovation Lead and IT & Enterprise Sector Champion ([cgeorge@bridgend.ac.uk](mailto:cgeorge@bridgend.ac.uk)).
34. Proposals will be considered by a panel against the criteria set out in Annex A. The panel will be chaired by a HEFCW Council member and will include membership from the Welsh Government, Industry Wales and HEFCW officers. The outcomes of the process will be communicated to HEFCW-funded institutions within three weeks of their submission. HEFCW reserves the right to require further information to support the proposals.
35. The funding arrangements are as follows:
- Total funding available is £9.5m for new and continuing apprenticeships delivered in 2021/22;
  - Funding will cover Degree Apprenticeships in the priority areas of Digital, Engineering, and Advanced Manufacturing;
  - The maximum sum that can be allocated for the delivery of the requirements for each apprentice is £27k over the duration of the apprenticeship;
  - Funding will be allocated annually on a pro-rata basis in line with the length of the apprenticeship as indicated by the institution in their submission, e.g. £6,750 a year will be allocated for a 4 year apprenticeship;
  - Payment will be made on the basis of actual recruitment submitted in Monitoring Reports over three reference periods during 2021/22, comparable to HESA reference periods in Data Futures<sup>10</sup>. HEFCW will publish templates in its monitoring circular;

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<sup>10</sup> [www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/student/datafutures/coverage\\_of\\_the\\_record](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/student/datafutures/coverage_of_the_record)



- Funding cannot be claimed for the recognition of prior learning and/or associated costs of this process;
- Funding could be adjusted downwards based on modules not completed, withdrawals or if the total number of credits for the course is less than 360 credits due to recognition of prior learning (RPL). Adjustments of funding for RPL or apprentice withdrawals, will be calculated using HESA end of year monitoring data in November 2022, and recovered in May 2023;
- Funding will not be confirmed until the HEFCW-funded institution submitting the proposal has successfully had their qualifications accepted on to the Digital Degree Apprenticeship (Wales) Framework, and the Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeship (Wales) Framework
- Proposals for funding on each framework will be treated separately, and funding confirmed when qualifications have successfully been accepted onto either framework.

### **Continuing Apprentices**

36. HEFCW-funded institutions are invited to submit expected numbers of continuing apprentices from the three year pilot programme (2018/19 to 2020/21), to 2021/22. This is to ensure that apprentice numbers during 2021/22 are planned accurately within available funding. Please see **Annex C**.

### **Quality Assurance**

37. It is imperative that apprenticeships in Wales are of a high quality and comply with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) [Characteristics Statement, Higher Education in Apprenticeships](#). Only providers funded by HEFCW can be funded for the delivery of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales.
38. In line with HEFCW's statutory duties for quality, all HEFCW-funded institutions are required to commission an external quality assurance review of their higher education at least every 6 years. This review will provide assurances to HEFCW that providers responsible for the delivery of Degree Apprenticeships have the appropriate systems and processes in place to do so. The external quality assurance review will also provide assurances that the academic standards of the qualifications awarded as part of a Degree Apprenticeship are being maintained in line with European Standards and Guidelines. This process will also provide further assurances that university qualifications included on higher-level apprenticeship frameworks are being maintained within European Standards and Guidelines. HEFCW-funded institutions have chosen to do this through the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

39. HEFCW will only fund the delivery of Degree Apprenticeships that meet the requirements of Degree Apprenticeship frameworks in Wales. Frameworks will have been developed with employers and qualifications included on those frameworks will have gone through a process to ensure that they meet the requirements of an apprenticeship framework and the needs of employers.
40. HEFCW has commissioned the QAA to undertake a developmental review of Degree Apprenticeship provision in Wales. It is designed to provide information about the effectiveness of the arrangements to design, deliver and enhance provision, and identify good practice and areas for development to improve and enhance the delivery of Degree Apprenticeship provision, as appropriate. In November 2020, the QAA published the outcomes of their consultation on the draft review<sup>11</sup>, and a [handbook](#) outlining the process for the review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales in 2020-21. The final review was reported in June 2021, and the outcomes of this will inform our future approach to Degree Apprenticeship provision. HEFCW-funded institutions are expected to take account of review findings and recommendations for the future delivery and development of Degree Apprenticeships within their institution.

### Timetable

41. Proposals should be submitted by 12 July 2021 to Angela West (tel 029 2085 9738; email [angela.west@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:angela.west@hefcw.ac.uk)). Proposals received after this time may be considered, but this may affect the timing of consolidation of the proposals and there may be insufficient funds available to allocate after the official process.

Task	Date
Call for submissions	23 June 2021
Deadline for proposals	12 July 2021
Panel decision indicative date	w/c 19 July 2021
Allocation of numbers, subject to acceptance of qualifications onto the relevant framework	26 July 2021

### Further information / responses to

42. For further information, contact Angela West (tel 029 2085 9738; email [angela.west@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:angela.west@hefcw.ac.uk)).

### Assessing the impact of our policies

43. We have carried out an impact assessment screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the

<sup>11</sup> [QAA: Degree Apprenticeships Review \(Wales\)](#)

impact of policies on the Welsh language, and Welsh language provision within the HE sector in Wales and potential impacts towards the goals set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including our Well-Being Objectives. Contact [equality@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:equality@hefcw.ac.uk) for more information about impact assessments.