

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Degree apprenticeships in Wales: Proposals for Funding 2023/24 and 2024/25

Date: 20 March 2023
Reference: W23/04HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in Wales
Response by: 17 April 2023
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This circular invites HEFCW-funded institutions to submit proposals for funding for degree apprenticeships in academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25. 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.

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Introduction

1. This circular invites HEFCW-funded institutions to submit proposals for funding for degree apprenticeships in academic years **2023/24 and 2024/25**.
2. The call for bids applies to **new** and **continuing** apprentices on the [Digital Degree Apprenticeship](#) issued on 29 April 2018, and the [Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeship](#) issued on 1 August 2019, funded by Welsh Government through HEFCW.
3. Welsh Government has confirmed indicative budgets for the next two years, with budgets to be finalised in the HEFCW's 2023-24 Remit Letter and in due course for the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER). The indicative total budgets for degree apprenticeships allow for activity at levels similar to that for academic year 2022/23. Proposals for funding for academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25 will be approved in principle, subject to final confirmation from Welsh Government of the overall budget in 2023-24 and then in 2024-25, and subject to the transition to CTER.
4. The proposal template therefore covers activity for new and continuing degree apprenticeships for academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25 on the **existing degree apprenticeship frameworks** of Digital and Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing. However, the numbers of new and continuing apprenticeships will be required to be submitted separately for academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, in line with the annual budget process. Next year, in place of a full proposal, we will require providers to confirm the projected number of new and continuing degree apprenticeships for academic year 2024/25 on existing degree apprenticeship frameworks.
5. HEFCW-funded institutions will be required to submit a full proposal for funding of projected new recruitment numbers in 2024/25 on any **new degree apprenticeship frameworks** should these be introduced.

Background

6. In February 2017, the Welsh Government published its Apprenticeship Skills policy plan, [Aligning the Apprenticeship Model to the Needs of the Welsh Economy](#), which included the introduction of degree apprenticeships. The first cohorts of degree apprenticeships started in 2018/19 against the Digital Framework, with the first degree apprenticeship enrolments against the Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing Framework starting in 2019/20. The Welsh Government has committed to create 125,000 all-age apprenticeships in the current Senedd term¹. On 8 March 2022 the Welsh Government published its [Plan for Employability and Skills](#), which prioritises apprenticeships as an area for action.
7. Degree apprenticeships are an integrated programme of learning and training resulting in an apprenticeship and degree level qualification demonstrating the

¹ [Welsh Government Programme for government, 7 December 2021](#)

relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours that employers in Wales recognise and value. Degree apprenticeships in Wales therefore include an integrated bachelor's degree qualification as part of the requirement of an apprenticeship framework.

8. As of 1 May 2020, the Welsh Government became the [apprenticeship issuing authority](#) for frameworks/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. Welsh Government commissioned an independent evaluation of the degree apprenticeship programme, developed jointly with HEFCW, to focus on its effectiveness, efficiency and impact for employers, apprentices and Higher Education providers. Institutions are required to take account of the evaluation, both the initial [Scoping Report](#), published in October 2021, and the [final report](#), published in February 2023.

Degree Apprenticeships 2023/24 and 2024/25

11. The indicative budgets to fund degree apprenticeships allow for activity at similar levels to that for academic year 2022/23. The budget is to cover apprenticeships continuing from previous academic years and new apprenticeships starting in the respective academic years. The final budget is subject to confirmation of the overall budget from Welsh Government, anticipated in HEFCW's Remit Letter 2023-24 and in due course for CTER. Proposals for funding for AYs 2023/24 and 2024/25 will be approved in principle, subject to final confirmation from Welsh Government of the overall budget in 2023/24 and then in 2024/25, and subject to the transition to CTER.
12. 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. A summary of key points received in response to the consultation can be found in our circular [W19/03HE](#). The priorities and methodology by which funding is allocated identified in circular W19/03HE will

also apply to proposals for 2023/24 and 2024/25, should demand exceed available funding for these academic years.

Priorities for degree apprenticeships in 2023/24 and 2024/25

13. Priorities are that:

- HEFCW-funded institutions comply with relevant legislation and regulatory documents published by Welsh Government;
- There is strategic collaboration across education sectors in Wales to strengthen progression pathways that best meet the needs of employers and individuals, and avoid nugatory competition. HEFCW-funded institutions must include evidence of this within their submission;
- Individuals from groups under-represented in HE, apprenticeships 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 2050²;
- Degree apprenticeships comply with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) [Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement](#), and continue to address recommendations from the [Developmental Review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales](#).

Inclusive Degree Apprenticeships

14. Degree Apprenticeships enable HEFCW to take forward policy objectives articulated in Welsh Government's Apprenticeship Skills policy plan³. The plan committed to address future skills shortages for the economy in Wales, by improving access, equality and equity of opportunity, through the development of alternative routes into degree level provision.
15. 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.
16. Welsh Government also published an Employer Toolkit, [A More Equal Wales: A practical guide for employers to employing disabled people](#)⁴. 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 that this is disseminated to employers who are interested in recruiting a degree apprentice.

² [Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers](#)

³ [Apprenticeship policy plan \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁴ [Business Wales Skills Gateway: Disabled People's Employment](#)

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 programmes. In March 2021, Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol shared its Welsh-medium Action Plan 2050⁵ with HEI degree apprenticeship leads. The plan developed by Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol in collaboration with Welsh Government, 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. To ensure its effectiveness, institutions should address the Welsh-medium Action Plan as a whole, in their approach to Welsh language provision:
 - Learner Experience
 - Staffing Capacity
 - Provision
 - Resources
 - Assessment and Qualifications
 - Employer Engagement
19. HEFCW-funded institutions are required to share guidance documents referenced in this circular and HEFCW's expectations for degree apprenticeships with their delivery partners.

Call for proposals

20. The call for proposals provides 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.
21. Proposals for funding must clearly articulate lessons learned from managing and delivering the degree apprenticeship programme since 2018, and how this is taken into account in future delivery of degree apprenticeships within institutions.
22. HEFCW-funded institutions are expected to set out their approach to collaboration with delivery partners, so that provision across Wales is developed on a strategic basis. This is to maximise the transferability and recognition of apprenticeship outcomes for apprentices and meet employer needs, and facilitate progression pathways.

⁵ [Towards Cymraeg 2050](#)

23. Higher Education delivery partners and/or employers can be included in bids as a 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.
24. 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.
25. 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.
26. HEFCW-funded institutions are invited to submit proposals for the funding of degree apprenticeships by 17 April 2023. 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**.
27. Proposals for **new** apprentice numbers must be based on realistic projected recruitment numbers in academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25, to ensure that the available budget is fully utilised. The total number of new apprenticeships should be recorded using **Annex B**. The projected number of apprenticeships **continuing** from previous years into academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25 should be recorded at **Annex C**. HEFCW-funded institutions must be in a position to deliver, should proposals be accepted.
28. Institutions will be required to confirm projected recruitment numbers for new and continuing apprentices on existing frameworks in AY 2024/25, in a second call for proposals at a later stage. HEFCW-funded institutions will be required to submit a full proposal for funding of projected new recruitment numbers in 2024/25 on any new degree apprenticeship frameworks.
29. Submission of a proposal will be taken as agreement that the provision **will meet the following requirements** should numbers be allocated:
 - Qualifications have been successfully accepted onto the digital and/or the engineering and advanced manufacturing frameworks;
 - 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 will be provided with access to Welsh Government's Employer Toolkit, A More Equal Wales⁶;
 - An apprenticeship agreement⁷ 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 are supported in the workplace with at least 20%⁸ off-the-job learning or six hours of off-the-job training per week for a full-time equivalent (an individual working 30 hours or more) and/or meet notional guided hours regarding the credit undertaken;
 - 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 may 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 apprenticeship programme marketing and communications;
 - Student and learner protection measures⁹ as set out by HEFCW for regulated institutions will be applied in the standard way to the treatment of apprentices;
 - An apprentice can exit the qualification with accreditation or certification of learning achieved. This will not constitute successful achievement of a full apprenticeship.
30. 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.
31. 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 four weeks of their submission. HEFCW reserves the right to require further information to support the proposals.

⁶ [Business Wales: An Employers Guide to Employing Disabled People](#)

⁷ [Welsh Government: Apprenticeship Learning Agreement](#)

⁸ [QAA Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement](#)

⁹ [HEFCW: Students webpage](#)

32. 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 Claire George, Digital Innovation Lead and IT & Enterprise Sector Champion (cgeorge@bridgend.ac.uk).

Funding Arrangements

33. The funding arrangements are as follows:

- The indicative budgets to fund continuing and new degree apprenticeships allow for activity at similar levels to academic year 2022/23;
- The final budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25 is subject to confirmation of HEFCW’s overall budget from Welsh Government, and in due course for CTER;
- Funding will cover degree apprenticeships in the areas of Digital, Engineering, and Advanced Manufacturing, and any new frameworks in 2024/25, should they be introduced;
- The maximum sum that can be allocated for the delivery of the requirements for each apprentice is £27k;
- Funding will be allocated on the basis of the number of expected new apprenticeships starting in 2023/24 and 2024/25 (submitted using the template at **Annex B**) and an estimate of the number of continuing apprenticeships for each academic year (using the template at **Annex C**);
- Funding for AY 2024/25 will be allocated on the basis of the draft number of projected new apprenticeships starting in 2024/25 and an estimate of the numbers continuing, with final numbers submitted later this year;
- HEFCW will publish templates for the Monitoring Report in its monitoring circular. HEFCW-funded institutions should use the templates to report the actual number of new and continuing apprenticeships recruited during each monitoring period:

2023/24	Monitoring period	Submission deadline	Expected payment date
One:	01/08/2023 - 15/11/2023	12/12/2023	January 2024
Two:	16/11/2023 - 31/03/2024	21/04/2024	May 2024
Three:	01/04/2024 - 31/07/2024	20/08/2024	September 2024

2024/25	Monitoring period	Submission deadline	Expected payment date
One:	01/08/2024 - 15/11/2025	12/12/2024	January 2025
Two:	16/11/2024 - 31/03/2025	21/04/2025	May 2025
Three:	01/04/2025 - 31/07/2025	20/08/2025	September 2025

- Payment will be made on receipt of satisfactory Monitoring Reports for new and continuing apprenticeships.

New apprenticeships 2022/23 onwards

- HEFCW-funded institutions are invited to submit expected numbers of new apprenticeships starting in academic year 2023/24, with an estimate of new starts for 2024/25, with firmer projected numbers for 2024/25 starts later this year (template at **Annex B**);
- Funding will not be allocated 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;
- Funding of apprentices that started from 2022/23 onwards will be different to the funding method applied to apprentices starting in 2018/19 to 2021/22. Previously funding was calculated on an enrolment basis, whereas for 2022/23 starters onwards, funding will be calculated based on the associated assumed completed credit values that the apprenticeship students study during the academic year. This is to align with HEFCW's main teaching funding methodology;
- Payment will be made against numbers submitted in Monitoring Reports over three monitoring periods during 2023/24 and 2024/25, on the basis of the number of apprenticeships and associated assumed completed credit values associated with modules taken in that year;
- The amount of funding per credit value has been calculated using a total of £27,000 for a typical 360 credit value course, e.g. £75 per credit value. Therefore a student expected to be studying 120 credits each year on a 3 year course will attract £9,000 funding per year;
- Funding cannot be claimed for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning and/or associated costs of this process;
- Funding will be calculated based on the number of assumed completed credit values submitted via the Monitoring Reports. However 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 will be calculated at the end of the academic year using HESA end of year monitoring data for 2023/24 and 2024/25, which will be verified by providers as part of the [HESA IRIS process](#) and recovered in May 2025 and May 2026 respectively;
- Further guidance on how to return credit value data will be included in the Monitoring Report requests, however it will follow general guidance and extraction criteria for credit values outlined in the Higher Education Student Early Statistics survey ([HESES](#)) as is currently submitted to HESA. Up to date guidance documents for both HESES and End of Year Monitoring (EYM) are made available on our [statistics webpage](#);

Apprenticeships continuing from 2018/19 – 2021/22

- HEFCW-funded institutions are invited to submit expected numbers of apprentices which started in the academic years 2018/19 – 2021/22 and are continuing into 2023/24 (and then into 2024/25 next year), using the template at **Annex C**. This is to ensure that apprentice numbers are planned accurately within available funding;
- Funding of apprenticeships which started between 2018/19 and 2021/22 and are continuing into 2023/24 and 2024/25 will be allocated annually on a pro-rata basis in line with the length of the apprenticeship as indicated by the institution in their proposal, e.g. £6,750 a year will be allocated for a 4 year apprenticeship;
- Payment will be made against actual apprenticeship numbers submitted in Monitoring Reports over three monitoring periods during 2023/24 and 2024/25, on the basis of the number and duration of apprenticeships;
- Funding cannot be claimed for the recognition and accreditation 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 for 2023/24 and 2024/25, which will be verified by providers as part of the [HESA IRIS process](#), and recovered in May 2025 and May 2026 respectively.

Quality Assurance

34. The QAA has published guidance on apprenticeships, including a [Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement](#) (June 2022). Those wishing to offer degree apprenticeships are expected to take account of QAA guidance in their degree apprenticeship programmes.
35. In line with HEFCW's statutory duties for quality, all HEFCW-funded institutions are normally required to undertake an external quality assurance review of their higher education at least every 5 years (from 2023/24). These reviews are carried out by the QAA, and provide assurances to HEFCW that providers responsible for the delivery of degree apprenticeships have the appropriate systems and processes in place. The external quality assurance review also provides 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 for Higher Education](#).
36. 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.

37. HEFCW commissioned the QAA to undertake a developmental review of degree apprenticeship provision in Wales. It was 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. The [Overview Report](#) was published in October 2021, and institutions are expected to take account of review findings and recommendations in their individual institution’s report for the delivery and development of degree apprenticeships.

Timetable

38. Proposals should be submitted by 17 April 2023 to Angela West (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
Deadline for proposals	17 April 2023
Panel decision indicative date	w/c 8 May 2023
Allocation of budget, subject to acceptance of qualifications onto the relevant framework	w/c 22 May 2023

Further information / responses to

39. For further information, contact Angela West (029 2085 9738; angela.west@hefcw.ac.uk).

Assessing the impact of our policies

40. We have carried out an impact assessment screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality. We also considered the 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 for more information about impact assessments.