

Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition Evaluation

**Equality of Opportunity Interim Findings
Report
January 2025**



Contents

1	Background	4
1.1	Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition	4
1.2	Equality of opportunity	4
1.3	Equality of Opportunity Interim Findings Report	5
2	DAFC evaluation	5
2.1	Evaluation overview	5
2.2	Data collection and analysis to date	6
3	Theory of Change – spotlight on equality of opportunity	6
4	Delivery of activities aimed at equality of opportunity	7
4.1	Activities and outputs to date	7
4.2	What worked well to increase equality of opportunity?	13
4.3	What challenges were faced in increasing equality of opportunity?	14
5	Early outcomes	15
5.1	Increasing opportunities for apprentices from underrepresented groups	15
5.2	Demand from underrepresented groups	16
6	Interim lessons learned	19
7	Future reports	19

1 Background

1.1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition

The Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition (DAFC), administered by the Office for Students (OfS), is a strategic initiative aimed at expanding and enhancing the provision of Level 6 degree apprenticeships across England. The DAFC will make £40 million funding available to higher education providers over three competitive waves. The funding will support initiatives aimed at increasing the number of degree apprenticeship standards delivered. The DAFC has a particular focus on boosting enrolment on Level 6 degree apprenticeships from groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education settings. This initiative aligns with the OfS's broader strategic objectives of promoting educational choice, enhancing graduate outcomes, and ensuring that all prospective students, regardless of their background, have equal access to the opportunities provided by higher education institutions.

1.2 Equality of opportunity

Equality of opportunity in the context of DAFC refers to a key aim of the initiative to create equitable access to Level 6 degree apprenticeships from historically underrepresented groups. These groups include:

- students from ethnic minority backgrounds
- students under 21 years old
- students eligible for free school meals
- students with long-term health conditions or disabilities
- students from low socio-economic backgrounds
- students from areas with low higher education participation
- mature students, and
- care leavers.

This commitment involves a concerted effort to address and reduce disparities that arise from socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, and other demographic factors that have traditionally limited access to higher education. The DAFC aims to cultivate an inclusive environment within higher education where all apprentices¹ are given the chance to thrive and take full advantage of the opportunities that degree apprenticeships offer. By focusing on addressing these disparities, the DAFC seeks to ensure that

¹ The terms 'apprentice' and 'student' are both used throughout this report. The term 'apprentice' is consistently used to refer to those who are enrolled, or are considering enrolling, onto a Level 6 degree apprenticeship course. 'Student' is used as a more general term for those who are currently in education and/or in the process of considering options for higher education, e.g. a 'prospective student' may be considering a level 6 degree apprenticeship course amongst other higher education options.

degree apprenticeships become an inclusive and accessible pathway for all individuals, thereby fostering a diverse and skilled workforce that reflects the society it serves.

1.3 Equality of Opportunity Interim Findings Report

This report shares interim findings, as of October 2024, on Wave 1 of DAFC delivery and an early indication of progress towards the intended outcomes of funded activities that aimed to increase equality of opportunity. The findings are based on interim analysis of data collected during ongoing fieldwork with higher education providers who received Wave 1 DAFC funding. The next interim and final reports, scheduled to be delivered in July 2025 and August 2026 respectively, will provide findings based on complete waves of fieldwork with funded providers which will be triangulated with data collected from employers and apprentices involved in DAFC funded activities. The findings in this report should therefore be treated as indicative only and subject to revision once all fieldwork has been fully completed.

2 DAFC evaluation

2.1 Evaluation overview

The evaluation of the DAFC is structured around three core research objectives:

1. **Process Evaluation:** To determine whether providers in receipt of funding effectively delivered the activities outlined in their bids. This aspect focuses on assessing the implementation processes and identifying any challenges or facilitators in the delivery of DAFC-funded projects.
2. **Impact Evaluation:** To understand the extent to which the DAFC is achieving its strategic aims, as specified in the funding competition's guidelines. This involves evaluating the outcomes and early impacts of the funded activities and identifying the factors that have contributed to or hindered their success.
3. **Value for Money Assessment:** To assess the overall value of the programme, evaluating whether the investment provided is delivering the anticipated benefits efficiently and effectively.

The evaluation is based on a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive assessment of the DAFC. This includes:

- **Quantitative data collection:** Surveys administered to funded providers and employers to capture feedback on the activities delivered, perceived outcomes and mechanisms of change.
- **Qualitative data collection:** In-depth interviews with providers, employers, and apprentices to develop insights into the implementation challenges and successes, as well as qualitative evidence of the programme's impact on engaging employers, attracting apprentices and increasing opportunities for underrepresented groups.
- **Secondary data analysis:** This involves the analysis of combined Student and Individual Learner Record data to assess changes in learner demographics and outcomes over time, as well as thematic analysis of all funding applications and provider completed monitoring information.

- **Case study research:** Detailed case studies of selected providers for a nuanced understanding of the context-specific successes and challenges in delivering DAFC-funded activities.
- **Theory-based contribution analysis:** An analytical approach that explores the causal mechanisms of change and to assess the contribution of DAFC-funded activities on observed outcomes and the strength of the contribution.

The evaluation is being conducted between March 2024 and August 2026.

2.2 Data collection and analysis to date

Data collection and analysis for the DAFC evaluation is being conducted in three stages aligned to the three funding waves. Stage 1 involves data collection and analysis of Wave 1 funded activities; Stage 2 involves data collection and analysis of Waves 2 and 3 funded activities; and Stage 3 is focused on programme-level contribution analysis.

This thematic report has been written during Stage 1 and is a snapshot of findings, as of October 2024, from the following sources:

- analysis of 83 funding applications from across Waves 1 and 2
- 36 responses to the Stage 1 provider survey which was distributed as an online survey to all 51 Wave 1 DAFC providers
- five interviews with Wave 1 providers, including providers who identified through their funding applications or monitoring returns that their activities included a focus on increasing equality of opportunity
- analysis of Wave 1 final monitoring returns and Wave 2 interim monitoring returns.

The analysis to date has focused on the activities, delivery enablers and barriers, and outcomes specifically related to equality of opportunity. Future reports will triangulate data collected from higher education providers with the data collected from employers and apprentices to provide evaluative conclusions against the research objectives. This report presents survey findings with low base sizes and should be interpreted with caution.

3 Theory of Change – spotlight on equality of opportunity

A core component of the DAFC is the long-term aim of increasing the number of Level 6 degree apprenticeship starts among underrepresented groups. This is expected to be achieved through three main strands of activities: curriculum design and development, apprentice attraction and support, and employer engagement.

Through developing new Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes and revising existing ones, higher education providers seek to offer more relevant and accessible learning opportunities that align with the needs of diverse apprentice populations. This involves integrating inclusive teaching practices and ensuring that the curriculum reflects industry demands, which can attract a broader range of apprentices. Additionally, the development of specialised modules for in-demand skills and flexible learning options

(such as online courses) is expected to make degree apprenticeships more appealing to underrepresented groups, enhancing their engagement and enrolment.

Focused outreach and recruitment activities are central to increasing awareness and demand among prospective apprentices from underrepresented backgrounds. By implementing targeted marketing campaigns, hosting informational events, and providing tailored support services such as application assistance and enrolment guidance, institutions seek to significantly boost the interest and participation of these groups. These activities are designed to address specific barriers to entry, such as lack of awareness or perceived accessibility issues.

The role of employer engagement is critical in expanding apprenticeship opportunities and ensuring that they are accessible to underrepresented groups. Employers are responsible for recruiting apprentices and much of the preparatory work to market vacancies to prospective apprentices and therefore have a crucial role in enhancing equality of opportunity and reaching apprentices from underrepresented groups. Activities such as conducting local skills audits, developing employer networks, and co-creating workforce plans are intended to align educational offerings with labour market needs and to encourage employers to adopt inclusive recruitment practices. These practices involve advising employers on how to create job descriptions that are appealing and accessible to a diverse range of candidates, ensuring recruitment panels are diverse, and implementing bias-free recruitment processes. Furthermore, the development of employer toolkits that provide guidance on inclusive hiring and retention strategies is crucial. By fostering strong partnerships between providers and employers, the DAFC aims to increase the availability of degree apprenticeship opportunities and ensure that they are seen as viable and attractive options for a diverse range of apprentices.

4 Delivery of activities aimed at equality of opportunity

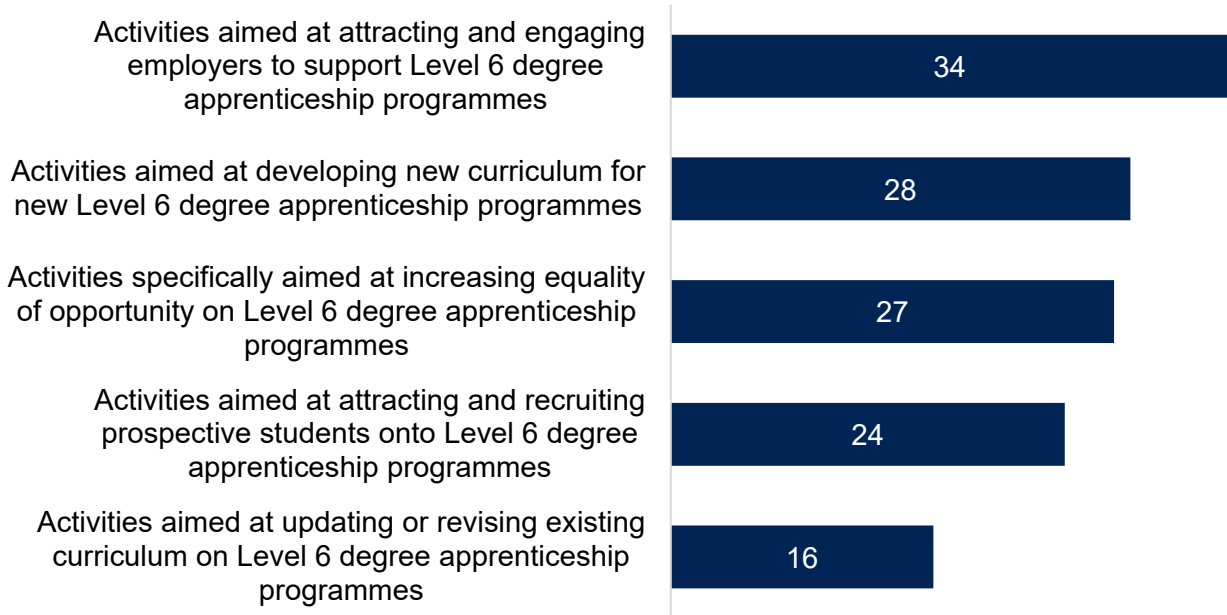
4.1 Activities and outputs to date

As outlined in the DAFC guidance issued by the OfS², Wave 1 activities were primarily focused on the rapid expansion of Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision among providers already engaged in Level 6 degree apprenticeship delivery. While Wave 1 did not specifically require activities aimed at increasing equality of opportunity (EoO), this was a more pronounced focus in Waves 2 and 3, where providers were encouraged to include initiatives targeting groups that are currently underrepresented on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes.

Figure 1 shows the number of providers delivering categories of activities through the Wave 1 DAFC. Overall, 27 providers (out of 36 survey respondents) delivered activities specifically aimed at increasing EoO on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes, which was the third most prevalent category.

² [Degree apprenticeships funding competition - Guidance for providers.](#)

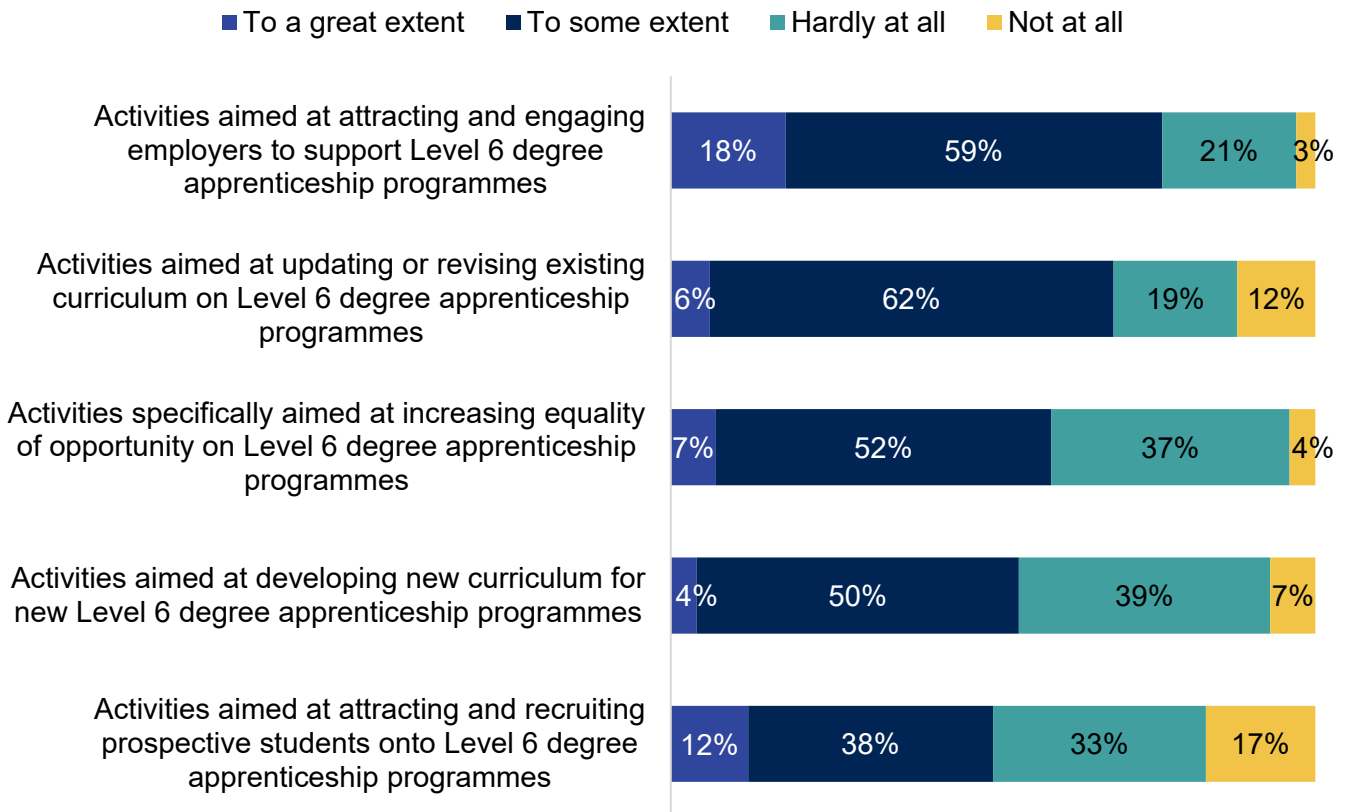
Figure 1: Did you receive funding to deliver any of the following activities through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition? Select all that apply.



Base: All providers (36).

As shown in Figure 2, of the providers delivering EoO initiatives, nearly six in ten (59%) reported that they were already delivering these activities to a great or some extent prior to receiving Wave 1 DAFC funding. Two fifths (41%) reported that they were hardly or not at all delivering these activities prior to receiving funding through the Wave 1 DAFC. This suggests that DAFC Wave 1 has led to an enhancement of existing activities as well as new activities aimed at increasing EoO. This is higher than for activities aimed at revising or updating curriculum on existing programmes and activities aimed to attracting employers which were less likely to be new initiatives since receiving the Wave 1 funding.

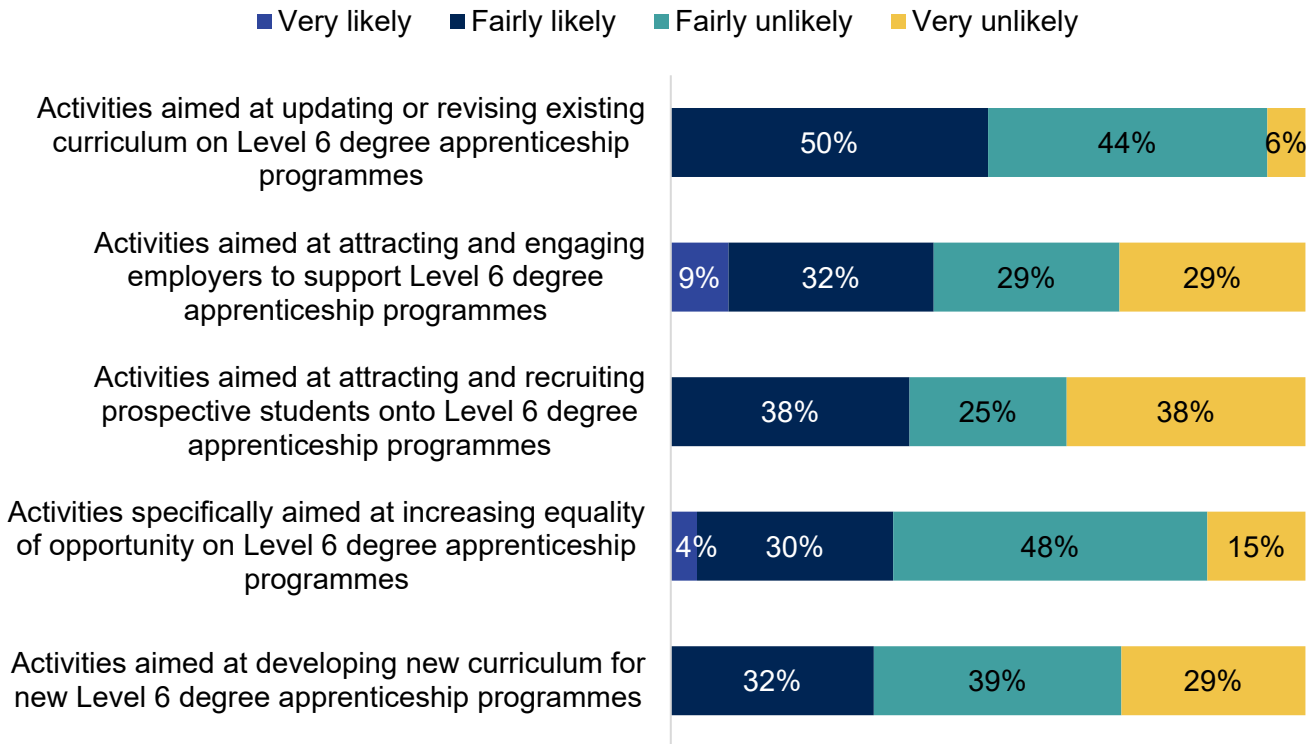
Figure 2: To what extent were you already delivering these activities before receiving funding through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition?



Base: Providers delivering activities aimed at attracting and engaging employers (34), Providers delivering activities aimed at updating or revising existing curriculum (16), Providers delivering activities aimed at increasing equality of opportunity (27), Providers delivering activities aimed at developing new curriculum (28), Providers delivering activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective apprentices (24).

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 3, nearly two thirds (63%) of providers who delivered activities aimed at increasing EoO said they would have been unlikely to have delivered these activities without receiving any funding. This is the second only to activities aimed at developing new curriculum for new Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes, suggesting that the funding was an effective catalyst for providers to deliver these types of activities.

Figure 3: How likely would you have been to deliver the activities that you did without receiving any funding through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition?



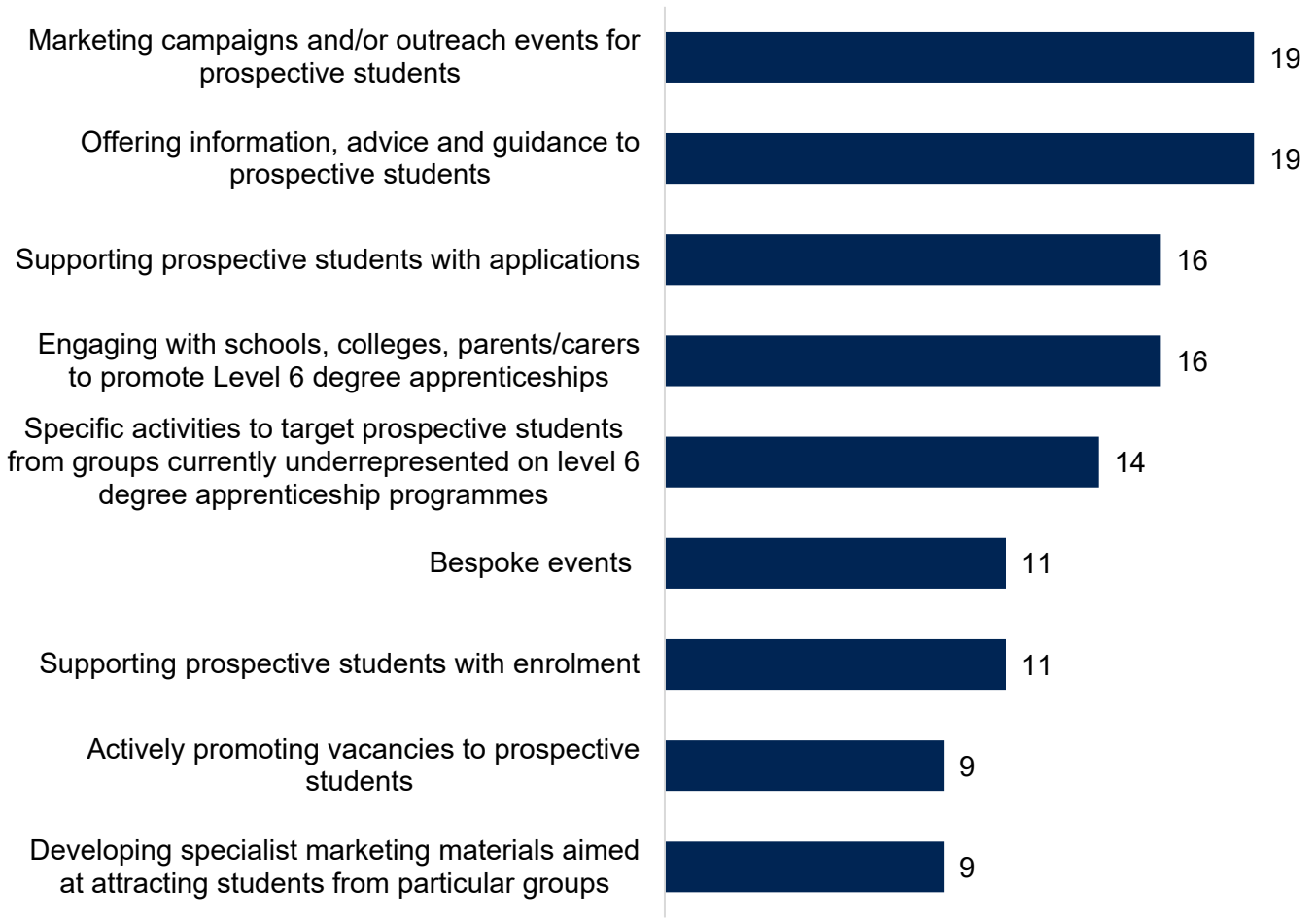
Base: All providers (36).

Overall, according to providers, Wave 1 DAFC funding has stimulated activities aimed at increasing EoO on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes which were not already being delivered and which were not likely to have been delivered without the funding. The funding appears to have had a greater impact on stimulating new and additional activity in this category than other categories of funded activities.

4.1.1 Targeted activities aimed at apprentices from underrepresented groups

For providers who had received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective Level 6 degree apprentices, more than half (14 providers) had delivered activities specifically targeting prospective apprentices from groups currently underrepresented on this type of provision. This was the fifth most prevalent activity in this category. Nearly four in ten (nine providers) had developed specialist marketing materials aimed at attracting apprentices from particular groups (e.g. multilingual resources) which was the least prevalent activity in this category.

Figure 4: Did you use Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding to deliver any of the following activities to attract prospective students onto Level 6 degree apprenticeships? Select all that apply.

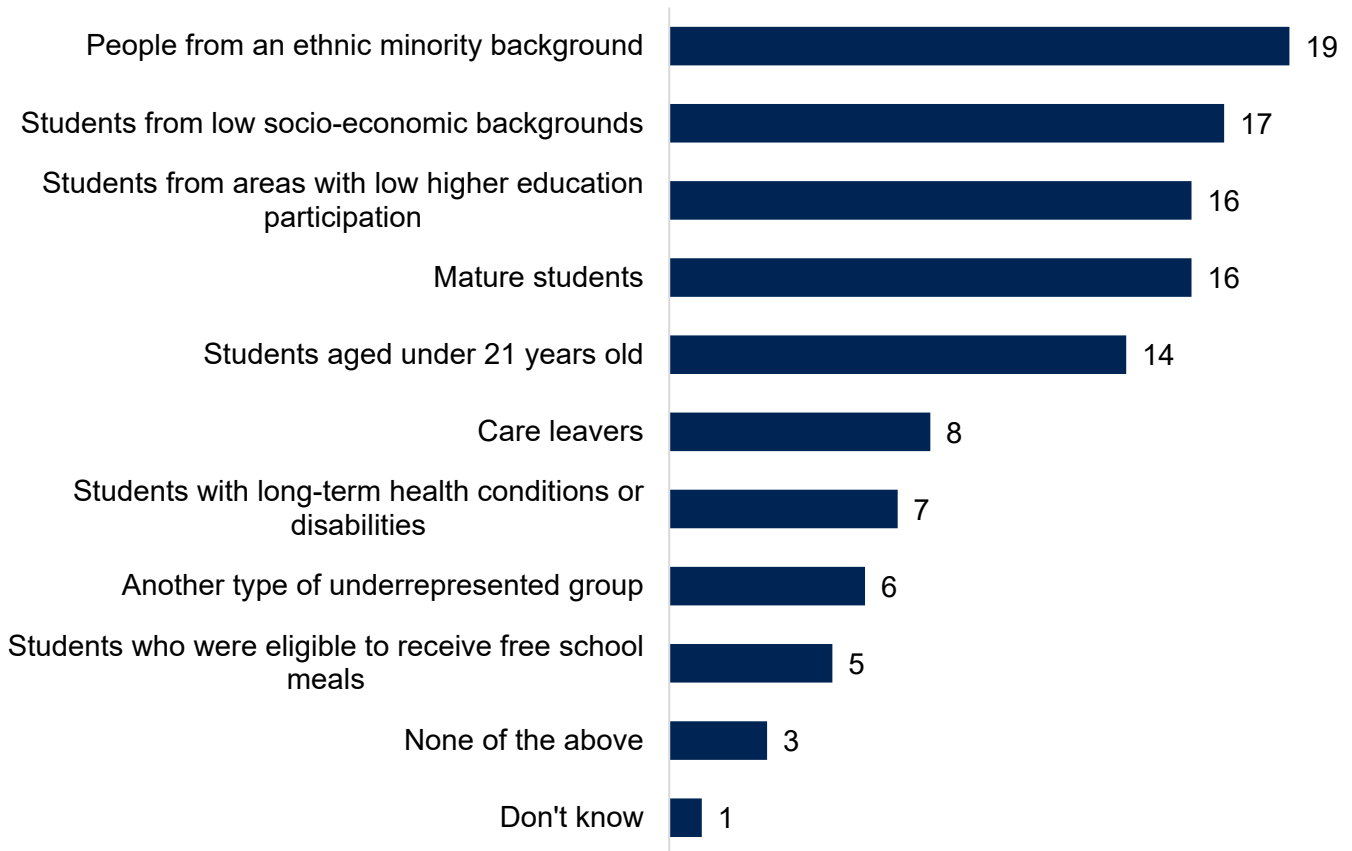


Base: Providers who received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective apprentices onto Level 6 degree apprenticeship (24)

Providers who used the Wave 1 DAFC funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective apprentices and/or activities aimed at increasing EoO were asked which groups they were specifically targeting in their activities. All underrepresented groups, as identified through the OfS funding guidance³, were targeted through the delivery of activities to some extent. The groups who were targeted the most were students from an ethnic minority background (19 providers), students from low socio-economic backgrounds (17 providers) and students from areas with low higher education participation (16 providers). Other types of underrepresented groups were also reported by providers in the open-ended code, including refugees, neurodivergent students and students entering through a foundation degree. Students who were eligible to receive free school meals (five providers), students with long-term health conditions or disabilities (seven providers) and care leavers (eight providers) were less likely to be targeted groups during delivery of activities.

³ [Degree apprenticeships funding competition - Guidance for providers \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk).

Figure 5: Thinking about the activities supported through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition, did you target any of the following groups when delivering student attraction activities? Select all that apply.



Base: Providers who received funding to deliver activities aimed at attracting and recruiting prospective students onto Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes and/or activities aimed at increasing equality of opportunity on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes (31).

Interviews with providers identified a diverse range of activities aimed at attracting and recruiting apprentices from underrepresented groups, including the following.

4.1.2 Inclusive and accessible teaching and learning

Over two thirds (69%) of providers who used the Wave 1 DAFC funding to improve existing curriculum or develop new curriculum for Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes specifically designed teaching and learning content that can be delivered flexibly. Around one in five (17%) invested in technologies for accessible and flexible learning.

One provider who was interviewed actively worked to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for neurodiverse learners, which they believed contributed to more than half of all apprentices on their Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision being neurodiverse. The funding allowed them to further enhance this engagement of neurodiverse students through conducting outreach within schools, hosting open days and providing awareness training for apprenticeship teaching staff.

4.1.3 Supporting employers' recruitment practices

The majority (62%) of providers who used Wave 1 DAFC funding to attract and engage employers to support Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes specifically advised and supported employers with targeted recruitment of apprentices from underrepresented groups.

Interviewed providers commented that employer recruitment practices could sometimes create barriers for underrepresented groups. Unconscious biases, a lack of diversity within hiring panels, and overly stringent entry requirements could disadvantage certain applicants. Providers emphasised the need to work with employers to review their recruitment processes and selection criteria to ensure fairness and inclusivity.

4.2 What worked well to increase equality of opportunity?

4.2.1 Designated roles

Providers commented on the benefits of recruiting new staff, or seconding existing staff, to designated roles focused on marketing and/or outreach. One provider allocated DAFC funding to recruit a marketing manager for Level 6 degree apprenticeships who worked across social media, events and partnerships to coordinate and increase the marketing of apprenticeships, including to underrepresented groups. Another recruited a designated outreach officer who conducted leaflet dropping in areas of high deprivation, attended mosques to reach individuals from the Muslim community, and built relationships with local schools and community organisations to identify groups and opportunities for continued targeted outreach. Providers commented on the benefits of having such designated roles to ensure consistent, focused efforts, and the building of knowledge and relationships that would be more difficult if this responsibility was dispersed across multiple individuals or roles.

4.2.2 Targeted outreach

Providers who delivered targeted outreach activities felt that they had been particularly successful in attracting prospective apprentices from currently underrepresented groups. Some providers' outreach activities focused on schools within the local community, including schools in areas with high deprivation rates or high numbers of ethnic minority residents. Some conducted workshops in schools that centred around aspiration raising and offered advice and guidance on completing degree apprenticeship applications. They also developed resources for schools and hosted webinars to educate parents and carers about degree apprenticeships and how school staff and family members can support applicants, such as delivering mock interviews. Providers felt that outreach was particularly necessary to reach students from underrepresented groups and worked well as a marketing and promotional tool alongside other activities, such as social media posts and hosting events.

4.2.3 Challenging ideas and assumptions

Providers commented on the benefits of activities that specifically focused on challenging misconceptions about degree-level apprenticeships and higher education more generally. Providers mentioned that many prospective students, parents, and even educators perceived apprenticeships to be a less desirable option compared to traditional university degrees. Providers reported that this belief developed from a lack of awareness about potential career paths and earning potential associated with degree apprenticeships and the attractive option of zero tuition fees. Providers felt that awareness-raising activities were required with these groups to develop understanding of the application process, the potential benefits of degree apprenticeships, and the potential career pathways they offer.

Providers discussed peer networks and role models as effective ways of challenging ideas and assumptions. One provider involved current and former apprentices in outreach events and open days, enabling them to share their experiences to demonstrate the potential benefits of degree apprenticeships. This provider commented that hearing from peers about their experiences and the benefits of degree apprenticeships proved highly influential, especially for prospective students who might not have considered this pathway, i.e. those from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Another provider felt that ‘Insight days’ or ‘Taster sessions’ were effective strategies at challenging misconceptions about specific jobs or industries. They reported that particular attributes and features of professions could put some students off, such as police uniforms being offputting to girls, and especially girls who wore headscarves. They delivered taster sessions, aimed at year 10 students, focused on Level 6 degree apprenticeships within the emergency services, including the police force. They felt this was particularly effective at challenging preconceived notions about what was ‘for them’ and therefore opened possibilities.

4.2.4 Working with local community groups and venues

Providers commented on the benefits of working with specific community organisations whose work focused on supporting individuals from the underrepresented groups they were targeting. Providers worked with national and local voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations and networks, such as the Black Apprenticeship Network to expand their reach and connect with students from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds and the Quest for Economic Development in West Yorkshire which focuses on supporting young people from Southeast Asian backgrounds.

4.3 What challenges were faced in increasing equality of opportunity?

4.3.1 Timescales and delivery period

Providers identified the length of time available to deliver funded activities as a key challenge, including those aimed at increasing EoO. Providers received notification of the funding in December 2023 which resulted in a pause in project activity for a few weeks over the Christmas period. Some providers felt that the delay from the Christmas break may have impacted the ability of some to fully utilise the funding within the period and to influence starts in the 2024/25 academic year. Providers also felt that the seven-month funding period was not long enough to recruit new staff into designated roles.

4.3.2 Providers’ internal processes

Provider governance processes, such as approvals, validation panels, and quality assurance boards, were said by some providers to have slowed down and in some cases postponed the implementation of new apprenticeship programmes within the 2024/25 academic year. This was perceived to have impacted the number of additional starts in the 2024/25 academic year, including among underrepresented groups.

4.3.3 Staffing and recruitment

The recruitment and onboarding of staff to deliver funded activities presented some challenges. This particularly impacted activities aimed at increasing EoO where designated roles, such as an outreach officer, were identified to deliver these activities. The short timeframe of the funding made it difficult to get staff in place early to deliver, which was compounded by the fact that recruitment can generally be slow in the higher education sector.

4.3.4 External factors

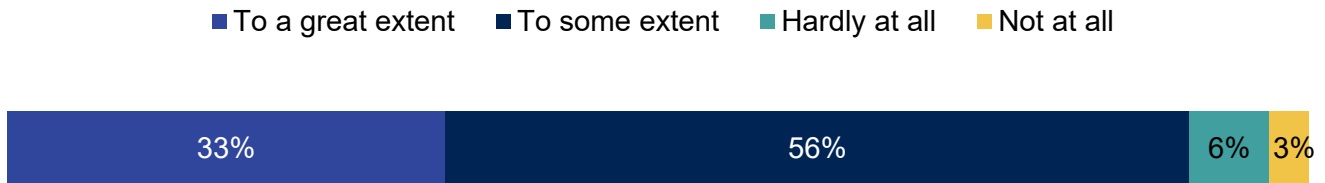
Providers commented on external events which created barriers to them delivering planned activities within the timescales, impacting all activities including those aimed at increasing EoO. Some providers had inspections (e.g. an Education and Skills Funding Agency inspection) during the funding window which meant that staff time and focus was temporarily on other things. One provider also commented on apprenticeship standards reviews creating uncertainty and a potential requirement to wait for these to be completed before conducting the scheduled curriculum development and revision activities.

5 Early outcomes

5.1 Increasing opportunities for apprentices from underrepresented groups

As shown in Figure 6, almost nine out of ten (89%) providers thought that activities delivered through the funding had contributed to a more strategic approach to increasing EoO on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes. Of these, one third (33%) thought it had contributed to a great extent.

Figure 6: To what extent did activities delivered through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition contribute to you and colleagues having a more strategic approach to increase EoO on Level 6 degree apprenticeship provision?

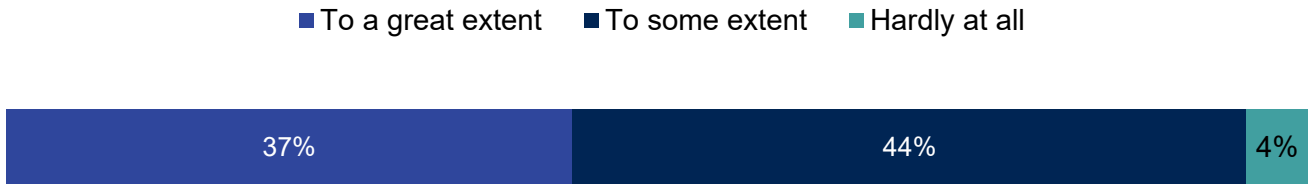


Base: All providers (36).

Evidence from the qualitative interviews identified the recruitment of designated roles focused on marketing and outreach and working with local community organisations as particularly impactful initiatives aimed at increasing EoO.

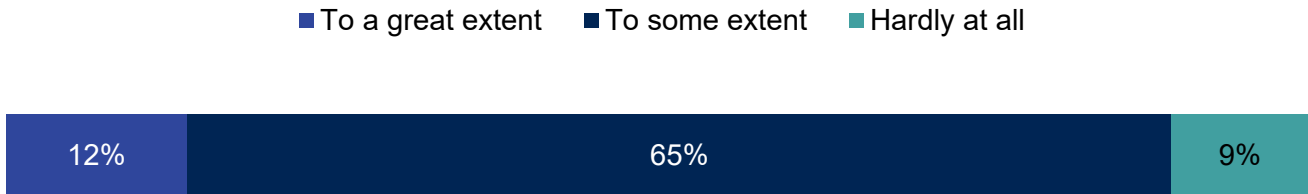
As shown in Figure 7, over eight in ten (81%) providers who delivered activities aimed at increasing EoO thought that activities delivered through the funding had contributed to increased opportunities for apprentices from underrepresented groups. As shown in Figure 8, over three quarters (77%) of providers delivering activities aimed at engaging employers thought that Wave 1 DAFC funding had enabled them to improve the inclusivity of employers’ recruitment practices to reach degree apprentices from diverse backgrounds.

Figure 7: To what extent did activities delivered through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition contribute to increasing opportunities available to students from groups currently underrepresented on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes?



Base: Providers who delivered activities aimed at increasing EoO on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes (27).

Figure 8: To what extent do you think the funding received through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition has enabled you to improve the inclusivity of employers’ recruitment practices to reach degree apprentices from diverse backgrounds?



Base: Providers who delivered activities aimed at attracting and engaging employers to support Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes (34).

Providers were more likely to report that Wave 1 DAFC activities had contributed to other employer outcomes not relating to EoO, including: increasing the awareness of Level 6 degree apprenticeships among employers (100%), increasing the attractiveness of Level 6 degree apprenticeships to employers (94%) and increasing employers’ confidence in recruiting Level 6 degree apprentices (95%).

5.2 Demand from underrepresented groups

Over two thirds (69%) of providers thought that Wave 1 DAFC funded had enabled them to increase the demand for Level 6 degree apprenticeships from underrepresented groups (Figure 9).

Figure 9: To what extent do you think the funding received through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition has enabled you to increase the demand for Level 6 degree apprenticeship opportunities from prospective students from groups currently underrepresented on these courses?

■ To a great extent ■ To some extent ■ Hardly at all ■ Not applicable ■ Don't know

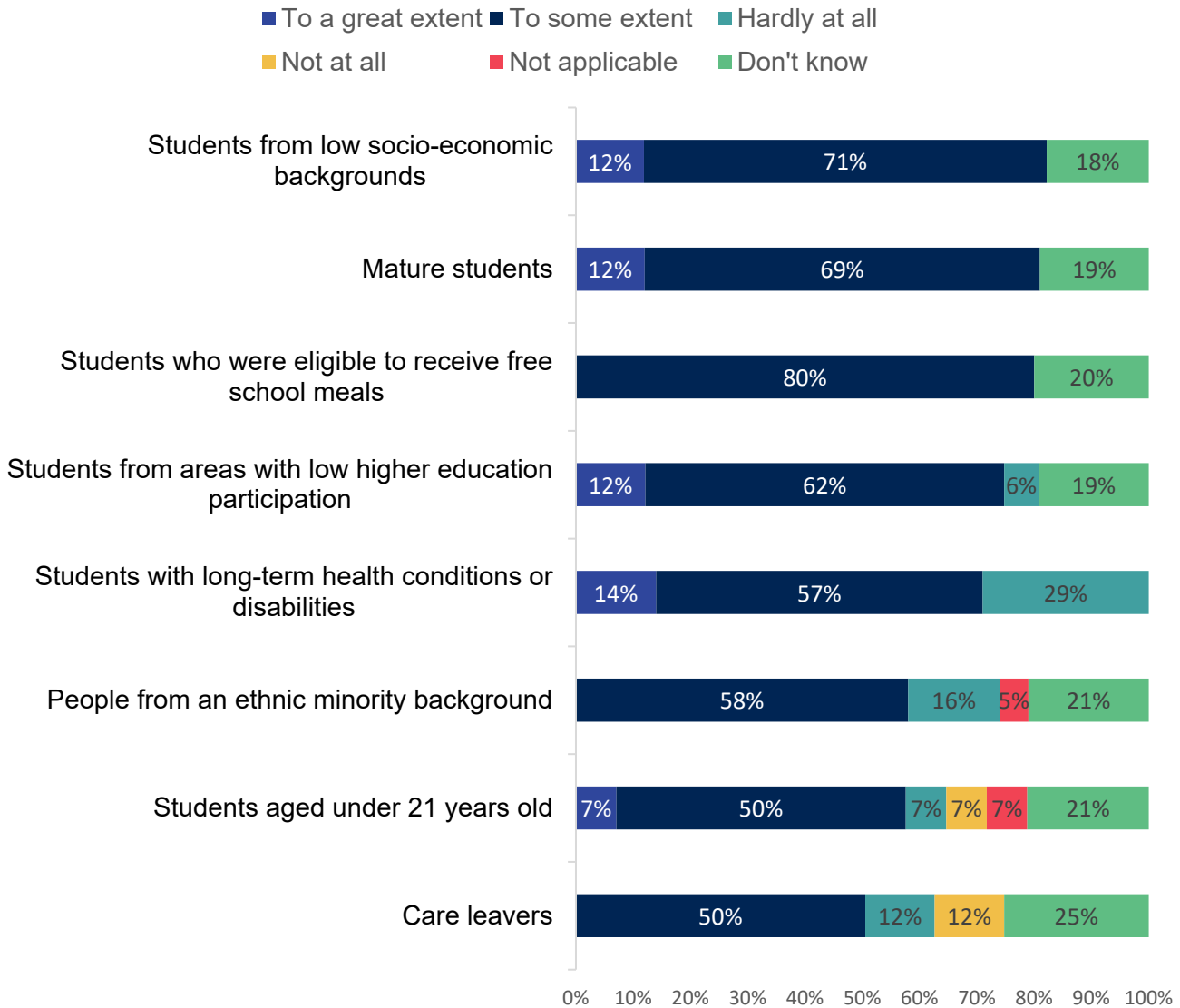


Base: All providers (36).

Whilst this is promising, providers were more likely to report that Wave 1 DAFC funded activities had contributed to other apprentice focused outcomes, including: increasing the awareness of Level 6 degree apprenticeships (88%), increasing the attractiveness of Level 6 degree apprenticeships to prospective apprentices (86%), and increasing the demand for Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes overall (74%). Providers were also more like to select ‘Don’t know’ regarding increasing demand from prospective apprentices from underrepresented groups compared to these other outcomes (3%, 6% and 9% respectively). This suggests that providers are more uncertain about the contribution of Wave 1 DAFC activities to increasing equality of opportunity than increasing general awareness and demand for degree-level apprenticeships.

For providers who had targeted underrepresented groups in their delivery of activities, the extent to which the funding had resulted in receiving more applications from these groups than they otherwise would have was varied. The contribution of DAFC activities to growing applications to a great or some extent was highest for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (83%), mature students (81%) and students who were eligible for free school meals (80%). The contribution of DAFC activities to growing applications to a great or some extent was least for people from an ethnic minority background (58%) and care leavers (50%). To note, these figures must be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size. Overall, it is important to note that there are also high levels of ‘Don’t know’ compared with other questions in the survey, indicating that providers are less confident in estimating the outcomes of Wave 1 DAFC on increasing numbers of applications from different groups. This is potentially related to the process of recruiting apprentices which is employer-led and therefore not all providers will receive data on number of applications, or the demographics of applicants.

Figure 10: To what extent do you think activities funded through the Wave 1 Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition resulted in you receiving more applications than you otherwise would have from each of the following groups?



Base: Providers who targeted people from an ethnic minority background (19), providers who targeted students aged under 21 years old (14), providers who targeted students who were eligible to receive free school meals (5) provider who targeted students with long-term health conditions or disabilities (7), providers who targeted students from low socio-economic backgrounds (17), students from areas of low higher education participation (16), provider who targeted mature students (16), providers who targeted care leavers (8).

Providers who participated in interviews generally felt that it was too early to tell whether Wave 1 DAFC activities had effectively contributed to the diversification of apprentices on Level 6 degree apprenticeship programmes. In part, this was because some degree apprenticeship programmes were postponed to later in the 2024/25 academic year, or the 2025/26 academic year.

Although the analysis of number of starts from underrepresented groups has not been completed, the anecdotal evidence from providers showed signs of promise in raising awareness and demand from underrepresented groups, particularly prospective apprentices from low socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds. Providers felt that the outreach activities in carefully chosen locations and venues was reaching those who would not have otherwise considered higher education and that the taster

sessions and open days were challenging misconceptions and assumptions about being an apprentice and working in specific sectors which anecdotally led to more people considering Level 6 degree apprenticeships. However, these activities often had longer-term aims and providers did not expect quantifiable outcomes to be realised, or confidently reported, immediately.

6 Interim lessons learned

At this early stage in the evaluation, there are some emerging lessons learned on the delivery and outcomes of Wave 1 DAFC activities aimed at increasing equality of opportunity, namely:

1. Providers report that Wave 1 DAFC funding has successfully stimulated new and additional activities aimed at increasing equality of opportunity among underrepresented groups which would not have been delivered without the funding.
2. Designated roles, targeted outreach initiatives and activities aimed at challenging ideas and assumptions about higher education and particular industries all show promising signs of contributing to increased awareness and demand for Level 6 degree apprenticeships from currently underrepresented groups.
3. Providers reported challenges in delivering planned activities within the timescales of the funding period. In some cases, this affected their ability to implement all planned activities and to realise immediate outcomes, particularly in relation to increasing starts in the 2024/25 academic year.
4. Providers are not yet certain on the extent to which DAFC funded activities will contribute to an increase in applications from underrepresented groups. This is partly due to the employer-led apprenticeship recruitment process, which limits providers' access to detailed application data. It is also due to some funded activities having longer timeframes to the realisation of outcomes, including those delivered in schools which aim to stimulate the future pipeline of apprenticeship applications. The impact on starts from these types of activities are not expected to be fully realised for another two to five years.

7 Future reports

As part of Stage 1 of the DAFC evaluation, several key reports will be developed and shared to provide ongoing insights into the progress and impact of the programme:

- **Quantitative and qualitative topline reports:** Two topline reports will provide preliminary findings from the first batches of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The quantitative topline, due in January 2025, will summarise key insights from the provider and employer surveys. The qualitative topline, scheduled for February 2025, will highlight themes and patterns from the first batch of provider, employer, and apprentice interviews.
- **Interim report:** The first comprehensive interim report will be produced in July 2025. This report will synthesise evidence and insights from all data sources administered to date, including surveys, interviews, monitoring returns, and secondary data analysis. It will provide a detailed assessment of the progress of Wave 1 DAFC activities towards the strategic aims of the fund, with a focus on the effectiveness of funded activities and the extent of impact achieved.

These reports will each focus on Wave 1 funded activities and provide stakeholders with evidence-based insights to inform continuous improvement of the DAFC programme.

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