

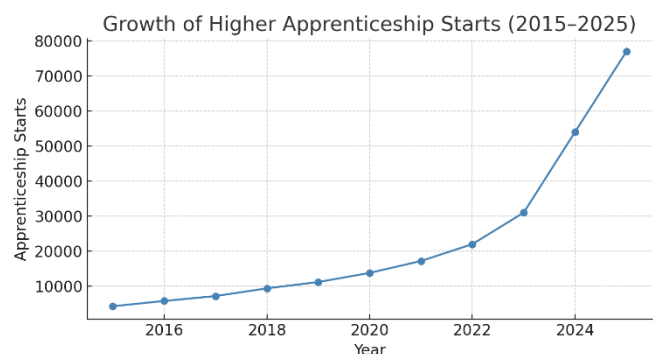
The rise of Apprenticeships in HE: A decade of growth



Without doubt the successful development and delivery of degree level apprenticeships, in ten short years, is truly remarkable.

Back in 2015, fewer than 5,000 learners enrolled in HE level apprenticeships, recent data has shown that almost 77,000 learners have enrolled on to level 6 and 7 programmes during the first half of the 2024 / 25 academic year.

Since the roll out of the apprenticeship levy there have been five Prime-Ministers, and seven different secretaries of State for Education. This is in addition to Article 50 and the implementation of Brexit, followed shortly by the Covid pandemic. So, in this context these achievements are not just remarkable, they are truly heroic.





Whilst the introduction of the Levy and development of level 6 and 7 apprenticeships opened new funding opportunities for, HE it also brought additional regulatory requirements such as Ofsted and unfamiliar ESFA/DFE funding and audit requirements.

As the levy was launched, the restructure of the funding agency resulted in a 'hands off' approach when providing the advice and support to new providers to the market. Some HEI institutions have attempted to integrate apprenticeship data into existing systems; others bought in expensive software packages that, in the end, often overpromised and underdelivered. The implementation of these solutions was either expensive or did not have the robust longevity to collect the right information or produce the meaningful data for management to base their decisions. This can be borne out by the challenges identified by Ofsted for HE.

Ofsted have completed over 70 HE Inspections. Overall, Ofsted deems that HE has adapted well to the requirements of Apprenticeship delivery, citing high grading outcomes, robust internal quality, and outstanding practices as key strengths.

The following were highlighted as some of the common challenges HE has and still does, face.

- **Leadership and management:** Some institutions lacked central oversight of apprentice progress, with fragmented tracking systems.
- **Programme design:** Ofsted emphasized that programmes should be built around the **Knowledge, Skills, and Behaviours (KSBs)** of the apprenticeship standard, not retrofitted from existing degree modules.
- **Learner progress monitoring:** Inconsistent tracking of apprentice achievement across all programme elements.
- **Safeguarding and welfare:** While strong, some universities needed clearer structures for supporting apprentices' well-being.



After a tumultuous decade, HEI's now face yet another apprenticeship challenge. With the recent announcement that funding for level 7 will be capped from January 2026, and that programmes

will be restricted to those aged twenty-one and under, there is a lifeline in the form of levy funds and Lifelong Learning Entitlement to release funds for HE flexible provision.

The UK government's Future Skills strategy outlined in the 2025/2026 priorities for **Skills England** is shifting focus toward **flexible, modular learning** as a response to the upcoming cap on Level 7 apprenticeships.

1. Bite-Sized Adult Learning

- Short, focused courses, such as Bootcamps, designed to **upskill or reskill** quickly.
- Delivered online, in-person, or hybrid formats.
- Targeted at working adults and career changers.

2. Stackable Units

- Learners complete **individual modules** that can be combined into full qualifications over time.
- Encourages **lifelong learning** and flexibility.
- Supports progression from **non-accredited learning to formal qualifications**.

3. Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE)

- Launching fully in 2025, the LLE allows adults to access funding for **modular learning** across their lifetime.
- Learners can “bank” credits and return to study as needed.

There are opportunities for HE, despite the capping of level 7's, which comes in the form of bite-sized adult learning delivered through short courses and stackable units, is central to the UK's **Future Skills strategy**.

Emma Cook, Managing Director at CogniSoft notes *“that to take advantage of these emerging opportunities, HE institutions will need to pivot quickly in both processes and systems.”*

CogniSoft's YETI Learner Management System is uniquely positioned to meet this challenge. It seamlessly supports all FE funding streams, from apprenticeships to adult education and skills bootcamps, within a single, integrated platform, supporting rather than driving organisational processes and ensuring institutions can adapt effortlessly, remain compliant, and seize new opportunities as they emerge.

CogniSoft YETI



“Change is inevitable. Change is constant.” Benjamin Disraeli

The shift towards Bootcamps and the new Skills England Strategy as central to driving forward our economy in modular, **bite-sized adult learning programmes**, micro credentials, short courses, and stackable units is another opportunity within our educational landscape to deliver.

To support this, HEIs need systems that are:

- Flexible enough for *multiple modes of delivery*
- Compliant with *all DfE, ILR and Ofsted requirements*
- Capable of managing *both apprenticeships and modular adult learning*

We know that solid system infrastructures and strategies that can give the longevity to Policy changes within education, coupled with forward thinking people, pedagogy and putting learners' outcomes first give the best overall business success.

Cost and sustainability are two of the key drivers when evaluating return on investment for software.



Thoughts of Jason Folkett, CEO Blueprint Education Services (BES), a niche data management, and consultancy services company.

“I have witnessed institutions and providers that have overspent on software with one funding delivery in mind, such as Apprenticeships. This restriction had resulted in the need for further investment to serve other fundable skills programmes and courses. Many systems promise full integration but fall short. Institutions need platforms that support the entire learner journey, onboarding to funding, with seamless data and compliance.

But systems alone are not enough. Skilled MIS staff are scarce, risking continuity and satisfaction. Institutions need resilient, streamlined processes to ensure predictable outcomes and built-in compliance.

Getting it right first time is not just ideal, it is a competitive edge.”

CogniSoft and BES: Your Partners in Success



At CogniSoft, we offer YETI, our fully integrated learner management system designed specifically for the learner journey on any learning and skills programme. With **over 35 years' experience** in the Learning and Skills sector, our platform supports every aspect of delivery, ensuring compliance, efficiency, and scalability.

In partnership with **BES**, we go further. Our managed service model combines robust systems with expert operational support, including **Power BI-enabled reporting** and **KPI management**. This provides institutions with real-time insights and **effective decision support**, helping you monitor performance, optimise funding, and drive financial success.

It is crucial that **your systems and processes** do not fall short when it comes to funding management, reporting, and compliance.

What you can do now

We encourage you to

1. Contact Blueprint Education Services and talk to our experts about a Data Health Check
2. Check your systems supplier's contract. Review your systems strategy and research with suppliers what will work best with your strategy.
3. Invest time into the analysis of your apprentice learner journey to streamline administrative burdens.
4. Revisit your 25/26 curriculum and business plans. Consider the duration opportunities and the optimisation of your funding whilst maintaining the successful apprentice achievements and exemplary standards.