

Supporting Mature Degree Apprentices

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Whilst existing literature documents experiences of mature students on traditional programmes in higher education (HE), extant literature fails to explore the unique experiences of degree apprentices in both on and off the job training (including academic study). In England, 47% of apprenticeships started in 2019/20 were by people aged 25 and over. Of particular interest are those literature classes as ‘upskillers’, that is apprentices with a diverse range of backgrounds and experience, who are seeking to advance their career through this programme. They tend to be mature students, and in the government’s evaluation of apprenticeships 2018-19 reported lower satisfaction levels than younger apprentices, with lack of support from training providers impacting this figure.

Literature (Fragoso et al, 2013) on mature students generally in HE describes them facing barriers to participation, including paid work, family/caring responsibilities, confidence, institutional and social class concerns. However, care must be taken not to homogenise mature students. Smith et al (2021) explored trajectories into apprenticeships across six universities in Scotland, including ‘upskillers’, and reported mature degree apprentices often

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have more complex support needs and that a larger gap between previous study can lead to imposter syndrome. Research (Fabian et al, 2021) has found that those not specifically recruited as apprentices reported challenges in learning and balancing work-life-study and calls have been made for universities to better understand their experiences.

This paper will report back on initial findings of focus groups conducted with mature degree apprentices on the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship. The outcomes of this exploratory project will provide an opportunity to understand the lived experiences of mature degree apprentices, how similar or different their experiences are to other mature students and identify appropriate support mechanisms. This will act as a basis to inform a more targeted learning and teaching policy, curriculum design and teaching practice.

Keywords: degree apprenticeship, management, upskillers, barriers to participation