

SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

Manchester Metropolitan University is one of the leading universities in the UK for delivering degree apprenticeships to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Led by the Apprenticeships Unit in MMU's Business School, the apprenticeships programme is being delivered in collaboration with the Faculties of Science & Engineering, Arts & Humanities, and Health.

The School was involved in a Trailblazer Group for the inaugural degree apprenticeships in 2015 and since then has grown from zero to being the leading university provider of Degree Apprenticeships in the UK, with a Grade 1 Outstanding Ofsted rating and being voted the number one university provider in the national "Rate My Apprenticeship" scheme 2019.

Very few universities undertook the application and assessment process to be able to offer apprenticeships to small businesses (it's estimated fewer than 10 across the UK) but MMU's commitment to partner with SMEs was clear from the start, and their work in this area and was codified in the University Apprenticeship Strategy soon after.

The Business School has set up Advisory Boards for Apprenticeships to ensure the SME voice is heard in how the curriculum is developed. Delivery encompasses the opportunity for feedback, to enable improvements to be made throughout the duration of the courses. Programmes are designed with a heavy focus on live business projects and 'portfolio units' so that SMEs can be sure that the training is bespoke to their particular needs and contexts. The courses are linked with a Skills Coach who visits the business and conducts three-way reviews with the managers and apprentices to contextualise the curriculum further and bring feedback back to the University.

Throughout the year the Business School hosts up to four dedicated open evenings to attract and retain prospective apprentices. Here, SMEs have the opportunity to have access to free stands / space to promote their SMEs and meet prospective applicants. In total, these open evening events have attracted over 800 visitors. The programme has secured an outstanding degree of academic success with over 80% of the school's first cohort achieving firsts.

The collaboration with other faculties and central services has led to far-reaching and long-term changes to the way the university operates. Directed by the School's Apprenticeship Unit, new teams and processes have been set up in finance, legal, schools liaison, recruitment and admissions, quality, management information, student support and other administrative function areas. New governance structures and strategies have been established and new roles defined and recruited across the partnering faculties. This has enabled the growth of the degree apprenticeships to date and has created a highly responsive and innovative, yet scalable, structure across the university to enable even greater growth in the future.

The Degree Apprenticeships programme provides both a vehicle and catalyst to inject new skills into SMEs. MMU's decision to proactively target SMEs (over larger businesses) is bold and driven by the vision over the broader university. Furthermore, over the last four years the school has provided significant impact into the Greater Manchester and East Cheshire entrepreneurial ecosystem, an economic value estimated to be £46m, and has developed a national reputation as the top provider for degree apprenticeship programmes.