

Apprenticeships: The Hidden Potential

2021

In association with:



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/ Introduction

In 2018, DMA Talent conducted research into the skills required for our industry to remain successful. The data revealed that 62% of the sample used apprenticeships and a further 32% would be interested in using one. We also found that technical and data roles supporting marketing - rather than traditional marketing roles - are more likely to be filled via apprenticeship programmes.

At the time, our members told us they would be keen to develop apprenticeships for data and marketing professionals but have also made clear that those available under the Government framework do not cover specific skills their firms require.

A wealth of available talent hailing from all backgrounds could fill junior data and marketing roles for brands, agencies and marketing services providers. Tapping into this pool would also help improve the diversity of people entering the industry.

According to the most recent information, there are 16 data and marketing apprenticeships on offer. Yet many aspiring young marketers still can't see a clear route into a suitable role that will develop their skills, and others will simply be unaware of the training opportunities.

There has yet to be a unified and sustained push to lead the data and marketing experts of tomorrow towards apprenticeships.

This is in no small part due to a combination of schemes' perceived complexity, the need for far better relationships between employers and providers, and clearer communication with Government. These issues are set against the backdrop of wider economic uncertainty, which make it even harder for organisations to recruit apprentices. During the first lockdown of the Coronavirus pandemic, the rate of redundancy among apprentices almost doubled. Between March and July 2020, 1,033 people in England were withdrawn from apprenticeship programmes. This compared to 615 for the same period in 2019, according to Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) data.

This report aims to highlight the benefits to both businesses and young people of delivering successful apprenticeship programmes, which includes understanding how best to use the Apprenticeship Levy and, where appropriate, Levy Transfer.

Our purpose is to understand how apprenticeships as a recruitment strategy have been embraced and managed until today by organisations in the UK. The research and resulting dialogue with the industry will inform DMA Talent's approach to helping DMA members increase the number of apprentices in their businesses.

Given the importance of understanding individual businesses' experiences of apprenticeships, we took a qualitative approach to the research. We conducted a total of 17 interviews with representatives of organisations using data and marketing apprenticeships, some that are not using those apprenticeships specifically, and others not using apprenticeships at all. Our aim was to identify challenges with the whole process, from set-up to final assessment. To understand more on the approach we took, please see the Methodology section and Appendices.

In the following pages we'll consider a range of issues that can prevent apprenticeships from running smoothly. We'll also delve deeper into what's working and what isn't.

It's clear from our research that firms are looking to trade bodies for support and guidance in rolling out effective apprenticeship schemes. The DMA/IDM is in a unique position to help, sitting as we do in the middle of brands, agencies and providers. As an intermediary ambassador of the Department for Education/ESFA we have a route into Government to discuss how schemes can be made more efficient and open to all - for the benefit of young talent and employers alike.

/ Foreword

DMA Talent's objective is to work towards generating a pipeline of diverse talent for its members and the industry. This includes ensuring we have different entry points for employees. Apprenticeships provide an opportunity for young people to enter the industry straight from school or college, gaining experience while they learn. Businesses benefit from tapping into fresh talent who can grow into a role, as well as broadening the diversity of their workforce.

The impact of Covid-19 on youth employment is well documented. The Chancellor made additional funds available to encourage organisations to take on apprentices in his Autumn 2020 'Plan for Jobs' but inevitably it hasn't managed to protect all apprentice's jobs.

This report seeks to understand the business benefits and challenges for those that use apprenticeships for data and marketing roles within their organisations, and to uncover ways in which the DMA can support through our network, our government relationships, and learning through the IDM.

Apprenticeships remain a great route for businesses to hire young talent into their organisations and future-proof their skills pipeline. Now we must determine the best way to make them work for business and for young people who are seeking to start a career in our industry.



The need to support the career aspirations of younger people has never been greater. The DM Trust is committed to enabling programmes aimed at creating opportunities for all to join the data driven marketing sector.

The apprenticeship initiative at the DMA is a great example of this, creating opportunities for young people and developing and nurturing the skills base that will ensure our industry's future

Matthew Housden
Chair - DM Trust

/ Definitions

Apprenticeship

Simply put, an apprenticeship is a job with government funded training. An apprentice is recruited to do a specific job within an organisation. The employer chooses a government 'standard' that aligns most closely with the job and a training provider to deliver training against that standard. The apprentice is paid a salary by their employer in the same way as any other employee.

The **Apprenticeship Levy**, introduced in 2017, is a levy on UK employers to fund new apprenticeships. In England, control of apprenticeship funding falls to employers through the Digital Apprenticeship Service. All companies with a salary bill over £3m must pay the levy. The levy is charged at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's paybill. Each employer receives an allowance of £15,000 to offset against their levy payment.

Levy Transfer allows levy-paying employers that have unused apprenticeship funds to transfer up to 25% of their annual funds to other employers seeking a transfer.

Examples include:

- employers they currently work with
- other employers in the same industry
- an Apprenticeship Training Agency
- other regional partners

Employers draw down on their 'levy payment' to pay for the chosen apprenticeship training.

/ Context: The Best Of Times, The Worst Of Times

In theory, there has never been a better time for young people to pursue a career in data and marketing. For businesses this should mean a steady flow of talented individuals ready to take their first step into the industry. Apprenticeship schemes offer firms an opportunity to recruit new employees who are not just from the traditional - and, some might say, over-emphasised - graduate route, but from all backgrounds.

There are currently 16 appropriate data and marketing apprenticeship standards in operation (more details of which can be found in Appendix A). What's missing is a cohesive strategy for promoting and running programmes, with employer organisations of all sizes, as well as providers and tutors all involved in those discussions.

It's our belief, too, that Government communications must be clearer. As we'll see from analysis of the interviews we conducted, rightly or not there is confusion about what the levy can be used for. There's also widespread consternation regarding the stipulated agreement that a minimum of 20% of an apprentice's time must be allocated to their studies - a particular issue for agencies built on fee-earning models.

The Government has brought forward further advice and funding in 2020 as a response to Covid-19. Additional support includes allowing apprentices to be furloughed, and continue their training while not working, moving to online study where necessary.

Between August 2020 and March 2021, employers will also receive a £2,000 grant for each apprentice they hire aged under 25 and £1,500 for older apprentices. There was also redundancy support.

None of this masks the effect of the pandemic on recruitment generally. Figures from the Department for Education show that between 23 March and 31 July 2020 in England, 58,160 apprentices started their training - down from 107,750 during the same period in 2019. Apprenticeships for the under-19s were particularly affected, decreasing by over two-thirds compared to the same period last year.

A concerted effort is now required by all stakeholders to ensure young people have the opportunity to begin a promising career in data and marketing, so the industry can access a future pipeline of talent.

/ Positive-Sum Scheme: Benefits Of Apprenticeship Programmes

Our research revealed that while employers' attempts to run schemes can be beset with problems, there is less appreciation of the merits of having a programme in place.

Benefits can be split into two camps.

Business Benefits

Our interviewees pointed to the following as some of the positive outcomes of using apprenticeships as part of a wider recruitment strategy:

- Making talent more diverse, better representing UK society and customers
- Gaining the fresh perspectives of people from different backgrounds
- A 'clean slate' - no bad habits - and the reward of helping someone grow into a role
- Developing a more capable workforce, complete with specialist skills for the business
- Satisfaction of implementing a new recruitment and training framework

Just two interviewees mentioned the financial benefit of an apprentice completing their training before moving into a role within the business. When focusing on cultural benefits to the business, and the development of the individual, many organisations overlook wider and more long-term boons from 'homegrown' talent.

Agency based outside London: "With people who are new into the work environment we don't necessarily have to deal with bad habits they've picked up along the way. There are financial benefits you get from an apprenticeship in terms of future resource planning."

London-based brand: "If you can bring in somebody young, and mould and train them from day one, they're more likely to stay. It's a more sustainable way of growing your talent."

London-based agency: "There'll be a problem and the apprentices will come out with an answer that if we just sat there all day, nobody else in the room would ever think of."

London-based brand: "We get a more diverse set of individuals from all sorts of social backgrounds, which is great for serving our customers because we have a much better representation of the UK population."

London-based agency: “The apprentice is constantly updating their skills. They get exposure within the business, but also industry-wide. They’re upskilling above and beyond their team, and sometimes even their line manager.”

Apprentice Benefits

Interviewees shared feedback from apprentices about advantages that schemes offer them. These include:

- Accessing an industry generally perceived as ‘graduate-only’
- The opportunity to get paid while learning new skills
- Immediate application of skills in the workplace
- The chance to work across different departments
- A feeling of inclusion in the business and its culture

While many interviewees seemed to recognise the benefits of being an apprentice, only two mentioned contracts available after final assessments. This is further evidence that many firms see ‘starts’ as a fixed-term commitment rather than being of lasting benefit to either party.

London-based brand: “There are people who thrive at school and university and people who don’t. Joining a scheme can be the right time for an apprentice and so they’re enthusiastic and driven.

“Apprentices want a very hands-on practical way of learning through doing, as well as learning through education. You have to practice the ability to be in a work environment, and apply skills and knowledge as you learn them. The programme is a great balance of that.”

London-based brand: “They have the opportunity to get a qualification or degree without the debt. That’s a real bonus for them.”

London-based agency: “Companies need to think about end contracts, from the HR department to the CEO. There’s a reason why they’re doing an apprenticeship and not just applying for the job with everyone else who went to university.”

Brand based outside London: “Their CV didn’t include anything that would have got them an interview because of the other people who are out there. So for them, this is a great opportunity to come in, get the support of an organisation, an academic qualification and a salary at the same time.”

/ Best-Laid Plans: Barriers To Success

Despite an awareness of the programmes' benefits to employers and apprentices, our interviewees perceive many obstacles to achieving good outcomes. If these issues apply to organisations across the sector they offer an explanation for the current low number of schemes being offered.

The list of problems identified was longer than responses to every other question. This highlights the need for everyone involved in delivering programmes to collaborate to develop a better understanding of how they work, and ultimately increase the annual volume of starts.

There were some stark contrasts in the issues encountered by different types of business. London-based interviewees said their firm was often minded to seek recruits with existing experience. Agencies take longest to decide whether an apprentice scheme is appropriate. Brands' boardrooms are the hardest to engage in programme development and funding. SMEs, meanwhile, struggle more than larger organisations to justify the resource needed to support the apprentice.

Other stated problems include:

Difficulty creating a new framework and structuring the apprenticeship qualification

Dedicating enough time to ensure the apprentice succeeds - especially with client work pressures

- "Distant" providers failing to fully support mentors and apprentices
- Departmental differences over apprentice role and learning e.g. HR and marketing
- Paying the apprentice's salary on top of the levy
- Inflexibility of the system compared to graduate recruitment
- Understanding how apprentices apply in the gig economy

One of the biggest perceived difficulties is the requirement for every programme to allocate a minimum of 20% of an apprentice's time to studying - whether on-site at the workplace or elsewhere with a learning provider.

The challenges and priorities of work versus learning are ever present and a degree of flexibility is necessary on both sides. Very different approaches from training providers with regard to how the 20% is delivered are apparent. Apprentices may not want to miss out on a campaign launch day if it clashes with allotted training time, for example. The key to getting the balance right is upfront planning involving all parties.

Expert Opinion



A successful apprenticeship needs all parties connected to make it work - provider, manager and apprentice. We learnt from our first experience with apprenticeships that we needed to get everyone involved in the room to set out the 20% training from the start to enable workload planning in advance. We also made it more structured for the rest of the team, so time could be blocked out for training and the apprentice was clear they were not expected to work on anything else

Isabella Luba,
Head of Early Careers – Merkle

Provider based outside London: “The 20% dedicated to studying is a thorn in our side. When we had to start paying the levy, the company was against it.”

London-based agency: “One of the main drawbacks of using apprentices is making sure the infrastructure is there. Otherwise, you’re setting people up to fail.”

London-based brand: “When they were coming up with apprenticeships nobody said, ‘What do you need in a qualification in your sector?’ They just looked at what already existed and made no attempts to refresh it.

“Also, when we take graduates on, we mould them. With apprentices, the idea of having external influence on their development wouldn’t be particularly appealing to the majority of our senior management team.”

London-based agency: “There’s still a mindset of ‘I don’t know what an apprentice will bring, and that’s money I’m not sure I should spend’.”

Brand based outside London: “We’ve had to do a lot of engagement with senior leaders to help them see the art of the possible. It’s been a challenge.”

Brand based outside London: “If the line manager is engaged but doesn’t understand the apprenticeship, it becomes a very difficult development journey.”

Agency based outside London: “It was easier to find someone ourselves who we liked and had a lot of promise rather than go through the official apprenticeship route.”

London-based agency: “We are a small business, our new staff intake is ad hoc, such that we can’t really commit to X amount of apprenticeships.”

These are all issues that must be strategically addressed to encourage more young people to apply for apprenticeships.

In the next section, we analyse the pros and cons of specific aspects of programmes as identified by our interviewees.

/ Analysis Of The Interviews

Drivers

Main drivers	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Helping local community	7	11	x1.6
Diversity	5	9	x1.8
Ad-hoc creation of junior role	4	7	x1.8
Part of the business' DNA	3	3	x1.0
To give current staff a development opportunity	2	3	x1.5
Contacted by provider	1	1	x1.0
Bringing in new talent	1	1	x1.0
Creation of ad-hoc school outreach programmes	1	1	x1.0
Neurodiversity	1	1	x1.0
Board pushes to look out for transformational training for the business	1	1	x1.0
Marketing is a high-mobility industry	1	1	x1.0
Total	13	40	x3.1

The Apprenticeship Levy is the overriding main driver and is dealt with separately later in the report.

The table above shows that while interviewees gave worthy reasons why they have embraced apprenticeships, factors missing from their answers are perhaps more revealing. The lack of perspective on using apprenticeships to secure a future talent pipeline, and ultimately build growth, reveals a gap in employers' knowledge about the business value of the scheme.

Meanwhile, just one interviewee stated they had been approached directly by a training provider to take an apprentice. This suggests central promotion of the initiative is inadequate.

On a more positive note, multiple mentions of apprenticeships being part of the DNA of a business is encouraging. So too are the 11 total mentions of participation as a way to engage with local communities. Engaging with the local community to secure your talent pipeline makes good business sense – several technology and science campuses are located near universities in the UK. Recruiting young talent is essential for the future of a business.

Expert Opinion



The narrative needs to change from cause to privilege. Connecting with the local community and early careers talent should not be about doing good and ticking the CSR box, it's about protecting the future of your business, your product and maintaining relevance. Businesses have to earn the right to have brilliant young talent in their ranks, not see it as doing them a favour. It is a privilege to be able to bring potentially game-changing talent into your organisation to secure its future

Ross Taylor

Founder - Hidden

London-based agency: "We really wanted to work with schools with a higher-than-average BAME student population and high numbers receiving free school meals so they could benefit, even if it took a bit more effort by going outside London."

Provider based outside London: "In terms of recruiting apprentices, we've always tried to keep people local... to get the best and the brightest guys in the Midlands."

Diversity is another major driver; it was mentioned by five interviewees, although they were all based in London. Recognising the different skills and viewpoints of a more diverse workforce is key to success, and also reflects the diversity within an organisation's customer base. There are many sources that underline the importance of diversity for businesses. As long ago as 2015, Mckinsey's 'Why Diversity Matters' research showed that diverse businesses perform 35% higher than industry averages.

London-based agency: "It's a great way to bring in fresh talent from different backgrounds that don't see you; not just pulling from the same talent pool for the same types of people with the same ideas."

Brand based outside London: "There's an appetite at senior level for some outreach work with local schools, because our most recent D&I survey demonstrated we aren't mirroring our local area."

Four organisations consider themselves top heavy with experience and have used apprenticeships to create a less senior role, in a bid to bring different perspectives and energy to their business.

Provider based outside London: “We need an in-house team. That would be a good opportunity to look to an apprenticeship-style structure for a portion of it, a kind of future planning. After a year, you might create roles because your business is growing. We placed all six of our inaugural apprentices in the business after their first year.”

Facilitators

Main facilitators	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Internal staff (in general)	4	5	x1.3
Industry bodies	3	7	x2.3
Providers	3	3	x1.0
Those with oversight of apprenticeship programmes	2	4	x2.0
Apprentices' parents	2	32	x1.0
Internal mentor	1	1	x1.0
Total	9	22	x2.4

Along with training providers, industry bodies clearly have a role to play in facilitating more apprenticeship starts. They are highlighted as the main external source of support for organisations that engage with schemes, where they can seek support and guidance on monitoring apprentices' progress. For more detail on this and the role the DMA can play, see the final section of the report.

London-based agency: “I think it's really important for an industry body to champion apprenticeships with members.”

A robust support network is vital if schemes are to work and apprentices reach their potential. Respondents cited internal facilitators, from designated mentors to wider team members, were encouraged to help their new colleagues. Outside the organisation, parents also have a role to play. Schemes that work well can create positivity that ripples across the business.

London-based agency: “The person in charge does a really good job of making sure apprentices have someone central to turn to if there are challenges. Everybody is open to supporting others in the business, especially younger people. When people are asked to spend time with them they're really positive about it.”

Provider based outside London: “The manager became like the mother goose: apprentices would think they could have conversations with her like they did with their parents.”

Providers

Providers' omissions and challenges	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
General absence	5	8	x1.6
Many are not accredited so the levy cannot be used	3	5	x1.7
Thorough selection process to choose the providers	3	4	x1.3
Poor management of the endpoint assessment	2	3	x1.5
Disconnect with the provider/college	2	2	x1.0
Lack of providers' support	2	2	x1.0
Service delivery issues	2	2	x1.0
Slow to respond	2	2	x1.0
Finding the right provider	1	1	x1.0
Apprenticeships losing their genuineness due to providers' cold calls	1	5	x5.0
Poor-quality recruitment	1	1	x1.0
Access issues due to restrictions or other IT-hardware obstacles	1	1	x1.0
Partnering with a provider is better than a subcontracting arrangement	1	1	x1.0
Total	10	33	x3.3

Both set-up and endpoint assessments were picked out by several interviewees as problems with providers. One cited issues caused by final tests being conducted by a third party - employers cannot assess their own trainees - resulting in a disjointed end to the placement. Overall, interviewees spoke of a number of negative experiences and questioned the quality of some providers. Difficulties revolved around the provider being generally absent, or unavailable when the employer or apprentices sought help.

Provider based outside London: "There was a period of about four months when the tutor didn't even turn up. During that time the apprentice needed to know from the business, 'what am I supposed to do'?"

Provider based outside London: "The apprentice wasn't complimentary about the tutor, she had been let down a few times. That side of it has not been perfect."

Organisations also have difficulty finding providers that are accredited for data and marketing apprenticeships. They feel the process of tracking down providers named on a Government list is inflexible and frustrating. Some of those which are accredited were found to be "incredibly impersonal in their approach". Others find the complexity of choosing a provider overwhelming. They would like to take advantage of a more comprehensive list of providers to increase and improve the candidate pool size, quality and diversity; the stronger the partnership, the easier it is to establish a programme.

London-based brand: “We wanted our guys to do a CRM diploma and couldn’t find a recognised third-party organisation that had accredited apprenticeship status with courses meeting requirements.”

London-based brand: “We go through all kinds of risk management, contractual processes and reporting arrangements. It’s hard to find all that in one provider. So you either end up having lots of relationships, or try to find providers that will subcontract to others on your behalf. Many don’t want that level of risk.”

Benefits Of Providers

Positive experience	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Good communication	2	3	x1.5
Good at motivating candidates	1	2	x2.0
Total	3	5	x1.7

Despite numerous tensions, other organisations report a more positive experience. On several of the issues above they point to the other side of the coin, praising communication, apprentice motivation, ease of appointment and smooth subcontracting.

London-based brand: “The coaching staff at our provider have been excellent in terms of knowledge of the subject, but also the enthusiasm to help the apprentice get through the modules.”

Data and marketing apprenticeships are relatively new in their current format with lots of stakeholders across a wide variety of jobs. Ensuring a job matches the actual apprenticeship standard is one of the most important factors in the success of an apprenticeship and finding a provider you can work with.

It can be difficult to find the right training provider to match the job which delivers the training a company is looking for, but it also difficult for training providers to differentiate themselves.

Expert Opinion



There are presently 2,172 apprenticeship providers (private, colleges, universities, third sector and employer providers) working across 598 approved apprenticeship standards and it can be difficult to stand out from the crowd and show you are great provider. The price and apprenticeship standard you are working to is regulated so it is tough demonstrating you are flexible, competent and really care rather than an organisation which delivers the bare minimum. As a business we have won awards for our provision and have an established client base but potential buying organisations do need more support to identify the really good providers

Richard Goodwin

Managing Director - The JGA Group
(marketing apprenticeship provider)

Promotion

External promotion	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Industry bodies	4	5	x1.3
Local colleges	3	6	x2.0
Providers	3	3	x1.0
Local councils	1	1	x1.0
Local newspapers	1	2	x2.0
Specific platforms dedicated to apprenticeships	1	1	x1.0
Government site	1	1	x1.0
Centres supporting people from deprived background	1	1	x1.0
Total	7	20	x2.9

Promotion of programmes is crucial for organisations to attract apprentices. But it's also key to young people finding the opening that is right for them - at a firm they might not otherwise have discovered - rather than plumping for the first available opportunity.

Promotion Challenges	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Choosing the right time to go to schools to talk	1	1	x1.0
Random and multiple applications	1	2	x2.0
Unknown brands get less visibility which makes it harder to find good candidates	1	1	x1.0
Total	2	4	x2.0

Industry bodies feature heavily again, alongside a number of other channels that can be leveraged to get the message out. Using a range of platforms boosts the chances of increasing levels of diversity among apprentices; good for young people seeking roles, and also for the business and its customers.

For some firms, the main challenge is a matter of timing and when to approach young people; for others it's improving poor understanding of their business.

A lower proportion of organisations promote apprenticeships within their business. This is a particular oversight at the London-based firms we spoke to.

Internal promotion	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Intranet	2	2	x1.0
Employer website	2	2	x1.0
Apprentices telling their story/case studies	1	1	x1.0
Blogs/articles	1	1	x1.0
LinkedIn	1	1	x1.0
Total	4	7	x1.8

London-based charity brand: "I don't think we're geared up to advertise apprenticeships in our normal recruitment process. I don't think apprentices would look for a role here because they don't know who we are."

Skills

Desired skills	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Attitude	13	17	x1.3
Passionate and eager to learn	8	11	x2.0
Fit into the culture/team	4	4	x1.0
Limited experience	2	2	x1.0
Curiosity	2	2	x2.0
Collaboration	2	2	x1.0
Analytical skills	2	2	x1.0
Time management	1	1	x1.0
Some level of basic software experience (like Excel, Word)	1	1	x1.0
Should not be overqualified	1	1	x1.0
Learn a particular skill set	1	1	x1.0
Total	14	44	x3.1

Soft skills were front of mind for organisations in the recruitment process, with attitude mentioned by 13 interviewees - by far the most desired attribute (albeit hard to measure in an interview situation). If an apprentice shows innate soft skills, more technical aspects of the role can be added over time. Most organisations believe it's far better to have an eager attitude to learning, which in turn can make life easier for those involved in training the apprentice.

Analytical skills were mentioned by just four interviewees. Nor is experience necessary; in fact, some employers actively seek young people without it.

Recruitment challenges and barriers	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Measuring soft skills	5	8	x1.6
More difficult when out of London	1	1	x2.0
Line managers' time	1	1	x1.0
Needs to find ways to make the business memorable	1	1	x1.0
Duty of care of vulnerable people	1	1	x2.0
Dealing with young people and not treating them as normal candidates	1	1	x1.0
Speed is everything otherwise you lose good candidates	1	1	x1.0
Getting candidates from the same pool stops diversity	1	1	x1.0
Trying to not put too much attention on the CV	1	1	x1.0
Too many applicants	1	1	x1.0
Providers' low quality	1	1	x1.0
Total	9	18	x2.0

Agency based outside London: “We had quite a few applicants desperate to work in an agency and saw this as a way in, perhaps not really wanting to do the modules. They were just using it as a foot in the door. So we needed to make sure that in their applications, interviews and assessments, they weren't overqualified.”

London-based agency: “At a small business it's really important that people fit in. You've got to have a certain type of personality to go with the flow.”

London-based agency: “I don't care how much you know about marketing or Excel. We can teach you that. What we can't teach you is how to work well together, how to be open-minded, how to be curious, how to figure things out, how to problem solve.”

Recruitment

Recruitment specifics	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Interviews as preferred recruiting tool	2	2	x1.0
Hide person's details to avoid biases	2	2	x1.0
Job spec needs to be very clear	1	1	x1.0
Creation of ad-hoc tasks	1	1	x1.0
Looking at extra activities to get a taste of the persons' interests	1	1	x1.0
Use of escape room to test how candidates interact	1	1	x1.0
Use of psychometric tests for manager levels	1	1	x1.0
Total	6	9	x1.3

Setting out their approach to apprentice recruitment, five interviewees admitted the quest for soft skills is complicated by the difficulty in measuring them. This doubtless leads to mismatches between employer and apprentice - and further frustration with the process. Other barriers include the requirement not to treat an apprentice as a “normal candidate” (one who could talk about technical experience in an interview, or had experience of interviewing and might not be as anxious as a school leaver); avoiding bias and increasing diversity; and recruiting outside London.

Brand based outside London: “Getting down to a reasonable number of people to interview was hard - the traditional CV wasn't useful because we didn't care about experience. Who do you take forward without letting bias creep in?”

Organisations recognise the need to create a clear job spec and memorable first impression of their firm. In a situation where experience is often disregarded, this can mean providing innovative interview tasks or psychometric tests. One business arranged an escape room task to assess candidates' interaction with colleagues.

Marketing services provider based outside London: “Tell me what you've done at school, what you like, about your parents... You're trying to find out a lot about their personality. It's very difficult to get the right person.”

London-based agency: “We want to hire high-performing, ambitious candidates. The escape room is an opportunity to show us instead of telling us what you’re like. It doesn’t cost much and we can stand out, show them we’re different. About six months in, we issue a survey asking why people pick our apprenticeship. Every response includes the escape room - it shows our values in action.”

Levy

Levy benefits	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Levy as main driver to set up apprenticeships	10	15	x1.5
Easy to understand how to use it for apprenticeships	3	3	x1.0
Total	10	18	x1.8

Levy barriers	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Understanding how levy can be used to upskill current staff	2	3	x1.5
Explaining why you can't use it for other forms of training	2	2	x1.0
Not flexible enough	2	2	x1.0
Total	4	7	x1.8

The levy comes with benefits but also perceived barriers. As mentioned, more than half of the interviewees named it as the key driver of their organisation’s apprenticeship programme - but just as many have misgivings about the way it is set up. There is confusion about the levy’s use, with four interviewees wanting to know why it cannot be used to upskill current staff or put towards other forms of training beyond apprenticeships. This highlights the need for a broader and more interesting variety of schemes so employers can choose one that is suitable for their business.

London-based agency: “Senior people within the business have been misinformed and ask why aren’t we using our apprenticeship levy for such and such? You have to tell them legally we can only use it for this - so that’s been a challenge.”

Marketing provider based outside London: “I just wish the levy was a bit more flexible in terms of what we can use it for all sorts of learning, development, training... it would be easier to use.”

Yet there is also an understanding that the levy is unavoidable and should be apportioned wisely or it effectively becomes “money going to waste”. There is evidence that while the levy was used in a more scattergun way when it was first introduced many organisations are now thinking more strategically. Nevertheless, there are barriers to using the levy. These include getting the wider business to understand how it should be applied, while multiple organisations reported difficulties in getting the boardroom and line managers to agree best use of the levy.

London-based brand: “It’s a tax we have no choice to pay. Our levy pot is considerable - I need to be able to justify to our trustees and the general public how we’re spending that money effectively.”

Levy Transfer

There is a willingness among firms to use levy transfer, with an altruistic approach to supporting charities and local communities. Once again, though, the process is perceived to be difficult. Lengthy decision-making, lack of understanding and the need to appear unbiased towards partners and marketing services providers are all holding back transfer.

London-based brand: “We often get into the difficulty of where to send it. Many of our customers are also partners, marketing services providers or producers for us, so we have to be quite careful about this.”

London-based brand: “I cannot find a simplistic way to explain this to our senior leaders, so they’re not going to buy into it. I have to talk people through how it works. I don’t mind doing it, but it’s ludicrous - that’s why people just aren’t using it.”

Apprenticeship Standards

Firms offer some encouraging observations about the benefits of data and marketing apprenticeships. They are seen as a credible path into the industry for non-graduates, meaning they contribute to a more diverse workforce. The flexibility of work-life balance with the scheme is also appreciated by both businesses and the apprentice.

Brand based outside London: “It’s definitely easier for some people than others but they can flex the work so it’s not been much of a problem. Someone who was really keen to learn, ambitious and exposed to different types of work is driven to do more.

Standards’ challenges and barriers	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Lack of choice	4	5	x1.3
Lack of communication with those who work with apprentices	3	6	x2.0
There aren’t specific standards	3	5	x1.7
Lack of relevance for specific businesses	3	3	x1.0
Struggle to provide them with the type of work they require for their course	2	3	x1.5
Pair education with real experience	2	3	x1.5
Highly time-consuming research to understand which standards are the most appropriate	2	4	x2.0
Mostly available for jobs with high levels of churn	1	1	x1.0
Having a recognised awarding body	1	2	x2.0

Too academic	1	2	x2.0
Sometimes teachers' training methods/information are too complicated	1	1	x1.0
Hard to define teachers' required qualification level	1	1	x1.0
Total	12	35	x2.9

As with other areas of apprenticeships, there were a range of perceived problems with standards. Chief among these was a feeling that they are too generic to suit a specific role, mentioned five times. Others complained of the complexity of operating within a standard, and the difficulty of teaching and completing data qualifications - to the extent that trainers are underprepared and apprentices may not learn the required skills for a career in data or marketing. Meanwhile, agencies and providers say they struggle to put apprentices in front of clients.

Agency based outside London: "There was an opportunity to learn about marketing and be creative, but it didn't tightly align with an agency setting. It was more for a candidate placed with a brand, such as devising a business plan to launch a product. We had to fudge the criteria or invent tasks that matched the qualification requirement. An agency version of the framework would be quite appealing because agencies are attractive places to work but very difficult to get into."

Brand based outside London: "The programme has been more about hypothetical situations rather than honing skills like Photoshop or understanding SEO."

Brand based outside London: "Programme content feels out of kilter with ability. The data apprenticeship is probably too academic."

Training

Training format	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Online	7	7	x1.0
Mix	7	7	x1.0
Face-to-face	6	11	x1.8
Total	9	26	x2.9

A blend of face-to-face and online learning is used to teach young people. Depending on the situation, some interviewees admit their apprentices struggle with a dual focus on work tasks and the qualification, though others flourish when they are able to study alongside their peers. This may of course be more difficult the longer the pandemic and lockdowns last, but is a reminder of the importance of giving the right physical and mental space to apprentices to deal with both work and study loads.

Brand based outside London: "It's great for our apprentice to be part of the team, but also for him to be part of a group of data analyst apprentices too. The weeks he studies in London could be really important for him to learn the technical bits, but also to build a support group with people doing that apprenticeship."

Work/study balance

Work/study balance	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Transparent agreement in place	5	6	x1.2
Study requires extra time (outside the minimum 20%)	2	2	x1.0
Easy to manage as apprentices' time isn't billable	2	2	x1.0
Overload on the educational side	1	1	x1.0
More challenging when there are responsibilities involved	1	1	x1.0
It depends on the role/department	1	1	x1.0
Not communicated properly	1	1	x1.0
Total	10	17	x1.7

As noted elsewhere, the requirement for a minimum 20% of the apprentice's role to be dedicated to study is a delicate balance with other work. Organisations try to deal with this by instigating a transparent agreement between the board, line manager, trainer and apprentice - but even then it is a hard aspect to achieve, particularly at agencies. Some firms think more flexibility around study time is needed. One option might be to consider how to strike a balance that works well for the team, business and the apprentice e.g. a full day a week or a few hours per day.

Provider based outside London: "It isn't about allocating and managing time. The 20% is their time because that's what you've agreed. Right from the beginning, you need to allow the apprentice to use it."

London-based agency: "It needs to be vocational, otherwise they're just going to feel like they've come to school again. The last thing we want is study time outside budget, given there's more work to do because we don't have enough hours in the day. Is the apprentice working with you, or giving you more work?"

Successful Experience

Signs of a successful apprenticeship	Interviewees	Mentions	Mentions per interviewee
Contract as the ending point	7	7	x1.0
Value the apprentice	3	3	x1.0
Willing to invest in a person	2	2	x1.0
Learning from previous cohorts how to avoid future mistakes	2	3	x1.5

Having points of reference within the business	2	2	x1.0
Offering a salary higher than the one the Government suggests	2	3	x1.5
Setting up one-to-one meetings	2	2	x1.0
Apprentices inspire/energise all staff	2	2	x1.0
Treating apprentices equally, as every other employee	1	1	x1.0
Providing apprentices with human support	1	2	x2.0
Respecting study time	1	2	x2.0
Making sure everyone is on board	1	1	x1.0
Measuring both business and standard performance	1	1	x1.0
Giving opportunities to diverse talent	1	3	x3.0
Helping them understand how to behave in a business	1	1	x1.0
Willingness from both sides	1	1	x1.0
Increased competence	1	2	x2.0
Total	13	38	x2.9

It's good to finish on a positive note. Despite the many challenges of running an apprenticeship programme, there are many ways that companies can - and often do - provide a successful experience.

The best way of ensuring it isn't an opportunity wasted is to offer a contract with a salary above minimum wage - on completion of the course. This also ensures firms aren't training talent simply for them to end up at a rival organisation.

During the programme, apprentices should be given constant encouragement from across the business and feel like they are valued and worth the time spent with them. After the final assessment, they should be asked to share their positive experiences. The feedback loop is also vital, with firms implementing learnings from one cohort to the next.

Provider based outside London: "Nobody goes under the radar for more than two or three days, and it's not about just checking they are doing their work. A personal check-in helps physical and mental health too."

London-based brand: "The Government has a pay level recommendation. We pay a lot more than that, on the principle that this is a way to get fresh talent into the organisation over a period of time. We work on the premise that there is a role for them at the end of the programme."

London-based agency: "If you were using them just to do the work it's quite a negative way to look at the whole concept."

/ Body Of Evidence: The Role Of The DMA

Interviewees hailed trade bodies as key to their efforts to launch and sustain successful apprenticeship schemes.

The research shows organisations need particular support and guidance in a range of areas, including but not limited to:

- Creating actionable insights about how to get the best from schemes
- Making apprenticeships more attractive e.g. events, working with schools etc
- Publishing 'success story' case studies
- Promoting the benefits of employing apprentices to firms, communities and others
- Building bridges between providers and industry
- Sharing best practice from foreign programmes
- Providing ad hoc training for line managers
- Helping to define the apprenticeship endpoint

London-based agency: "It's really important for the industry body to champion apprenticeships with their members, constantly banging the drum that this is a great way to bring in talent, develop and retain it in your business."

London-based agency: "How can the industry speak to more schools? Even if it makes a small difference, hopefully it helps in some way towards accomplishing our goals. If we could lean on the DMA for extra support, share that responsibility of making people get good exposure and good training opportunities, that would be a huge relief."

Brand based outside London: "The DMA can tailor things a lot more, certainly from a data perspective. There are some very specific, thorny issues around data and analytics that aren't going to be picked up by the current courses."

Brand based outside London: "As a voice of the industry, there's a lot the DMA could do to help employers get what they want out of training providers and act as the 'conscience' for apprenticeships."

Brand based outside London: "The process of the endpoint assessment can be very convoluted for an employer. More trade body research is fundamental to help shape what is classed as a quality apprenticeship."

London-based brand: "There's a great opportunity for the IDM to do more around apprenticeships. Organisations like mine want to reduce disposable training budgets and maximise our use of the levy. It's far easier for me to spend money with the IDM going forward if everything goes through an apprenticeship programme."

/ How The DMA Can Help

As a hub of support and debate for this crucial issue, the DMA takes its role very seriously. We believe our relationships with diverse stakeholders, from employers to agencies and suppliers – change to marketing services providers to government, can be the driving force that propels data and marketing apprenticeship schemes to new heights if the industry works together to build on progress made to date.

The DMA also has a part to play through IDM learning. As employers are requesting a wider range of accessible providers, one option is for training bodies to work with providers on their content and offer market-leading, trusted, specialist qualifications that better reflect the industry. It could also help establish an approved list of training providers to fill evident gaps in data and marketing apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships are here to stay - but they can clearly work better. As we develop solutions to the challenges outlined in this report, we need industry input to make positive changes to programmes.

The DMA could offer the following support to employers, apprentices and providers:

- Collaborating with all stakeholders and responding to requests for guidance, training and other aspects of apprenticeships
- Simplifying information about frameworks, the Levy and Levy Transfer and how they would work best for this industry – including who it can be used in conjunction with - to cut complexity and build efficiency into programme implementation
- Strengthening links between employers and providers to maximise the benefit of schemes
- Providing case studies of successful apprenticeship programmes to prove their value to employers and young people
- Lobbying Government to look for change that would improve the process
- Supporting data and marketing apprentices in placements, whether in SMEs or larger corporations
- Promoting all aspects of data and marketing on behalf of employers, so apprentices are not only attracted to major brands
- Working with providers and academia including schools to raise awareness of the range of qualifications and careers on offer

Our aim now is to begin a conversation with employers, providers and others about improving apprenticeships. The DMA will run a series of engagements, including webinars and roundtables, in which we will ask participants to contribute thoughts and ideas that we can use to devise strategies for change.

/ Methodology

Interviews with 17 professionals - including a mix of some dealing with data and marketing apprenticeships; others overseeing apprenticeships in general; and several with no experience of managing apprentices - were conducted in autumn 2020.

Their roles comprised several positions in marketing and HR.

Nine of the participants were based in London, with eight based outside the capital. The sample included a mixture of brands, agencies and marketing services providers (described elsewhere in the report as 'provider/s').

The qualitative research took place in two stages; a pre-interview questionnaire conducted on Qualtrics, and a semi-structured interview. The latter took place face-to-face or via telephone and lasted on average 60 minutes.

Content/discourse analysis was then conducted, along with software-based analysis using NVivo 12.

See Appendix B for more information.

/ APPENDIX A: Current Data and Marketing Frameworks and Standards

Data Technician (Level 3)

Artificial Intelligence Data Specialist (Level 7)

Creative Digital Design professional (Degree)

Digital User Experience (Degree)

Digital Community Manager (Level 4)

Marketing Assistant (Level 3)

Advertising and Media Exec (Level 3)

Marketing Exec (Level 4)

Marketing Manager (Level 6)

Data Science (Level 6)

Digital Marketer Degree (Level 6)

Digital Marketer (Level 3)

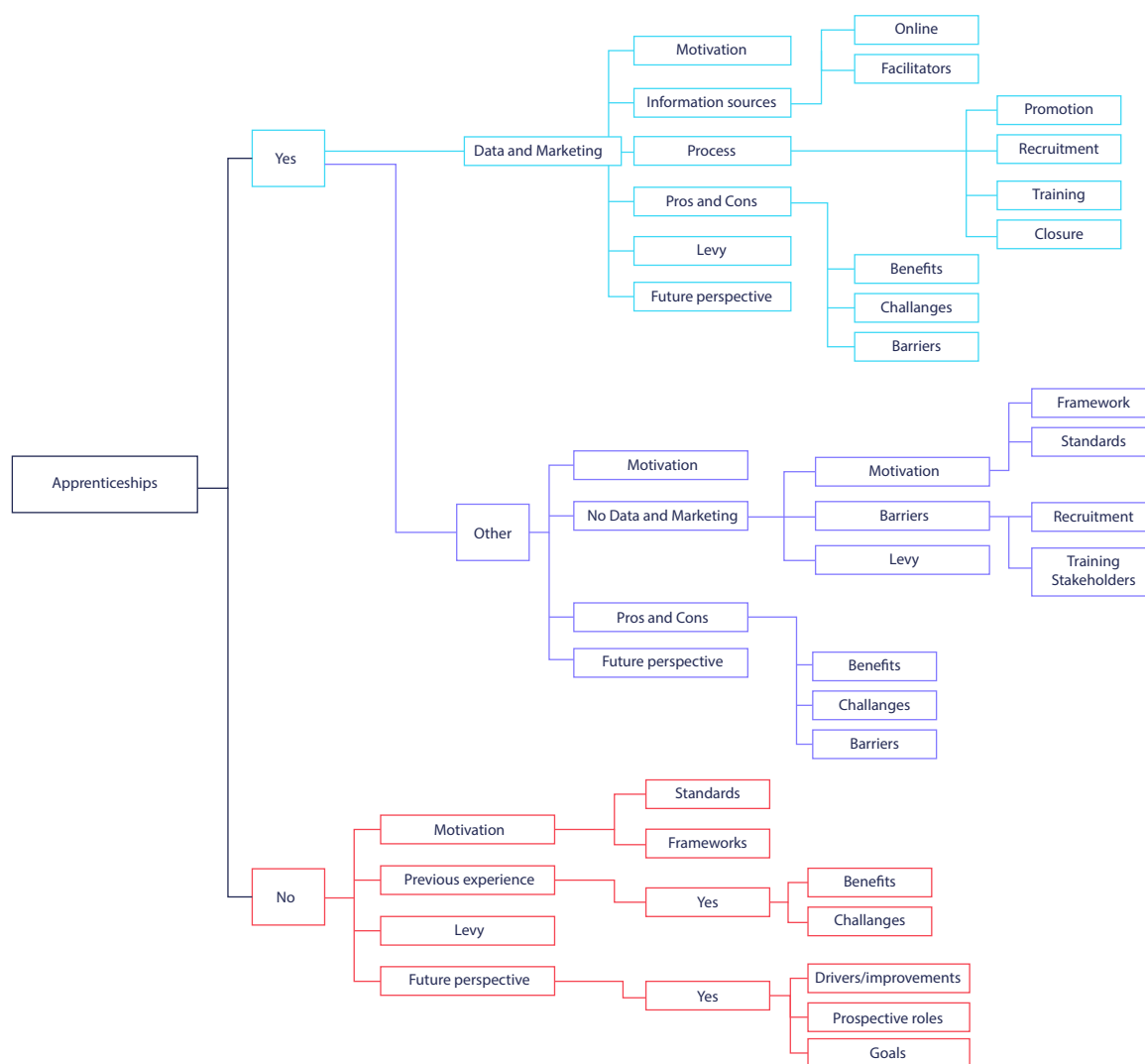
PR and Comms Assistant (Level 4)

Regulatory Compliance Officer (Level 4)

Event Assistant (Level 3)

Data Analyst (Level 4)

/ APPENDIX B: Interview Concept Map



The conceptual map represents the areas addressed with interviewees and the 'paths' taken. We spoke with employers currently using apprenticeship schemes in data and marketing (blue path), those using apprenticeship schemes but not specifically in data and marketing (purple path), and those with no experience of such schemes (red path).

Interviewees with these three backgrounds were included as the research wanted to establish the challenges for those that are using and those that aren't using data and marketing apprenticeships, to ultimately identify challenges with the whole process, from set-up to final assessment.

/ About the DMA

The Data & Marketing Association (DMA) comprises the DMA, Institute of Data & Marketing (IDM) and DMA Talent.

We seek to guide and inspire industry leaders; to advance careers; and to nurture the next generation of aspiring marketers.

We champion the way things should be done, through a rich fusion of technology, diverse talent, creativity, and insight – underpinned by our customer-focussed principles.

We set the standards marketers must meet in order to thrive, representing over 1,000 members drawn from the UK's data and marketing landscape.

By working responsibly, sustainably and creatively, together we will drive the data and marketing industry forward to meet the needs of people today and tomorrow.

www.dma.org.uk

About DMA Talent

DMA Talent champions young people as the future of our industry. Our goal is to attract a new generation of fresh thinkers by raising awareness and showcasing the sector's inspiring and dynamic range of career opportunities. We nurture aspiring marketers by providing the roadmap, skills and connections to kick-start their professional journey, and by instilling our customer-first principles, we drive our industry forward in a responsible and sustainable way.

About DM Trust

The DM Trust has been established from the merger of the DM Foundation and IDM Trust to serve the whole direct, digital and data marketing industry. The main function of the Trust is to distribute funds in support of projects and activities which contribute to the future growth and governance of the data driven marketing sector.



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