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Higher apprenticeships in England: professional and vocational formation

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Abstract

This paper identifies how a series of higher apprenticeships projects funded by the UK coalition government in England between 2012 and 2014 are located within structures of professional and vocational formation. Factors that relate to the structuring of formation are discussed, including how notions of professionalisation and legitimacy, and the political economy of skill, impact on formation processes. Using sketches of three modes of formation, and evidence from documents associated with eight developmental and capacity building projects, higher apprenticeships are perceived as providing opportunities to vertically extend formation structures 'upwards' and 'downwards', in addition to providing forms of 'horizontal extension' through the development of new alternative progression routes to professional qualification. Alterations and extensions to formation structures are engendered by the specific macro and meso context of the relevant sector or profession, and may be influenced by the involvement of further and higher education institutions, leading to the prioritisation of particular types of progression, professional accreditation and qualification.

Key words: higher apprenticeships, professional formation, vocational education

Introduction

Over the last thirty years a wide range of work based programmes have been labelled as apprenticeships in England, as governments have exploited the appeal of this enduring model of learning for policy objectives (Fuller and Unwin, 2009; Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch, 2010). While the concept of apprenticeship as an occupationally-based period of vocational formation has retained its cachet, the location of apprenticeship in national Vocational Education and Training (VET) policies and regional, sectoral and occupational infrastructures has varied over time and with national context (Fuller and Unwin 2009; Hogarth, Gambin, and Hasluck, 2012; Brockmann, Clarke, and Winch, 2010). Fuller and Unwin (2011, p. 262) focus on 'four interconnected dimensions' of apprenticeship, the 'pedagogical', 'occupational',' locational' and 'social', that enable analysis of the sustainability of apprenticeships. The locational and social dimensions examine the dynamic of the relation between employers, communities and apprenticeships, and thus turn our attention to how apprenticeships achieve and sustain value and validity through societal recognition. The pedagogical and occupational dimensions focus, respectively, on issues of learning, broadly understood, and the process by which apprentices 'in formation' are inducted into a specific or broader 'occupational community' (p. 262). In England, industrial change and the dismemberment of regulatory infrastructure have changed the dynamics of demand for apprenticeships over time (Gospel, 1995; Gleeson and Keep, 2004), while governments have concentrated on pursuing supply side reform, convinced of the virtues of applying the logic of the market to the provision of education and training (Keep, 1999, 2006). The consequence has been profound change in the 'occupational dimension' of apprenticeship across many sectors in England, as previously coherent occupational structures have fragmented, obligations on employers to support training have weakened, and the 'locational' and 'social' factors that set the pursuit of apprenticeship within a wider context of the development of civic identity are undermined.

This article seeks to contextualise the development of higher apprenticeships in England between 2012 and 2014 by analysing their impact on, and location within, existing structures of vocational and professional formation. It is the second of a pair of articles focusing on higher apprenticeships in England, with the first (Hordern 2015), addressing issues relating to the curriculum and knowledge content of higher apprenticeships in more depth. Following a brief review of the policy context, this paper outlines how macro, meso and institutional processes shape formation, discusses how a profession or vocation establishes legitimacy, and identifies pressures to extend formation structures. This is followed by an analysis of how eight of the over thirty funded higher apprenticeship projects are located within 'stronger', 'emerging' or 'weaker' structures of vocational and professional formation that reflect the differing circumstances of professional or professionalising occupations. The higher apprenticeship projects illustrate how the development of formation structures can proceed by 'horizontal extension', to enable wider access or build new pathways, and by 'vertical extension',

both 'upwards' and 'downwards' to involve practitioners at different 'levels' of formation or career stage.

Background to higher apprenticeship policy in England

The current United Kingdom Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition government aims to encourage a substantial increase in apprenticeship numbers in England 'across all sectors from current numbers'(HM Treasury, 2011, p. 87), portraying this model of learning as well-aligned with their approach to education and industrial policy (PMO, 2013). New 'degree-level' higher apprenticeships have been promoted as 'a good alternative to full-time higher education for young people who want to develop a career through on-the-job training' (p. 85). This commitment to expand apprenticeship was demonstrated in July 2011 with the announcement of the Higher Apprenticeship Fund (HAF), which offered £25m to projects that would develop new apprenticeship frameworks, secure employer engagement and start recruitment of apprentices (NAS, 2011). The HAF was announced in two phases with an initial round in 2011 resulting in 19 (+ 2 trailblazers) successful projects and a second round in 2012 resulting in 9 successful projects (NAS, 2012). The successful projects were led by a range of organisations including 10 Sector Skills Councils, 8 Further Education Colleges, 2 Higher Education Institutions, 4 independent providers or qualification bodies, and 3 other employer or employer-led organisations, often working closely with others to ensure support for the bids (NAS, 2012).

Higher apprenticeships have been presented as approximating to undergraduate degrees, and there have been suggestions that they could pose a substantive threat to 'traditional' higher education provision (Helyer, 2012). Any assertions that there is a generic equivalence between higher apprenticeships and higher education qualifications should however be treated with caution, due to the fact that many of the qualifications included in higher apprenticeship frameworks are credit rated on the QCF (Qualifications and Credit Framework), rather than on the FHEQ (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications), and can contain significantly fewer credits than undergraduate degrees (Fuller and Unwin, 2012). The QCF and the FHEQ relate to different types of qualification, with the QCF focused on vocational qualifications and the FHEQ higher education. As Fuller and Unwin (2012) outline, the use of the QCF for qualifications within apprenticeships can lead to a 'vocational glass ceiling' (2012, p. 6) for apprentices, particularly as achieving a 'Level' within the QCF requires acquiring a relatively small number of credits (2012, p. 12). This can lead to misleading claims about the extent of achievement, with, for example, qualifications on the QCF or FHEQ at 'Level 6' (final year of undergraduate degree) requiring very different quantities of study, and meeting different criteria.

All types of apprenticeship (Intermediate, Advanced and Higher) involve the completion of competence and knowledge qualifications, or a qualification that integrates both elements. Until the

revision of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) in 2013, all apprenticeships had to include a minimum amount of 'off the job' learning (DBIS, 2011), in line with the framework set out in the 2009 Apprenticeship Skills Children and Learning act (ASCL). The revised SASE (DBIS, 2013a) removed the requirement for higher apprenticeships to specify off the job learning, and introduced a new minimum credit value for higher apprenticeships of 90 credits. This is an increase from the previous minimum requirements of 37 credits, equating to 370 hours of learning, with a minimum 'knowledge' component of 10 credits (100 hours) (DBIS 2011). The increase to 90 credits is, however, still likely to involve substantially less guided learning or study time than a Foundation Degree or full BA degree of 240 and 360 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) credits respectively (which equates to 120 and 180 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System points). This is only a minimum value, however, leaving open the possibility for more substantive qualifications to be used in higher apprenticeships frameworks. The new SASE also introduced the stipulation that higher apprenticeships should 'be developed in partnership with the relevant professional body or bodies (where they exist)' and, if completed, be a 'recognised pathway to professional registration' (DBIS, 2013b, p. 4).

In 2011 the UK-based Professional Associations Research Network (PARN) was asked by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) 'to assess market demand for Apprenticeships in the professions….and to explore the attitudes and opinions of professional bodies and their senior staff towards Apprenticeships' (Williams and Hanson, 2011, p. 2). The National Apprenticeship Service is the body that oversees apprenticeship provision in England, and is part of the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (DBIS) in the UK government. The research demonstrated a level of interest in higher apprenticeships amongst the professions, finding that many professional bodies support the idea of developing further work-based routes to professional qualification (Williams and Hanson, 2011, p. 27). However, the research also notes that 'Level 6 is the most common minimum requirement for entry to professions' (p. 27), implying that an undergraduate degree would be required by most professional bodies. 'Entry' here seems to imply full membership rather than some form of association to a professional body, which is often available to those with lower qualifications or less experience. The involvement of professional bodies lends credibility to the development of higher apprenticeships as an alternative form of work-based higher education, co-existing with 'more traditional' forms of higher education. In turn, this may open access to the professions to younger people who might have been reluctant to follow a full-time university course, and to experienced employees in associate and technical roles for whom full time education is not feasible.

Professional and vocational formation: structure, context and legitimacy

Patterns and processes of vocational and professional formation are central to questions of vocational practice, knowledge, and identity. 'Formation' is considered here as encompassing the 'structures' or

'pathways' that interrelate aspects of education, training and work, leading to some form of recognition in terms of accreditation or qualification. While formation often has a formal, tangible representation, it can also be said to encompass the processes of assuming professional identity, developing knowledge, capability or competence (Eraut, 1994), 'becoming' professional (Dall'Alba, 2009), and engaging with informal or formal manifestations of professional organisation. How formation is structured is influenced by how the occupation relates to other vocations or professions, and the changing nature and organisation of work (Friedson, 2001; Becher, 1999). Although some may perceive a distinction between a 'profession' and 'vocation', it can be argued that key arguments that emerge through sociological studies of work, professions and knowledge pertain to all occupational forms. Not least of concern are how occupations achieve forms of 'legitimacy' for their activities, the maintenance of 'jurisdiction' over work tasks (Abbott, 1988), hierarchical and collaborative relations between different occupational groups (Abbott, 1988; pp. 69-79), and the emergence of new forms of 'corporate' and 'organisational' professionalism (Evetts, 2004; Muzio and Fitzpatrick, 2011). Within studies of vocational formation, the constitution of vocational practice, the structure and effectiveness of vocational education and training systems, and the nature of relations between workplaces, schools and universities are all of concern (Winch, 2012; Guile, 2009). The contested relation between models of learning as 'acquisition' and 'participation' (Sfard, 1998) is central to debates on which combination of formal and 'informal' structures and processes, involving specific institutions, networks and communities of practice, best serve formation objectives in ways that are appropriate to specific sectoral and professional contexts.

Formation can be primarily 'front end' (Beckett and Hager, 2002), involving highly structured periods of 'schooling' and tightly specified work placements, providing a consistency and 'stability' which establishes a foundation for further development. Alternatively, and in contrast, formation can be entirely or primarily work based (Lester, 2009), with emphasis on learning from colleagues or structured professional development (Eraut, 1994, 2007), informal or formal mentoring and coaching, and through engagement in workplace practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Whereas 'initial' formation is often connected with more structured approaches and 'continuing professional development' with less structure, there are gradations and overlaps between the two, with the degree of 'structure' and career stage not always correlated. Arguably, the degree of emphasis on structure and formality or fluidity and informality in a given profession or vocation implies particular conceptions of knowledge and learning. In turn, whatever views of knowledge and learning are held by professional associations or educational institutions, these may or may not accord with the beliefs and priorities of practitioners.

Professional and vocational formation needs to be seen in context (Unwin et al., 2007). The full topology of 'context' is, however, challenging to grasp. It may encompass the macro-level, including political economy, policy, legislation and professional and sectoral dynamics, the meso-level,

including organisations, networks, partnerships and workplaces, and the micro-context of interaction and interrelation between individuals, colleagues, and clients, each contributing biographical input to a learning environment (Hodkinson et al., 2004). Certain economic and political configurations may enable productive organisational and workplace learning, supported by strategies and patterns of institutionally embedded skill formation (Felstead et al., 2009). On the other hand, where there is limited collaboration and partnership in the socio-technical infrastructure in a given sector or occupational area, as a consequence of macro-economic conditions, political ideologies or policy initiatives, then the potential for structured vocational formation may be undermined. There may be attempts to obscure inherent imbalances in power that exist in many employment relations, and to reduce or extend discretion and control at work through forms of work organisation and performance monitoring regimes (Unwin et al,. 2007; Felstead et al., 2009). The extent to which macro-level conditions 'structure' meso-level organisational practices varies by and within sectors and professions, with considerable variability in the levels of investment in skills and support for discretion, and the continued prevalence of Taylorist work forms and practices (Felstead et al., 2007; Baum, 2002).

How pedagogy is experienced in the workplace is also subject to contextual influences. Pedagogical practices and curricula are shaped by workplace dynamics, embedded and reinforced by individual initiative, organisational strategy, and wider sectoral and professional approaches. Workplaces have distinct 'invitational' qualities and socio-cultural characteristics (Billett, 2002), structuring the extent and range of possible avenues for learning , and this learning may or may not be recognised alongside, and articulate with, formal pathways and routes to vocational formation which offer accreditation, recognition and vocational identity. Although structural contextual factors may impress significantly on workplace dynamics, studies have demonstrated the potential for individual and collective agency to develop and institutionalise patterns of learning within workplaces (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Billett, 2001), supporting aspects of formation in ways that may be often unrecognised and unaccredited, and interacting with structural factors to co-configure and continuously iterate learning environments (Unwin et al., 2007).

Actors within systems of formation co-determine the context of formation, in that the degree of satisfaction with the current structure, flexibility and extent of formation may result in an impetus for change or the institutionalisation of current arrangements. There may be pressures to extend formation 'vertically' in order to involve practitioners of all levels of experience by introducing a foundation tier or a higher level of formation, or pressures to extend formation 'horizontally' by developing new pathways or routes into the vocation or profession. The vertical forms of extension may be both 'upwards', through the addition of higher levels in a formation structure, or 'downwards' through the creation of lower levels, enabling new entrants to access the formation structure with lower levels of

qualification and experience than previously.   Where there are perceptions of a 'gap' in formation that is militating against progression to higher levels of capability, there may be demands for new or improved structures to reinforce progression. These pressures may be about meeting the challenges facing the profession or vocation, due to technological or policy change, or may arise through ambitions to extend the influence of the profession or vocation (Larson, 1977). Reforms or changes to formation may also be resisted, on account of the extent to which they may 'delegitimise' the status of the qualifications and learning achieved by those who have passed through existing structures, resulting in struggles through which compromises may be sought or conflicts heightened. Some professions may maintain that there is a need for an abstract body of knowledge that is tested and iterated through traditional academic mechanisms, but this will require appropriate conditions to be engendered in Higher Education Institutions, and sufficient freedom for those institutions to contribute to the knowledge base effectively. On the other hand, other professions may seek to enforce a notion of practical 'knowing' that can only be developed through the workplace. It could be argued that such a commitment will require the active engagement of employers and more experienced employees in order to enable novice practitioners to engage in the workplace 'communities', 'networks' and 'pedagogic practices', necessitating different formation structures and processes.

Research approach

The following section demonstrates how a selection of higher apprenticeships are located in, and impact on, structures of professional and vocational formation in England. Thus the focus is primarily here on the 'occupational dimension' of apprenticeships, or the 'induction' into the 'occupational community' (Fuller and Unwin, 2011). The eight higher apprenticeship projects selected for analysis were chosen for their capacity to illustrate both the diversity of higher apprenticeship provision emerging and the diversity of professional and vocational formation structure. Choice of apprenticeship project to study was also constrained by the availability of documentation on the partnerships involved and whether the relevant apprenticeship framework had been agreed. Research involved a qualitative content analysis of publically available documents that related to the involvement of organisations and agencies and the objectives of the project, and apprenticeship framework documents which set out in detail the various knowledge and competence qualifications contained within an apprenticeship in addition to entry requirements and progression opportunities. Data collection and analysis was 'directed' (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) in that the process was focused on identifying specific characteristics of the apprenticeships, including the qualifications contained within frameworks, minimum duration, organisational involvement and relationships to existing formation structures.

Although these apprenticeships, or indeed the three overarching modes of formation discussed (stronger, emerging, weaker), are not necessarily archetypal, those projects considered here cover some of those sectors where apprenticeships are most numerous in England (i.e. Business Administration, Hospitality, Construction). Equally, the issues raised, in relation to the value of qualifications, opportunities for progression, and the variable topography of context, are significant for all forms of vocational and professional formation. At the time the research was undertaken the numbers on higher apprenticeship provision were very low as the projects had recently started, and very limited data was available for the study relating to recruitment, completion or progression of apprentices. The higher apprenticeships covered here are at Levels 4 and 5 on the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF), although some contain qualifications on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), evidence of demand for more substantive qualifications and a recognition of the importance of connecting the apprenticeship with an overarching formation structure. The table below provides an outline of each of the higher apprenticeships studied.

(**Table 1 about here**)

Higher apprenticeships in stronger formation structures

Strongly structured formation exists where professions or vocations have historically required substantive volumes of knowledge content, developed licence to practice regimes with formal requirements for qualification, and drawn on cultural-cognitive and regulative elements to maintain authority (Abbott, 1988; Scott, 2008). Such professions have generally valued the notion of a knowledge base that draws on, and iterates, a body of abstract theory, or a highly explicit procedural body of knowledge. Strong formation structures are also characteristic in hierarchies of occupations that reflect a transparent, and highly regulated, division of labour, for example in the medical professions (Abbott, 1988). However, the strength of a formation structure does not necessarily negate its capacity to adapt to circumstance. The routes to professional qualification as a Chartered Accountant via the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), or to Chartered Tax Advisor via the Association of Tax Technicians (ATT) provide interesting examples. The AAT and ATT work closely with corresponding chartered professional associations such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) and the Chartered Institute of Taxation (CIOT), in addition to employers and educational institutions, to ensure that trainee accounting and tax technicians are able to acquire appropriate knowledge and practice experience, and to provide progression routes. The capacity of professional Accountancy for flexibility, adaptability and self-determination has frequently been noted (Armstrong, 1985; Annisette and Kirkham, 2007), reflecting its history as a profession that has succeeding in demarcating its territory, acting pragmatically to maintain status and authority (Sikka and Willmott, 1995). Importantly, Accountancy has a history of

successfully ensuring that new vocational policy initiatives are adapted to professional standards, as can be seen in the case of National Vocational Qualifications (Young, 2011).

Higher apprenticeships have been introduced for Audit, Tax and Consulting pathways as part of a professional services framework at Level 4, with Level 7 pathways in Accountancy, Audit and Tax also recently validated (Financial Skills Partnership, 2013). The pathways at Level 7 take apprentices to full professional status with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) and the Chartered Institute of Taxation (Hammett and Baker, 2012; Financial Skills Partnership, 2013). In the case of the Audit and Tax pathways at Level 4 apprentices will gain knowledge based qualifications (the ICAEW Certificate in Accounting Finance and Business or the ATT qualification in Taxation) which will provide a foundation for future progression as these are widely recognised qualification that are embedded into routes to further qualifications. Indeed, the recently validated framework at Level 7 includes the Level 4 apprenticeship as a potential entry pathway (Financial Skills Partnership, 2013, p. 12). On the other hand the Consulting pathway focuses to a greater extent on 'consulting skills' such as 'business and commercial understanding, communications and relationship building, and project management' (Hammett and Baker, 2012, p. 326; Financial Skills Partnership, 2012). The Tax and Audit pathways can be seen to be reinforcing the 'vertical' extension of their professional formation structures to 'lower' Levels on the Qualifications and Credit Framework, and therefore offer further routes for less qualified and experienced potential practitioners to enter the profession. However, this 'downwards' vertical extension is not novel, as work based routes at this Level already exist via AAT or ATT (UKCES, 2011, pp. 15, 18-19). The notion of 'horizontal' extension is, however, more pronounced with the higher apprenticeship route designed as an alternative access point that is 'beyond the traditional talent pool and recruitment model' (Hammett and Baker, 2012, p. 324), and in order to meet identified skills shortages based on the Future Skills in Accountancy report (UKCES, 2011). Management Consultancy, on the other hand, shares little of the strength of the Accountancy and Tax formation structures, with the fluid work practices and skill sets involved in Consultancy work reflected in the lack of an authoritative and coherent body of knowledge or career structure (Fincham, 2006).

There are also apprenticeships in Advanced Manufacturing and in the Sustainable Built Environment, aimed at sub-sectors of the Construction and Engineering workforces. A key impetus for apprenticeship development comes from the priority placed on boosting engineering or advanced construction skills to meet skills shortages and gaps (Leeds College of Building, 2012; Twigg, 2012; Construction Skills, 2011, p. 26). These apprenticeships have been designed primarily to strengthen skills through a work-based route directed at those entering or employed in associate technical roles, within formation structures that are comparatively well developed and transparent, and thus offer established routes through to more advanced roles within the Engineering or Construction-related

professions (SEMTA, 2013; Leeds College of Building, 2012). In the case of Engineering, professional bodies and educational institutions have a series of longstanding networks and institutional arrangements that facilitate vocational formation (Shearman and Seddon, 2010; Engineering Council, 2009), while the Construction sector has managed to maintain some continuity over time through sustaining the training levy system developed by the Construction Industry Training Board (Toner, 2008). The initiators and leaders of these projects are Further Education Colleges and Sectors Skills Councils such as SEMTA, Leeds College of Building, Construction Skills and Summit Skills (Leeds College of Building, 2012; SEMTA, 2013), who have built on existing networks of educational institutions, employers and professional associations to provide and validate all the knowledge and competency components of the apprenticeship. In such cases the 'soft infrastructure' (i.e. networks, partnerships and relationships) on which the apprenticeship relies provides the resources and links to develop progression routes for those completing the higher apprenticeships. These resources are embedded in the networks of collaboration, and also include agreed formation structures, such as the 'Construction Technical and Professional Framework' (Construction Skills, 2013, p. 13).

The Engineering and Construction higher apprenticeship frameworks are characterised by substantial knowledge content requirements and a large compulsory core of modules, the involvement of Higher Education Institutions, and durations of around 24 months or more, in order to meet the requirements of the formation structure. For example the Sustainable Built Environment apprenticeship at Level 5 lasts a minimum of 30 months and comprises a minimum knowledge content of 240 credits (out of a total of 314), and the Advanced Manufacturing higher apprenticeship at Level 4 lasts a minimum of 42 months and has knowledge content of a minimum of 120 credits (out of a total of 243). The Sustainable Built Environment apprenticeship incorporates a Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Construction and the Advanced Manufacturing apprenticeship has various pathways that include Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and HNCs (SEMTA, 2013). Both of these apprenticeships are linked with the accreditation routes for relevant professional bodies, including the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in the case of the Sustainable Built Environment (Leeds College of Building, 2012), and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, the Institution of Engineering and Technology and the Royal Aeronautical Society, in the case of the Advanced Manufacturing framework (SEMTA, 2013, p. 21). These apprenticeship opportunities are promoted as alternatives to 'traditional routes' into higher education, offering a greater degree of work-based experience and better job prospects, but progression and achievement of higher education qualifications is still considered a necessary objective. The apprenticeships can thus be considered to be new 'horizontal' extensions of formation structures, aiming to increase the range of pathways into the Construction and Engineering professions in attempts to attract greater numbers of entrants who might not have considered a traditional university route. Progression opportunities to

further higher education qualifications are feasible for those who complete, particularly where there have been endorsements from professional bodies and where Foundation Degrees or HNDs have been embedded in the apprenticeships. There is also evidence that employers in the Engineering and Manufacturing sectors are keen to support progression to higher education (Kewin et al., 2011, p. 14), particularly due to the persistence of skills gaps and shortages and the advent of new technologies.

The notion of 'structure' is central to these apprenticeships. 'A well trained productive workforce' is characterised by the availability of a 'structured career path for technical, supervisory and management occupations to progress to higher level jobs using further and higher education' (Construction Skills, 2013, p. 15). However 'structure' is, crucially, envisaged as involving *both* education *and* work related elements. Rather than dismissing the value of traditional qualifications, actors involved in these apprenticeships have sought to adapt and reform curricula and programmes to fit new imperatives. The strength of the underlying professional formation structures ensures that the higher apprenticeship is adapted to meet existing tried and tested structural requirements, which are imbued with the cultural and cognitive elements that provide credibility with employers, training providers, potential apprentices and decision makers.

Higher apprenticeships in emerging formation structures

The contexts of emerging formation structures are characterised by a more ambiguous mode of professionalism found in corporate or organisational professions (Muzio et al., 2011; Evetts, 2011). Personal knowledge, networks and generic attributes may be particularly valued in these occupations, but nevertheless a form of professionalisation is deemed necessary in order to establish legitimacy and manage relations with other occupations. The growth of business services in the economy, with its requirement for new forms of 'knowledge work' and modes of corporate behaviour, teamwork and self-management, necessitates that professional knowledge constantly demonstrates its 'value' in work contexts (Reed, 1996; Fincham, 2006). Such professions have fewer opportunities to draw on cultural-cognitive or regulative elements for legitimacy, and thus rely predominantly on 'normative' resources, enacted through the promotion of the value of their services in the market. Human Resource Management (HRM), for example, is engaged in a well-documented struggle for greater influence in business environments (Gilmore and Williams, 2007; Wright and Snell, 2005; Francis and Keegan, 2006), while Project Management has gained credibility as a distinctive professional field comparatively recently as a result of the changing organisation of work in the Engineering, Construction and Information Technology sectors, and involves many who might consider their primary allegiance to other professional backgrounds or bodies of knowledge (Morris et al., 2006). Public Relations continually has to justify its value to the business community, and struggles to define the boundaries of its work in distinction with other related business activities (CIPR, 2011). Thus

these 'emerging' business orientated professions are seeking to establish jurisdiction and demonstrate their value in business contexts, findings ways to assert the value of their expertise.

Similarly to the case of apprenticeships in stronger formation structures, the higher apprenticeships here are often providing a 'downwards' vertical extension, offering a route to a fuller professional status to those who are in 'associate' or supporting roles, for 'talented young people looking for an alternative to university' (PRCA/Pearson, 2012, p. 2) or for those who 'may not want to go to university' (Skills CFA, 2012a, p. 6). In the case of these emerging formation structures, however, these routes appear to be novel, and not running alongside existing pathways, and therefore there is less of a 'horizontal' extension at work here. These initiatives may also be seen as primarily serving the professionalisation 'projects' (Larson, 1977) of the occupations themselves, in attempting to establish greater structure to their formation processes, and to secure new members for their professional associations. The Project Management higher apprenticeship framework, for example, suggests that 'a formal project management career structure' will improve project management (Skills CFA, 2012b, p. 6), and that the higher apprenticeship has a key role to play in 'providing structure'. In the cases of the Human Resource Management, Project Management and Public Relations higher apprenticeships, completers either secure or are steered towards an 'associate' level of membership in the professional body, or 'progress towards membership' (PRCA, 2012, p. 6). Vertically extending the structure of formation downwards could be a means of increasing legitimacy through strengthening the presence of the profession, capturing associate and vocational routes within the ambit of the professional association, and thereby increasing numbers and the reach of the profession across organisations.

Prioritising recruitment and access can also mean offering qualifications as part of the apprenticeship that are 'lighter' in terms of knowledge content and duration.   As Muzio et al. (2011) demonstrate, emerging 'corporate' professions such as Recruitment Consultancy and Project Management are prepared to construct new approaches to professional knowledge and organisation to reflect the circumstances of the occupation, and these may depart significantly from the traditional approaches to knowledge and association exemplified historically by Medicine and Law. The qualifications contained in the higher apprenticeship frameworks require relatively few knowledge credits, ranging from 28 in the case of Public Relations to 30 in Human Resource and Project Management, leaving the competency element of the apprenticeship to predominate. It could be argued that there is a risk that such qualification may not offer substantive opportunities to cover the key principles of the field in depth. However, such criticisms could also be countered with the argument that these apprenticeships are only intended to provide a foundation for a professional career, providing apprentices with sufficient familiarity with work to become 'legitimate participants' in the professional enterprise and extend their knowledge through greater immersion in vocational practice.

Higher apprenticeships in emerging formation structures are promoted as alternatives of equal value to higher education, rather than alternatives to *traditional* higher education routes. This crucial distinction is well illustrated in the description of the Public Relations higher apprenticeship as 'aimed at 19-24 year olds who seek a practical alternative to university' (Pearson in Practice, 2012). However there is also a tendency to take advantage of the confusion around the correspondence between 'Levels' on the QCF and the FHEQ to claim, unequivocally, that higher apprenticeships are 'equivalent to a Foundation Degree' (Pearson in Practice, 2012) or 'equivalent to the second year of a degree' (CIPD, 2012), when there is a lower volume of content in these apprenticeships than the 120 CATS credits included in each year of an undergraduate degree. Unlike the apprenticeships in the stronger formation structures listed above, the qualifications that apprentices will take do not therefore provide for 'systematic progression' (Kewin et al., 2011, p. 10) to a higher education qualification. In the cases of, Human Resource Management and Public Relations, the qualifications on offer provide insufficient credit in themselves to provide a basis for progression, whereas the 120 credit Project Management qualification may have a better case. Indeed, some Project Management higher apprentices will benefit from a progression route to a Foundation Degree that has been secured by their employer (Rolls Royce, 2013). The serendipitous nature of progression to higher education for many apprentices contrasts with the Foundation Degrees, HNDs and HNCs that are embedded with the apprenticeships in Advanced Manufacturing or the Sustainable Built Environment, most of which will provide a platform for further higher level qualifications.

Higher apprenticeships in weaker formation structures

Weaker formation structures tend to be located in sectors characterised by labour intensive work process and low levels of skill requirements, where notions of professionalism are absent, or perhaps used primarily to discipline and motivate (Fournier, 1999), rather than to build social legitimation or a coherent identity. In sectors such as Social Care, Hospitality or Retail, work often requires repetitive physical tasks and constant contact with customers, and employees often experience poor job security, shiftwork and low pay (Lloyd, Mason and Mayhew, 2008). Although there have historically been limited requirements for qualifications in many of these sectors, with experience or personal attributes usually valued as highly as formal education, there are claims of significant skills gaps and shortages, including at managerial level (Eborall, Fenton and Woodrow, 2010, p. 12; People 1st, 2012), part of which may be driven, in Social Care at least, by legislative requirements. The 'occupational dimension' of apprenticeships in these sectors is characterised by a weakness in the infrastructure that would otherwise promote 'solidarity…around shared knowledge, skills, values..' and 'formal certification' (Fuller and Unwin, 2011, p. 262), with relatively few opportunities to establish greater legitimacy through institutional mechanisms (Scott, 2008). The higher apprenticeships frameworks in Social Care Management (General Social Care) and Hospitality Management provide a form of

'upwards' vertical extension of formation, by providing a QCF Level 4 or 5 qualification that appears to be targeted at those involved in direct line management in customer service settings. In Social Care Management the higher apprenticeship is 'a clear progression route for employees working at supervisory levels' and 'can be used to enhance the knowledge and skills of existing employees', including 'adult's registered managers, adult's managers and adults' advanced practitioners' (Skills for Care, 2013a, p. 3-5). The most recent iteration of the framework specifies its suitability to 'meet the development and qualification needs of the workforce….and is appropriate for existing staff....or new entrants' (Skills for Care, 2013b, p. 7). In a similar vein, entry to the Hospitality Management higher apprenticeship requires 'significant experience of working at a supervisory level' (People 1st, 2012, p. 9) and 'provides a progression route into higher level management jobs' (People 1st, 2012, p. 7).

The duration of these apprenticeship frameworks can be short, with Social Care Management having a minimum requirement of only 6 months for those over 19 if accredited or prior learning exists although a standard duration of 18 months is mentioned (Skills for Care, 2013b, p. 42), and Hospitality Management lasting a minimum of 12 months. Additionally, there is a relatively low mandatory knowledge content (Social Care only 10 credits, and Hospitality 37), although it should be noted here that framework content, at least in the case of Social Care, was to be revised in the light of the new SASE in 2013. The low minimum durations to the apprenticeships may reflect the fact that many higher apprentices will be 'conversions', adults with some years relevant experience, having progressed into supervisory and managerial roles from entry level work. There is little evidence that those developing the framework envisage systematic progression to higher education from a higher apprenticeship framework in Hospitality Management or on the General Social Care pathway of Social Care Management, but it may also be the case that demand for such progression will be minimal. It could be argued that these apprenticeship structures are extending formation to facilitate work processes in the sectors concerned, by providing a structure to the acquisition of a sufficient level of managerial skill to deliver perceived increases in performance efficiency.

It should be noted here, however, that a specialist route in Social Care Management has been developed on the higher apprenticeship framework, which includes a range of diplomas in professional practice worth 120 credits on the FHEQ, and is directed at those who need 'broader/deeper levels of specialist knowledge to function effectively in their work role' (Skills for Care, 2013b, p. 25), for example those working in dementia or end of life care. This could facilitate a strengthening of the formation structure in Social Care Management, with pathways emerging that retain engagement with a more abstract, conceptually coherent (Muller, 2009), knowledge base. However, the greater extent of knowledge content may result in these apprenticeships becoming more expensive for those participating, which may mean that some employers, and potential apprentices,

prefer the 'lighter touch' general pathway, if legislative and policy conditions allow. The 'functional' rationale presented above does not suggest a deeper vision of professional formation in this sector, and further progression routes do not appear to have been clearly established, other for those who wish to change their sector of employment or train as a social worker (Skills for Care, 2013b, p. 22).

Legitimacy and expansiveness

The classical archetype of a structured route to high professional status incorporates partnerships between a strong professional association, educational institutions as guarantor of knowledge legitimacy, and engaged employers facilitating the formation of new professionals (Millerson, 1964; Abbott, 1988). The ambit of vocational practice can be considered to include both associate professionals and practitioners of other definable occupations for which recognised qualifications and modes of practice exist, implying that a very broad spectrum of arrangements may exist to constitute structures of vocational formation. As professionalism and vocationalism adapt to, and combine with, the logics of organisation and markets, formation structures may reconfigure, resulting in new relations, forms of knowledge and modes of learning. Fuller and Unwin (2003, p. 411-412) outline how 'expansive' elements support vocational formation through a 'stronger and richer learning environment', emphasising opportunities to cross boundaries and engage with other organisations and professionals, access to recognised qualifications and a transparent and comparatively formalised structure of formation. In classical professional formation 'expansiveness' is guided by an institutional logic that enables the recognition, sustenance and prioritisation of professional value, bringing professional associations, higher education and employing organisations within boundaries that are, nevertheless, semi-permeable, both exclusive and inclusive (Friedson, 2001, p. 201-203). However, these classical frameworks have yet to operate at scale outside of the high professions of Medicine and Law, with most formation structures needing to constantly adapt to support the maintenance of professional authority in the constant struggle for jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). In emerging professions or in vocations, the systemic support for 'expansiveness' is not guaranteed, with partnerships between education institutions and professional bodies often weakly institutionalised and contingent, an absence of social legitimacy due to the lack of a distinct professional identity, and a greater need to persuade employers to engage with the purposes of formation.

The role of higher apprenticeships in respect of formation structures appears to relate primarily to meeting perceived occupational skills gaps or the objectives of professions. With the exception of those apprenticeships that relate to scientific and technical areas, there is an absence of higher education involvement, and an emphasis on forms of 'knowing in practice' rather than the acquisition of abstract knowledge, and this may be problematic (Wheelahan, 2010). The development of professional knowledge through practice relies on a series of factors being present in the 'expansive' workplace through an infrastructure that involves managers and peers in formation processes, and a

recognition of the value of learning for organisational processes (Felstead et al., 2009; Rainbird et al., 2004). Arguably, it also entails the provision of opportunities to learn from those in similar roles in other organisations. Ironically, it is often those professional formation structures that rely to a lesser extent on 'knowing in practice' that provide the best conditions for its development. Professional associations in fields such as Engineering and Accountancy have the legislative and network infrastructure to ensure that workplaces provide expansive learning, by requiring the involvement of other, more qualified, professionals in formation processes.

On the other hand, in the emerging commercialised and corporate professions, and sectors such as Hospitality, Social Care and Retail, there are fewer infrastructural mechanisms to promote workplace expansiveness. Studies using a productive systems approach, focusing on how political economy and organisational dynamics impact on workplace learning and professional formation, have demonstrated the extent to which learning in the workplace relies on appropriate institutional conditions (Bishop et al., 2009; Fuller et al., 2009), with sectors such as Hospitality or Social Care particularly susceptible to restriction on learning with limited investments in skill or qualification opportunities. Thus higher apprenticeships in emerging professions and labour intensive sectors are subject to particular pressures on processes of workplace and learner recontextualisation (Evans et al., 2010) to enable formation, brought about by a lack of appropriate infrastructure that would serve to frame the workplace curriculum and learning environment (Hordern 2015). Decisions made to support learning at a workplace level become particularly important, but are correspondingly weakly supported by the institutions that structure the context of formation in these sectors or professions. Whatever the occupational institutional conditions, however, the lack of involvement of educational institutions in many of the higher apprenticeships suggests a potential neglect of the conceptual foundations that would enable apprentices to participate more fully in the ongoing development of their occupation, and indeed in wider society (Wheelahan, 2010).

The conditions of formation that the majority of professions and vocations are subject to also suggest the centrality of the role of professional associations or Sector Skills Councils, in building progression routes and ensuring that practitioners in formation are able to gain access to learning opportunities. The extent to which professional bodies are able to shape the institutional context in which the profession or vocation sits is debateable, with some suggesting that proactive associations that are able to recognise changes in the landscape can steer professions towards new educational and working practices (Greenwood et al., 2002; Nordegraaf, 2011). Professional bodies and Sector Skills Councils in the emerging and weaker formation structures have made considerable efforts to engage employers in coming to a consensus around the shape and content of higher apprenticeships. For example, the Hospitality Management higher apprenticeship framework, developed by People 1st, the relevant Sector Skills Council, provides a long list of those consulted within what is a diverse and fragmented

sector (People 1st , 2012, p. 4). In Project Management, consultation processes involved 80 organisations, primarily employers and training providers (APM, 2012) , while the PR apprenticeship involved 'road shows' and employer engagement in six cities in England, engaging with 'over 200 PR agencies and in house teams' (PRCA/Pearson 2012, p. 2). Considering the extent to which these professional associations and sectoral bodies are operating with little recourse to sources of legitimacy (Scott, 2008), and thus have limited resources to pressure employers into participation, significant work is always needed to gain the support of employers, who are not bound into a relation with the professional body by any infrastructural network. However, despite the recognition of the need to gain legitimacy through employer assent, engagement with the other aspect of sustainable professional formation structures, educational institutions offering higher-level learning, appears to have been less of a priority. This not only restricts the capacity of formation to develop the legitimacy offered by higher education qualifications, it also undermines the development of knowledge resources for the profession that will support the accurate identification, and successful management, of key challenges facing the profession by depriving practice of broader insights and academic research. Importantly for practitioners, it reduces progression possibilities that may be open to others entering at a 'higher' level of the profession following a higher education qualification at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Concluding remarks

Higher apprenticeships are located in formation structures that are characterised by specific articulations of education, training and work that reflect the institutional conditions of given professions or sectors. It seems that actors working with stronger, professionalised, formation structures are able to adapt the policy-driven contemporary manifestation of apprenticeship to the needs of their 'occupational community' and wider industrial imperatives. Evidence of 'horizontal extension' of formation in the higher apprenticeships developed in more strongly professionalised areas of Engineering and Accountancy shows how new alternative pathways to formation are being opened that can co-exist with established routes at the same level, often to address skills shortages and access a broader pool of potential recruits. A further consequence of these may be the development of new alternative forms of work-based higher education that may complement or challenge existing traditional entry routes depending on their popularity and perceptions of their quality. On the other hand, in emerging or weaker structures apprenticeships have a more ambiguous role, reflecting the concerns and ambitions of professional associations with vertical extension 'downwards' to professionalise the existing workforce, or 'upwards' to manage perceived skills gaps or low levels of skill. In these emerging or weaker professional formation structures, the 'occupational community' is itself in the process of development, requiring the strenuous efforts of professional bodies to ensure engagement in apprenticeship development.

Furthermore, there are important issues here that relate to how the notion of apprenticeship may be being portrayed in ways that do not concur with realities for learners and employers, stemming from the use of higher apprenticeship policy as a vehicle for meeting political objectives and the aspirations of professional bodies. Government and many professional associations ascribe higher apprenticeships with equivalence to higher education qualifications in order to bolster their legitimacy, but these claims clearly need to be treated with caution. The diversity of higher apprenticeship provision illustrated here negates claims that this vocational route necessarily leads to structured formation and tangible progression opportunities, suggesting that potential apprentices and employers need to scrutinise the content of a higher apprenticeship very carefully before making any assumptions as to its value. This may be further complicated by the implementation of the recommendations of the Richard Review into the future of apprenticeships in England, which involves plans to replace apprenticeship frameworks with 'standards designed by employers', 'rigorous independent assessment' at the end of an apprenticeship, and a grading system (HM Government, 2013, p. 4-5), with significant implications for the structure and delivery of higher apprenticeships. The move towards linking assessement and grading to the notion of an apprenticeship, rather than to knowledge and competence qualifications in apprenticeship frameworks, is a fundamental change that may have the potential to increase legitimacy of the institution of apprenticeship in England, while opening up new challenges for progression and formation. Equally, as apprenticeships are re-designed, there may also be potential risks to robust professional and vocational formation if the 'occupational community' is perceived only in terms of specific dominant employers, rather than meaningfully including institutions, associations and practitioners themselves.

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Table 1 – Eight higher apprenticeship projects funded by HAF

Name (Level on qualifications framework)	Project lead and partners	Minimum duration	Total credit value of qualifications*	Knowledge qualifications involved
Professional Services (Audit, Tax, Consulting) (L4)	Price Waterhouse Coopers, ICAEW, ATT, AAT, CIOT, Employers	18 months	94 - 111 credits	Diplomas in Accounting and Tax (assessed through AAT and ATT examinations); Certificate In Management Consulting.
Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (L4)	SEMTA, FE Colleges, Employers	42 months	200 – 227 credits	Foundation Degrees, HNDs, HNCs.
Sustainable Built Environment (L5)	Leeds College of Building, FE Colleges, Employers	30 months	304 credits	HND
Human Resource Management (L5)	CIPD, Employers, Training providers	12 months	74 credits	CIPD Level 5 Diploma
Project Management (L4)	APM, Employers, Training providers	24 months	120 credits	EAL Level 4 Diploma
Public Relations (L4)	Pearson in Practice (now defunct); PRCA	15 months	70 credits	EDEXCEL BTEC Level 4 Diploma

Hospitality Management (L4)	People 1st, Employers, Professional associations	12 months	96 credits	Level 4 Diplomas (EDI, Edexcel, City and Guilds)
Social Care leadership and management (General Adult Social Care) (L5)	Skills for Care, Employers	6 or 12 months depending on age	80 credits	Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care (Various awarding bodies)

*Not including functional skills. in some cases these arrangements will need to be revised over 2013-14 as a result of the 2013 revision to the SASE.