



**Enhancing the degree apprenticeship curriculum through  
work-based manager and mentor intervention**

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3 Enhancing the degree apprenticeship curriculum through work-based manager and mentor  
4 intervention  
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6 Journal of Work Applied Management  
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8 **Abstract**  
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10 **Purpose** – Educational policy instruments such as apprenticeship levy and forthcoming lifetime skills  
11 guarantee are creating unprecedented opportunities for rapid growth in a range of work-based  
12 learning (WBL) programmes, requiring increasingly complex levels of collaboration between  
13 providers and employers. Apprenticeships require providers to assume responsibility in ensuring  
14 apprentices' work-based managers and mentors (WBMMs) are equipped to provide effective support  
15 to individuals as they learn 'on the job'. After six years of higher education institution (HEI)  
16 apprenticeship curriculum delivery there is opportunity to examine existing WBMM practice to  
17 inform the design, content and delivery of a shared knowledge base via a practical interactive toolkit.  
18 By developing clearer understanding of WBMMs' experiences, expectations and challenges, the  
19 study aims to reduce potential gaps in knowledge and skills and encourage more effective  
20 collaboration between employers and providers to better support apprentices as they progress  
21 through WBL programmes.  
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25 **Design/methodology/approach** – This paper discusses evolution of higher level and degree  
26 apprenticeships, explores guidance for WBMMs and investigates the influence of expectations and  
27 motivations of WBMMs. Theoretical and conceptual foundations relating to WBL programme  
28 delivery and WBMM role are analysed and discussed. Qualitative data drawn from semi-structured  
29 surveys are analysed thematically to investigate common patterns, clarify understanding and identify  
30 development areas to inform future university provider and employer practice.  
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33 **Findings** - The findings suggest a number of themes to improve apprentice management; further  
34 clarity of WBMMs role, greater involvement of WBMM's for negotiated learning, unplanned  
35 experiences do add value and scope for richer mentoring dialogues. WBL value for WBMMs is  
36 broader than expected, incorporating apprentice performance and output improvements, and  
37 solving complex problems.  
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40 **Research limitations/implications** - The research is drawn from an established University with five  
41 years of experience. However, the context in which programmes are delivered significantly varies  
42 according to providers and employers. This means factors other than those highlighted in this paper  
43 may continue to emerge as the research in this field develops.  
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45 **Practical implications**- The practical implications from findings can be used to cultivate stronger  
46 collaboration, providing a foundation of knowledge intended to provoke further dialogue regarding  
47 content for an interactive toolkit. The findings signal the need for further resources, a review of the  
48 restrictions associated with levy funding for co-creation of a more effective national apprenticeship  
49 framework.  
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51 **Originality / Value** - This paper builds on a limited body of research examining employers'  
52 perspectives of apprenticeship management. Degree apprenticeships have attracted limited scholarly  
53 attention over six years since their inception (Bowman, 2022) resulting in a significant paucity of  
54 research that focuses upon employer role. This study addresses this void by exploring WBMMs  
55 experiences, requirements and expectations, revealing new insights for providers of WBL, employers  
56 and individuals employed as WBMMs.  
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3 **KEYWORDS:** Work-based Manager Mentor, Work-based learning, Higher Level and Degree  
4 Apprenticeships, Negotiated learning, Toolkit  
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6 PAPER TYPE: Research Paper  
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## 10 **Introduction**

11 The introduction of higher level apprenticeships by the UK Government in 2014 sought to offer  
12 greater opportunity for employers to contribute to curricula, recognising that employers and  
13 universities need to work together (BIS, 2016). Six years later, employer-led programmes are vaunted  
14 as a critical success factor for HEIs, employers and wider society, underpinned by empowering  
15 relationships (Daley et al., 2016) potentially overcoming the ‘employer-university’ divide. At practice  
16 level this includes ongoing support from employers to co-create curricula with providers, by  
17 capturing positive lessons from academic learning and translating them into the workplace (Irons,  
18 2017). Policy instruments have continued to build upon this promising start, with the burgeoning  
19 ‘Help to Grow’ programme and forthcoming lifetime skills guarantee likely to create additional  
20 opportunities for a diverse range of collaborative approaches and WBL delivery models for  
21 management development (DfE, 2021). Funding across England has been available since 2017 via the  
22 apprenticeship levy, charged at 0.5% to all organisations with a payroll exceeding £3 million per year.  
23 Employers may only access their contribution by engaging with apprenticeships from Levels 3 to 7.  
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33 Employers value the opportunity to engage with degree apprenticeship programmes (Universities  
34 UK, 2019) attracting high calibre learners, developing knowledge and skills needed by managers in a  
35 rapidly changing economy. Apprentices spend 80% of their time completing work activities,  
36 synthesising and applying what they are learning through taught aspects of the programme to the  
37 workplace. Employers are required to appoint WBMMs, forming key stakeholders of apprenticeship  
38 programmes through an implicit expectation of ownership and engagement demonstrated by  
39 facilitating their apprentices through their journey. Mentors are expected to remain separate entities  
40 from line managers (Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, 2022), yet evidence  
41 suggests widespread amalgamation of fundamentally very different roles of management, mentoring  
42 and coaching, risking complexity and disruption (Roberts et al., 2019). WBMMs are expected to have  
43 capability and capacity to manage apprentices and support the curriculum by facilitating access to  
44 authentic learning at work, a highly complex and ambiguous role which is at odds with the prevailing  
45 view of under qualification amongst UK managers (CMI, 2021). Inadequate support could  
46 compromise long-term sustainability of apprenticeships and national agenda to widen social mobility  
47 through HE (Lester, 2016).  
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3 There are few published studies which explore and inform the complexities of heterogeneous and  
4 disparate support beyond the confines of the provider. Guidance for universities to support WBMMs  
5 therefore remains limited, focused upon internalised responsibilities of providers (QAA, 2019)  
6 juxtaposed with externalised guidance concerning the employers' role in raising standards (Institute  
7 for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (2022)). Yet, there is no explicit instruction or text  
8 indicating how WBMMs should support these initiatives, nor is there adequate attention paid to  
9 strategies to improve the impact of WBL. Furthermore, there is scant reference to who should fund  
10 development and appraisal of WBMM practice through design and implementation of appropriate  
11 training and resourcing.  
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18 Despite challenges there has been accumulation of rich experience gained since 2015, comprising a  
19 body of knowledge which is now generating valuable insights for providers. Hitherto, strategic  
20 partnerships have informed dialogue and discovery at the macro level, driven by funding, business  
21 engagement and broader curriculum rather than emerging miniature activities and relationships  
22 between WBMM and apprentice (Hughes & Saiva, 2019). Pedagogic research lends itself to an  
23 examination of homogenous activities which might loosely associate with WBMM responsibilities  
24 including: portfolio of evidence (Schedlitzki, 2019), evaluation of WBL tools (Garnett, 2020) and  
25 reflective dialogue (Konstantinou & Miller, 2020; Rowe et al., 2020). Minton and Hadfield (2015)  
26 expose risks of disjointed apprenticeship programmes, endorsing apprentice engagement with  
27 WBMMs to make the most of learning opportunities at work, but practically it has not been possible  
28 to review and publish findings about applied aspects of the role until recently. The notion of ongoing  
29 curriculum collaboration supported by effective delivery of WBMM training and guidance remains  
30 sporadic and detached from both providers and a wider community of WBMMs (UUK, 2019;  
31 Bowman, 2022). It is this specific aspect our research seeks to address, building upon work of  
32 Roberts et al. (2019) to provide further insights into the role and social practice of WBMMs.  
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44 Our research is framed within the nascent body of higher level apprenticeship literature providing  
45 deeper understanding of experiences, expectations and challenges of management degree WBMMs  
46 across the South of England, by exploring the extent to which they can realistically support authentic  
47 and immersive learning and achieve optimum outcomes for apprentices and the wider organisation.  
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3 remain largely unexplored to date (Bowman, 2022). Specifically, the empirical findings uncover a  
4 range of disparate activities leading to inconsistent experiences for apprentices, including pockets of  
5 excellent practice which may be used to inform a range of future interventions and support  
6 structures.  
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10 This paper is divided into four sections. Firstly, a literature review explores the role of apprenticeship  
11 management. Methodological considerations are subsequently outlined before the findings are  
12 showcased. The discussion follows, including an outline of the implications of the paper's findings for  
13 practitioners and policy makers. Finally, an initial discussion of intervention recommendations is  
14 provided as well as the paper's limitations.  
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## 18 **Literature Review**

### 19 ***Explicit expectation of WBMM role***

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21 Degree apprenticeship literature across professions focuses mainly on pedagogy, from a provider  
22 perspective rather than employer. Although sparse in the field of management due to its brief  
23 history, there is evidence to suggest apprenticeship programmes are more likely to succeed if  
24 programmes are supported by employers as co-designers, particularly as most apprentices' learning  
25 derives from practical application in the workplace (Lillis & Bravenboer, 2020). At a strategic level,  
26 advantages for employer collaboration have been identified including increased workforce capability  
27 and developing talent, yet the paucity of research makes it difficult to discern the extent to which  
28 this incentive applies at micro level, and specifically the role of the WBMM which is where the  
29 responsibility for the practical application of learning lies (UKK, 2019; Bowman, 2022).  
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34 Design of apprenticeship programmes seeks to engender knowledge, skills and behaviours,  
35 theoretically gained via provider input and practically applied through workplace opportunities. Such  
36 development is guided by the trailblazer informed professional standard and assessment plan, ideally  
37 leading to work integration (Lillis & Bravenboer, 2020). Here, the assessment plan outlines explicitly  
38 that WBMMs should be 'supported via the guide provided by the line manager's employer in  
39 conjunction with the HEI' (CMDA p.7). This concept implies employers have mutual responsibility to  
40 contribute to enhancing curriculum supporting WBMMs to adopt new workplace approaches to  
41 support learning (Rowe et al., 2020), yet early research suggests many are beset by pre-course  
42 concerns amidst an ongoing air of mystery over the exact nature of their roles and responsibilities  
43 (Hughes & Saieva, 2019).  
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55 Concerns are substantiated by a plethora of duties and confusing terminology including '20% off the  
56 job' learning time and perpetually unhelpful distinction between 'academic learning' and 'on the job  
57 delivery' (BIS, 2016), rather than adopting more practical description of 'integrated learning' (QAA,  
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3 2019). Likewise, tripartite reviews form an integral part of WBMM's remit, described as valuable  
4 processes (Dalrymple et al., 2014) which presents an opportunity for 'open and frank discussion' with  
5 apprentice and provider on a quarterly basis about progress and achievement (Hughes & Saieva,  
6 2019; p.8). Yet, there is still no real consensus regarding their benefits in HE (Minton & Lowe, 2019).  
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8 Similarly, it remains unclear as to whether the dialogue creates any value for WBMMs, at worst  
9 replicating similar processes and attracting similar criticisms as performance appraisals (Grint, 1993).  
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13 The extended nature of programmes continues to exacerbate the enormity of WBMMs' task,  
14 requiring sustained enablement of apprentices' applied learning of 'skills, knowledge and behaviours  
15 on an ongoing basis' (CMDA, 2022; p. 7). Assessment plans imply that WBMMs command a clear  
16 understanding of professional standards and degree curriculum comprising modules and a synoptic  
17 project to support the apprentice with workplace application and construction of knowledge in the  
18 workplace. The prevailing expectation infers that WBMMs proactively identify authentic learning  
19 opportunities, steering and contextualising workplace projects in conjunction with effective  
20 academic facilitation to generate valuable learning for both parties, potentially resulting in significant  
21 benefits for the wider organisation (Rowe et al., 2017).  
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### 31 ***Implicit expectation of WBMM role***

32 WBMM is a complex role requiring coaching and mentoring experience, regardless of whether there  
33 is a dual role combining line manager and learning mentor, or where these roles co-exist as two  
34 individuals (Roberts et al., 2019). WBMMs are expected to deploy coaching skills to drive tasks to  
35 facilitate utilisation of knowledge and mentoring skills to support behavioural and professional  
36 development. Currently, there are no sector standardised practice or formalised training  
37 programmes for WBMMs or access to recommended coaching tools which raises questions of  
38 consistency and quality in practice. Expectations that organisations, learners and providers have of  
39 WBMMs can vary depending on a range of variables and conditions, including the working  
40 environment, resources and the apprenticeship standard itself, giving rise to a bewildering list of  
41 implied duties.  
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49 There is a reliance on WBMMs to match initial needs to learning through work, supporting growth of  
50 apprentice autonomy and identity construction (Clarke et al., 2009). In practice, workplace learning  
51 increases when apprentices' self-efficacy improves, potentially due to alignment to increased  
52 initiative and persistence (Eden, 1992). There is an expectation WBMMs facilitate apprentices'  
53 learning through guided review and reflection on experiences (Boud & Solomon, 2001; Kolb, 1984).  
54 The apprentice constructs meaning from reconciliation between new and previous knowledge and  
55 experience potentially resulting in changes of beliefs and behaviours that become the "norm" for  
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3 their profession. It is the WBMM that could positively influence performance outcomes, which  
4 includes verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and physiological feedback, particularly with more  
5 inexperienced apprentices who are found to become more successful if guided by experienced  
6 professionals (Milton & Lowe, 2019).  
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10 WBMMs require time to support development by encouraging apprentices to be critical of  
11 themselves and to challenge current practice in an environment without undue resistance or  
12 criticism. Ideally apprentices become “braver” by sharing their tacit knowledge or “tacit-knowing”  
13 (Brook & Corbridge, 2016) initially with peers, through action learning sets (Quew-Jones & Brook,  
14 2019) and subsequently with their WBMM. This knowledge exchange enhances work-based practice,  
15 empowering the apprentice as envisioned by Antcliff et al. (2016). Drawing on the findings of Roberts  
16 et al. (2019) it is apparent there is insufficient research examining the breadth and depth of WBMM  
17 remits, therefore it is difficult for providers and organisations to fully appreciate the role’s implicit  
18 multiple realities, and subsequently establish further guidelines to steer apprentice skill development  
19 through vicarious experiences.  
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### 27 ***WBMM motivation to manage***

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29 Atkins (2016) highlights differences between WBL and work-integrated learning (WIL) in the context  
30 of apprenticeships. Boud and Solomon (2001) suggest WBL instigates collaboration between  
31 universities and employers to create new workplace learning opportunities, whereas Lester (2016,  
32 p.8) suggests WIL is ‘practice learning in the workplace, through models where the student is  
33 employed but follows a structured academic programme’. The QAA (2018) emphasises the  
34 importance of integration, accentuating the workplace is considered by HEIs as an equally important  
35 source of learning. As such, it appears apprenticeships are founded on the premise that WBMMs are  
36 sufficiently motivated, committed and empowered to inform overall success of the development of  
37 their apprentice, yet may be practically thwarted by Boud and Rooney’s (2015) belief that work takes  
38 central priority, with learning and learner experience viewed as a secondary endeavour.  
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46 Despite the benefits of workplace support, inconsistencies in WBMM motivation and ownership are  
47 apparent, resulting in varied experiences even within the same organisation (McKnight et al., 2019).  
48 The context and culture of the workplace may drive attitudes concerning apprenticeships as well as  
49 the level of support from senior executive teams and further complexities arise where established  
50 relationships become destabilised due to frequent staff changes (Billet, 2016). Roberts et al., (2019)  
51 highlight the value attached to cohesive relationships between apprentice and WBMM, but  
52 Quew-Jones (2022) suggests there may be some merit in the notion of flexibility and  
53 interchangeability to support the developmental needs of the apprentice as they progress.  
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3 A fundamental understanding of each contributory component and its underpinning best practice for  
4 success is required to further engender 'buy-in' (Minton & Lowe, 2019), specifically to inform  
5 appropriate support structures, resourcing and training which implicitly link to optimal organisational  
6 project completions, staff development opportunities, self-fulfilment, career progression and  
7 retention. Support mechanisms and case studies exemplifying such benefits may serve to reassure  
8 the 'busy manager' and reduce anxieties about the commitment required to facilitate  
9 apprenticeships (Mulkeen et al., 2017). Yet, there is little published research examining  
10 organisational cost to benefit aspects of such programmes beyond crude rubrics attached to levy  
11 contributions. Therefore, whilst 'learning organisations' believe that strategic fit of apprenticeships  
12 may be supported by progressive leaders who are likely to value and invest in the wider  
13 infrastructure, potential for negative experiences at the 'coal face' appear to be wide-ranging.  
14 Emerging themes expose WBMM concerns including: losing staff for a day (Minton & Lowe, 2019);  
15 investing in staff who subsequently leave (Hughes & Saieva, 2019); unrealistic supervision time  
16 allocation (Mulkeen et al., 2017); mentoring burden juxtaposed with cost cutting measures (Higgs,  
17 2021); public sector resource constraints (Lillis & Bravenboer, 2020).

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19 These emergent themes, fuelled by inadequate resourcing and infrastructure illuminate an  
20 infinitesimal aspect of the breadth of challenges presented by a diverse range of participants and  
21 host organisations, impacting WBMMs, apprentices, departments and teams. There is an expectation  
22 that providers and employers work together to ensure relevance and consistency of the overall  
23 programme, ensure effective learner support, and integrate the workplace and education  
24 environment (Lester, 2016). Yet, the diversity of tensions explored appears to confront any notion of  
25 genuine parity in supportive strategies, signalling the absence of underpinning frameworks, and  
26 specifically collaboration through a shared vision, common purpose and commitment to  
27 apprenticeship learning. Furthering this embryonic body of knowledge, the study explores  
28 experiences, expectations and challenges faced by WBMMs to develop practical interventions and a  
29 portfolio of best practices to facilitate collaborative and supportive learning environments. It is  
30 anticipated this research will stimulate broader dialogue in terms of practical activities which  
31 providers can subsequently develop to attract and sustain a national professional network of  
32 WBMMs, consequently promoting greater consistency in support mechanisms and interventions for  
33 apprentice learning at work.

## 34 **Methodology**

### 35 *Design/Methodology/Approach*

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3 Adopting an inductive, phenomenological methodology and qualitative approach, data was gathered  
4 through a semi-structured electronic survey to explore views of WBMMs responsible for supporting  
5 learners enrolled on a HEI management degree apprenticeship programme in the South of England.  
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### 8 *Design*

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11 This study explores lived experiences of WBMMs as they engage managers and aspiring managers  
12 through an apprenticeship to develop leadership and management competencies. The research  
13 design draws upon an interpretive and constructivist epistemology to generate socially constructed  
14 data developed from analysis of meaning and understanding through semi structured questionnaires  
15 (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The interpretivist paradigm recognises the indivisible connection  
16 between reality and researcher, and epistemologically that the construction of knowledge is shaped  
17 through one's own conceptions (Tolley et al., 2016).  
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23 A qualitative case study approach enabled a holistic exploration of complex inter-relationships  
24 between individuals and across varying contexts, recognising the effect of multiple perspectives and  
25 social construction of events upon individual interpretation and feelings (Yin, 2018). The researchers'  
26 ability to maintain integrity and truth to ensure construction of meaningful and valid reality is  
27 recognised, in addition to the consideration of appropriate case boundaries, here comprising  
28 organisational context, respondent profiles and pedagogical practice associated with the programme  
29 (Yin, 2018). Inductive reasoning supports formation of emergent theory and diminishes the  
30 contextual boundaries 'in which actors and issues can be considered' (Stokes & Wall, 2014, p.142).  
31 The research focuses upon a management degree apprenticeship programme case study to draw  
32 upon 'rich and textured evidence', creating a detailed picture by exploring phenomena within  
33 'real-world' contexts (Cameron & Price, 2009).  
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### 41 *Data Collection*

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44 A semi-structured survey was developed, containing questions orientated toward key research  
45 concepts uncovered within the literature review to explore WBMMs' attitudes, beliefs and  
46 interpretations (Stokes & Wall, 2017). The survey comprised six open questions to enable  
47 participants to relate their lived experiences by eliciting respondent views concerning: their  
48 understanding of WBL; the value of WBL; the quality of support given; and challenges and  
49 recommendations for improving future practice (Bell et al., 2018; Bansal et al., 2018). The electronic  
50 questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics and piloted via 5 non-programme affiliated  
51 respondents prior to wider distribution to augment reliability, quality and validity of data collected  
52 (Jankowicz, 2013; Stokes & Wall, 2017). Participants were contacted via email to introduce and  
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3 explain relevance, purpose and ethicality of the research, along with an electronic link to enable  
4 participants to access the questionnaire easily and anonymously (Jankowicz, 2013).  
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### 6 7 *Sample*

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9 Given that the nature of the investigation comprised an exploratory inductive approach, focused  
10 upon collection and interpretation of qualitative data, the researchers drew on a non-probability  
11 exhaustive sample technique for a population sample of 71 WBMMs from the Chartered Manager  
12 Degree Apprenticeship responsible for supporting apprentices. The participants were employed by a  
13 range of organisations from a variety of sectors across the South of England whilst supporting an  
14 innovative degree apprenticeship programme delivered by a local HEI, consisting of 3 cohorts and 71  
15 apprentices.  
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21 Data was collected through individual semi-structured survey responses in December 2021 eliciting a  
22 response rate of 15 (21%). Rich case study material was generated by exploring perceptions and  
23 views of a diverse range of WBMMs as some of the programme's key stakeholders (Gehman et al.,  
24 2018). The semi-structured survey allowed respondents time and space to reflect upon and fully  
25 answer questions posed and provided the flexibility required for participants to relate their own  
26 story and experience of their role, specifically in terms of the extent to which they have engaged  
27 with: apprentices as they learn; the content, structure and pedagogy of the programme itself; and  
28 university procedures and support systems. The researchers adopted this broad approach to enable  
29 an effective and robust exploration of the topic complexities, strengthening the richness of data  
30 collected (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Responses were collated and analysed, facilitating a clearer insight  
31 into the lived experiences of WBMM participants (Bansal et al., 2018).  
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### 40 *Data Analysis*

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42 Data from the survey were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic approach  
43 supported by Nvivo 12 software to explore key themes. As the data was drawn from participants  
44 from different roles, contexts, experiences and perceptions, the researchers adopted a  
45 variable-oriented approach by applying Braun and Clark's (2006) rigorous yet flexible framework to  
46 facilitate a progressive 'iterative and reflective process' (Maguire & Delahunt 2017, p.4).  
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51 Firstly, the researchers undertook repeated readings of the data to reinforce reliability, shuttling back  
52 and forth to holistically explore themes across individual questionnaires, beginning to transcribe and  
53 note initial ideas. Each data set was then coded inductively to identify recurring themes and patterns  
54 (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Emerging ideas simultaneously informed "conceptual memoing" to  
55 begin theorising data whilst coding (Glaser & Strauss, 2017, p.83). The codes were collated into  
56 common themes leading to development of descriptive codes, subsequently augmented by  
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3 underpinning interpretive and pattern codes. Descriptive codes were reviewed and refined to allow  
4 clustering and cross-referencing of themes to effectively incorporate differing perspectives of  
5 WBMMS, exposing layers of detail across the entire data set, informing an early thematic map of  
6 analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Definitions for each theme, category and code were cross-checked by  
7 inspecting categories and their contents to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity  
8 (Patton, 2002). This recursive approach enabled traverse between phases of reviewing data, coding  
9 and early findings enabling a comprehensive and immersive exploration which identified themes and  
10 patterns across the cases, generating comprehensive insights beyond mere description (Bansal et al.,  
11 2018). The researchers mitigated potential issues of bias throughout data collection and analysis  
12 stages of the process by individually cross-checking analyses and making sense of the interpretations  
13 made (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). A report was created from the findings, offering illustrative  
14 examples and quotes, intended to raise aspectual awareness of this form of WBL to inform future  
15 practice.

### 24 25 *Ethical Considerations*

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27 Ethical approval conformed to the primary researcher's institutional protocol which is founded upon  
28 the Chartered Association of Business School's (2015) principles of research.

### 30 31 **Findings and Discussion**

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33 Examining both previous literature and research data themes emerge which offer a deeper  
34 understanding of current apprenticeship management practice, provoking discussion at both a  
35 practical and academic level.

### 36 37 38 39 *Concept of WBL*

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41 When asked about their understanding of WBL (Q1), all WBMM respondents agreed its primary aim  
42 facilitated opportunities to apply learning to work. Respondents highlight: ***"learning the theory and  
43 then putting it into practice with a scenario at work to finish learning on the subject," Q1, P3;***  
44 ***"using the company you work for and the staff to further develop your skills by applying the new  
45 degree skills to issues in the workplace." Q1, P6.*** This understanding offers a strong foundation for  
46 apprentices to learn experientially through facilitation to practice new skills and knowledge. In terms  
47 of best practice, it is essential that all WBMMS have grasped the concept of WBL at an early stage,  
48 proposed at induction by Roberts et al. (2019).

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50 For some WBMMS learning seems to be viewed as disconnected between theory (university led) and  
51 practice (workplace opportunity) described as discrete activities by two respondents: ***"the  
52 apprentice does have the opportunity to put their learning into practice within a work-based  
53 environment - splitting their learning from study and practical." Q1, P4; "learning that is carried  
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3 ***out in the workplace and is practical, rather than theory” Q1, P4.*** Analysis reveals potential  
4 inconsistencies in levels of learning expectations; ranging from a binary approach of formal and  
5 informal learning to one of integration. This led to differences in apprentices' experiences, potentially  
6 mitigated by WBMM training or shared examples of strengthened connections, enlivening Lester's  
7 (2016) vision of genuine work informed learning.  
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12 Analysis suggests expectations of learning from planned experiences in the workplace seem to occur  
13 with 'the doing' rather than reflection (Kolb, 1984). Despite clear links between assessment and  
14 development of skills, knowledge and behaviours one respondent refers to ***“opportunity to develop  
15 soft skills- leadership, communication, teamwork and self-confidence earlier and faster in the  
16 workplace.” Q2, P1*** revealing a potential gap between workplace facilitation and the programme. An  
17 explicit connection between knowledge, skills and behaviours and module content is essential best  
18 practice, which in turn requires a degree of translation for WBMMs to interpret their role of effective  
19 facilitation. Nonetheless, translation of practice into the workplace as a concept was strongly  
20 supported ***“equates to real life which is much more important” Q1, P3; “offers examples in the  
21 everyday working environment and linking to relevant projects at the time”, Q1, P8.*** Therefore,  
22 WBMMs have an appetite for involvement with negotiated learning in the workplace with one  
23 respondent suggesting ***“allowing a challenge in a safe environment” Q3, P6.*** The findings reveal a  
24 sound conceptual understanding of WBL, however, recurring themes of discrete workplace and  
25 provider activities weaken notions of collaborative curricula in practice. Connection to programme  
26 outcomes for professional skills and behaviours as an assessed part of the CMDA standards appear  
27 weak, yet arguably raises questions about the extent to which WBMMs should further align to a  
28 more integral mentoring role. If apprentices are more closely supported in the workplace through  
29 regular assessment-relevant dialogue and reflection, the benefits of strengthened facilitator critical  
30 reflection and inquiry skills through Bowman's (2022) suggestion of a learning transfer toolkit appear  
31 logical. Building upon work of Schedlitzki (2019) and Rowe et al. (2020) findings suggest  
32 improvements in apprentices' behavioural learning may follow if WBMMs are equipped to create  
33 optimum conditions for meaningful reflective dialogue and journaling, specifically confidence to  
34 examine and challenge customary organisational practice.  
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#### 50 *Value of the Apprenticeship*

51 From WBMM perspective the apprenticeship offers many positive outcomes for apprentices, team  
52 (Q2) and organisation (Q3) with far reaching impact, aligning with the work of Garnett (2020). There  
53 was a strong view that apprentices' engagement within the workplace has increased, exemplified by  
54 a number of comments including: ***“If selected correctly, a hungry to succeed apprentice who is keen  
55 to grow and add value.” Q2, P7; “Hunger to learn and progress” Q2, P4.*** The associated  
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3 organisational benefits are evident from both planned activities and unplanned experiences,  
4 leveraging time spent upon work-based problems; ***“timetabled into the delivery of the project”, Q3,***  
5 ***P7; “space to create new processes and look at continued improvement”, Q3, P3.*** Here, planned  
6 experiences seemed to provide affirmation of apprentices’ achievement, adding value by overcoming  
7 problems and becoming knowledge producers, aligning with the views of Boud & Rooney (2015).  
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12 Analysis also highlights the value of unplanned experience through apprentices’ conduit of  
13 knowledge in importing and exporting examples of emerging practice between the programme,  
14 peers and workplace, exemplified by one respondent: ***“Fresh approach to what we do day-to-day***  
15 ***with new ideas and fresh eyes.” Q2, P4.*** Incidences of deeper inquiry and exploration of  
16 organisational practice is evident, illustrated by comments: ***“More willingness to challenge 'how it's***  
17 ***always been done', the status quo when not having previous experience” Q3,P1; “a newer***  
18 ***generation of thinking”. Q3,P4.*** Here, apprentices are developing confidence to ask questions and  
19 generate insightful dialogue, reinforced by supportive organisational learning culture characteristics  
20 described by Billett (2016) as engendering reflexive capabilities and safe forums for difficult  
21 conversations.  
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29 The analysis reveals evidence of growing confidence extending further in practice, noted by one  
30 WBMM who suggests their apprentice is ***“more than capable of doing my role in my absence”***  
31 attributing this to ***“the WBL they have done around certain topics - especially when dealing with***  
32 ***managing and motivating their staff group.” Q3, P3.*** Here, capability to take the lead illuminates the  
33 notion of fresh perspectives but also illustrates benefits of increased productivity in terms of work  
34 completion that WBMMs may never have had time to invest in. The data suggest a genuine  
35 empowerment of apprentices fulfilling Antcliff et al.’s (2016) early vision for graduate employees,  
36 generating enhanced motivation to engage more broadly, highlighted by one WBMM ***“studying is***  
37 ***motivational to the apprentice and engages them far more in the activities and performance of the***  
38 ***organisation.” Q2, P3.*** The data reveals apprentices’ desire to drive independent learning, finding  
39 congruence with the work of Billett (2016) and confirming WBMMs’ active participation in Atkins’  
40 (2016) definition of WIL. Yet, whilst the value to the organisation is recognised, there is no formal  
41 record of success beyond academic and workplace progress reviews between learner and  
42 organisation, suggesting that full integration between workplace and institution recommended by  
43 Lester (2016) and contribution to intellectual and structural capital endorsed by Garnett (2020) are  
44 not always entirely explicit. In extending Roberts et al.’s (2019) principles for practice, such  
45 transformational activities require capture as best practice examples to share with existing and new  
46 managers and other stakeholders.  
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3 The data suggest apprentices have developed a rounded knowledge of different facets within their  
4 organisations evidenced by an ability to ***“work at more varied tasks and across the wider team” Q2,***  
5 ***P4.*** There was an implied increase in the level of business awareness and soft skills aligned to those  
6 within the assessment plan ***“to drive change in the business” Q2 P7.*** This impact may have been  
7 influenced by growing confidence and experience of the apprentice as they progress becoming  
8 comfortable to share ‘tacit-knowing’ (Brook & Corbridge, 2016). Surprisingly, unlike research from  
9 Roberts et al. (2019) there was no mention of the fulfilment of the role as part of their own  
10 development. This finding raises questions as to whether there should be more direct benefits for  
11 WBMMs. Here, further training, qualifications and opportunities to showcase apprentice success via  
12 internal and external awards seem likely interventions to foster good will and encourage exemplary  
13 practice in colleagues and more specifically, other WBMMs across the sector.  
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### 21 *Support and Challenges for WBMMs*

22 Analysis reveals the prevailing theme of time, dominating much of the commentary from both  
23 WBMM and apprentice perspective ***“not enough time for them to explain everything they are***  
24 ***doing.” Q5, P5; “Time, time, time! We don't have time to do our normal day job, constantly fire***  
25 ***fighting” Q3, P3; “Work pressures impacting the agreement to give the student non-working time”,***  
26 ***Q3 P6 ; “to consistently allocate 20% of work time is a big ask when an organisation is time***  
27 ***dependent” Q3, P7.*** An unexpected finding was defending the apprentices' time. One respondent  
28 was required ***“to deflect those who don't understand the process and why the business is***  
29 ***supporting the apprentice given time to complete his work where he is uninterrupted” Q5 P6.***  
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37 These findings concur with previous literature that highlights difficulties due to resources available to  
38 WBMMs, exemplifying Boud and Rooney's (2015) view that work always takes priority over applied  
39 learning. There is no consistency in meeting frequency or format, varying from monthly, fortnightly  
40 or weekly, taking place remotely or in person and there is no reference to tripartite review at all. The  
41 dislocated range of approaches may stem from individual WBMM management style, organisational  
42 or provider buy-in or perceived capability of the apprentice, all of which present potential problems  
43 for provider, apprentice and organisation. The empowerment of the WBMM apprentice relationship  
44 is embedded within the concept of apprenticeships yet such an approach reduces parity and risks  
45 over-reliance upon apprentice autonomy and resilience, specifically where there is inadequate  
46 resource, training or commitment evident. Despite warnings raised by Roberts et al. (2019)  
47 concerning a lack of information as an impenetrable barrier to apprenticeship management it is  
48 particularly concerning to note that under supported, time-poor WBMMs remain reliant upon  
49 previous ad hoc experience, in part resulting from on-going challenges associated with the quantity,  
50 quality and timing of provider information.  
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3 The data suggests the purpose for WBMM apprentice meetings appears to be task oriented including  
4 to ***“ensure they are undertaking real tasks that apply knowledge and add value to business” Q4,***  
5 ***P1; “discuss projects and how this could link into practice” Q4, P4.*** These positive discussions  
6  
7 evidence the tackling of real-life work-based problems, adding value by making stronger connections  
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9 in the context of their own workplace. However, richer mentoring style dialogue is less apparent, for  
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11 example ***“getting them to explain the impact it has on the workplace”, Q4, P5; “motivating the***  
12 ***apprentice through the lockdown .... supporting my apprentice to cope with some of the other***  
13 ***negative attitudes of a minority of apprentices” Q5, P2.*** For WBMM it signifies the breadth of  
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15 complexities of their role exposed by Robert et al. (2019), specifically the requirement to adapt from  
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17 task driven manager towards a hybrid coaching and mentoring role. In recognising these challenges,  
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19 four respondents created wider apprentice support by drawing upon others in the business to share  
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21 their experiences, exposing the apprentice to wider networks, forums, meetings and experiences,  
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23 instrumental in Bandura’s (1977) concept of social learning.  
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## Conclusion

Our research exposes a range of opportunities to share best practice, but also reveals tensions over 'learning responsibilities' and ownership. Whilst more experienced WBMMs have clearly well-developed competencies enabling them to ensure learning fits with real workplace experiences, lesser supported WBMMs may not have required degree of knowledge or confidence, or do not see apprentice learning as their responsibility. The extent to which poor support might affect apprentices learning from unplanned or informal learning experiences, reflection on impact and progress towards professional standards remains unclear. The apparently wide-ranging and inconsistent approach to supporting apprentices at work is difficult for stakeholders to locate, requiring a far greater degree of alliance between providers, employers and WBMMs in designing strategies and tactics to develop WBMM competencies and practice in supporting apprentices through higher and degree apprenticeships. Effective apprenticeship collaboration requires a renewed evaluation of how providers and employers can support WBMMs operating at the 'coal face' of the apprentices' learning.

The value of the apprenticeship from the WBMMs perspective uncovered here is broader than existing research suggests, widening the extant body of knowledge (e.g. Antcliff et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2019) in looking at the challenges for employee stakeholder collaboration as it specifically addresses WBMMs perspective. Benefits highlighted in existing literature draw upon planned experience in solving genuine work-based problems which contribute to workplace processes but also provide the apprentice with confirmation of ability. The research presented here reaches further in identifying benefits of unplanned experiences for the organisation. Given the experience gained since the inception of higher and degree apprenticeships there is a wealth of tacit apprenticeship management knowledge and practice that could be captured to inform and improve support for all WBMMs whatever their current experience of apprenticeship management, in turn providing consistency and parity for apprentices. It also serves to strengthen authentic dialogue between multiple employers and providers, forming an opportunity to highlight real business challenges and showcase successes to inform curricula.

Our analysis of current WBMM perceptions and requirements builds upon nascent research in this sphere, particularly Roberts et al (2019) and underpins envisioning of a new hybrid coach/mentor role for the negotiation of learning through tasks whilst stretching apprentices to reach challenging skills and behavioural standards. The findings have been further distilled to contribute toward a conceptual model to inform our vision of an interactive toolkit comprising a wealth of co-created resources (Figure 1). The toolkit offers a foundation level of programme knowledge, advice and guidance at different stages of the journey as well as opportunity to delve deeper for examples,



supportive discussion forums and accredited training courses to offer tangible support structures and rewards to WBMMs beyond just fulfilment of apprentice development. In developing our toolkit for consideration and collaboration we believe this model offers the foundation required for providers to review and strengthen crucial relationships within and across communities of employers, providers and individuals for optimum apprenticeship practice. However, if both WBMMs and University representatives are compromised by time and resource it remains increasingly challenging to fulfil the key component of ongoing dialogue (Antcliff et al., 2016) or build lasting and trustworthy relationships.



Figure 1: WBMM Toolkit

### Limitations and Future Directions

Our research raises important insights for stakeholders and providers involved in design and delivery of apprenticeships. Practically, a need for increasing levels of support for WBMMs so the full learning impact of programmes can be harnessed. This involves further resource implications and requires a genuine desire to co-create a more effective apprenticeship framework. A solution is reviewing restrictions associated with levy funding to enable providers and employers to better support apprentice learning at work.

We recognise limitations to this study due to its exploratory nature. It is not intended to provide a generalised detailed analysis of WBMMs from such a small and localised sample but rich and descriptive insights from WBMMs' perspective to provoke new ideas and underpin dialogue, particularly in co-creation of the toolkit. It recognises that the research elicited a greater response

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3 from more experienced WBMMs, therefore findings are less representative of views from recently  
4 recruited WBMMs.  
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7 Future studies might incorporate views of apprentices and managers who are less experienced in  
8 apprenticeship management, from different sectors and organisation size, and in conjunction with  
9 views of providers. Research to explore the current value of tripartite reviews is also recommended.  
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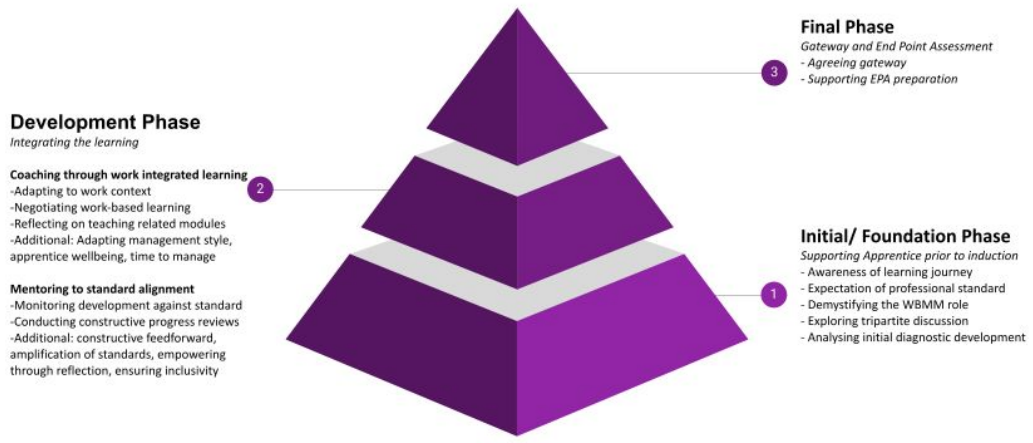


Figure 1: WBMM Toolkit

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