Microsoft

Microsoft Apprenticeship Programme Research

White Paper

Contents

FOREWORD

When Microsoft launched its apprenticeship programme in 2010 there was a quiet confidence that it would achieve great things. Nearly a decade later, and with over 20,000 apprenticeship starts, delivered by Microsoft Learning Partners, that quiet confidence has become something to shout about. This new research demonstrates the continued growth of the Microsoft Apprenticeship Programme since similar research was conducted in 2015 and suggests this will continue through 2019.

Importantly, digital apprenticeships buck the general trend that has seen a drop in starts. The Government's October 2018 figures show that apprenticeship starts were 15% lower than the corresponding period in 2016. These same figures though showed digital apprenticeships increasing by 21%. However, it is crucial that we are not drawn into a numbers game. Digital apprenticeships provide highly relevant skills in a digital world that benefit both the apprentice and the employer. The emphasis must be on quality over quantity.

Some of the most powerful stories in this research come from the apprentices themselves and the impact they say their apprenticeships have had on their lives. These range from career progression to personal development and social mobility. 70% of apprentices believe that undertaking a Microsoft apprenticeship will help with social mobility, although there remains work to be done to ensure the socioeconomic and gender diversity of apprenticeships is improved. This is something Microsoft cares deeply about, and we continue to push ourselves and our partners to meet this challenge.

Apprenticeships also bring tangible financial returns with apprentices estimating that they earn £5,200 more in their annual salary as a result of choosing an apprenticeship. Apprentices also said that the programme offers them greater financial independence compared to their peers (75%), for example compared to those who have opted to go to university. 7 in 10 apprentices also say the programme puts them on the right track to buy a house. Given the majority of apprentices in Microsoft Programmes are under 24 years old, this is a positive trend as the latest statistics show the average age of first-time property buyers in the UK to be 31 years old. In short, digital apprenticeships are transforming people's lives and that is why we committed to 30,000 apprenticeship starts across the programme by 2020.

Part of the success of Microsoft's Apprenticeship Programme is our unique supply chain model. This is a complementary partnership between Microsoft, our learning partners and employers across the country. Microsoft ensures quality training content, credibility and recognition, while learning partners help deliver the training and skills for apprentices out in the real world. Through qualitative interviews, apprentices have said learning partners' instructors and coaches are central to their career development, not least as important sources of career advice. For employers, learning partners are crucial to everything from recruitment, training, and maintaining a dialogue with Microsoft to ensure the continued success of the programme.

This new research also shows the value of apprentices to employers. Employers reported a £36,840 uplift as a direct result of taking on apprentices, up from £11,782 in 2015. Together with the notable financial and social impact for apprentices themselves, this research paints a powerful picture – digital apprenticeships are a win-win – and that's certainly something to shout about.

As we look to the future of the programme, there are a number of areas where it must evolve.
As technology advances, apprenticeships need flexibility to adapt to these changes. Apprentices themselves said that better communication between the training provider, employer and Microsoft is critical to avoid discrepancies between the training received and the apprentice's job. AI is a good example. Microsoft announced its AI Academy in the UK which will train 500,000 people in AI skills, but we need a facility to incorporate AI skills into current apprenticeship standards immediately, rather than waiting for a 3-year review cycle to come around. This clearly demonstrates the pivotal role of Microsoft's Learning Partners in the continued success and growth of the programme. Indeed without this critical part of the ecosystem, there would be no programme! We sincerely thank them for their valued partnership and look forward to continuing to develop future digital tech talent together.

Apprenticeships do not exist in a bubble – they must develop to match the skills people need in the real world. It is not yet clear that apprenticeships have the kind of flexibility needed by employers to adapt to the rapidly evolving world of digital occupations and we urge the Government to consider this as work continues on apprenticeship standards.

But that is for tomorrow. Today, let's celebrate the incredible achievements of all those involved in Microsoft's Apprenticeship Programme – a programme that is changing the lives of apprentices and employers in the UK.

Hugh Milward
Director of Corporate, External and Legal Affairs
Microsoft UK

BACKGROUND

The Microsoft Apprenticeships Programme has been running at scale in the UK since 2010. Microsoft has been committed to enabling the uptake of apprenticeships in the UK, with three key aims: help more people access digital careers, enable employers to widen their talent pool, and by extension, address critical shortages of digital specialists. From 2010 to 2018, nearly 20,000 people have started a digital career through the programme, establishing it as a mature and proven model as a viable talent acquisition option for employers and an attractive career strategy for young people.

Previous research commissioned by Microsoft and conducted by Edelman Intelligence in 2015 explored the impact of the apprenticeship programme on both apprentices and employers who take on apprentices. The results demonstrated the quality of the scheme and its success in enabling apprentices to build a solid foundation to a fast-tracked career while driving greater productivity and diversified skills in employers. It is hugely valued as a way to train and equip the next generation of IT experts with the relevant skills and experience to strengthen the UK's IT sector.

The key role of Learning Partners
Apart from apprentices and employers, the programme relies on the vital contribution of Microsoft learning partners, which include leading IT training providers in the UK, such as QA, Firebrand, Intequal and GK Apprentices. Through a 'supply chain' approach, sensitive to the needs of small and mid-size employers, Microsoft has amplified learning partners' local reach and high-quality delivery capability, helping them engage with individual employers and apprentices to successfully grow the programme and establish apprenticeships as a viable way to boost digital tech talent. While Microsoft leads on content creation, training is carried out by learning partners who hold a direct relationship with apprentices and employers. Learning partners also assist employers with apprentice recruitment and engage prospective employers to join the programme. To support learning partners in their key role as educators, programme managers and ambassadors of the programme, Microsoft ensures the programme's content is relevant and attractive to employers and apprentices, while its reputation also amplifies learning partners' local reach.

In January 2017, Microsoft announced plans to invest and grow the programme to deliver 30,000 more apprentices by 2020. In 2018 a research study was commissioned to provide a deeper understanding of the current status of the programme, and to identify key opportunities to improve it going forward. The output from the research study is being shared through this report, providing readers with an understanding of the programme through the eyes of its main users – apprentices and employers.

METHODOLOGY

Research was commissioned by Microsoft and conducted by Edelman Intelligence in May 2018. This paper combines insights from in-depth qualitative interviews as well as quantitative results from two online surveys. Both stages of the research were conducted with partner employers and former and current apprentices who are currently part of the apprenticeship programme or have been in the past.

The research was made possible by the contacts provided by learning partners and their role in engaging their network of employers and apprentices to take part to the following phases:

Ten one-hour qualitative interviews were conducted to understand the experiences of those who were involved with the programme in different ways. Insights from these one-hour interviews informed the design of the quantitative online survey.

Two online surveys were carried out between 15th June 2018 and 1st November; one was completed by former and current apprentices; the other was completed by employers who have taken on apprentices. Contact with online survey participants was established through learning partners: QA, Firebrand and Intequal.

A total of 166 current apprentices, 45 former apprentices and 48 employers completed the online surveys. Detailed breakdown of the research sample are as follows:

APPRENTICES

211 Apprentices

166 Current
45 Former

76% 22%

Age

Under 16 to 18	**20%**
19-24	**66%**
25+	**11%**

Training Provider

QA	**75%**
Intequal	**9%**
Firebrand	**16%**

Year starting apprenticeship

Started in 2013	**1%**
Started in 2014	**3%**
Started in 2015	**4%**
Started in 2016	**15%**
Started in 2017	**51%**
Started in 2018	**25%**

Professional status

Junior professional	**62%**
Professional	**34%**
Junior managerial/team lead	**1%**
Intermediate managerial/team lead	**1%**

Programme area

Systems or Network Support	**61%**
Business administration	**17%**
Software and web development	**12%**
Data analysis	**3%**
Digital marketing	**1%**
Sales	**1%**

Applied to other apprenticeships at the time?

Yes	No	Can't rememeber
13%	**69%**	**18%**

Scotland: **13%**
North: **15%**
Wales and N.I: **0%**
Midlands: **19%**
London: **21%**
South: **27%**
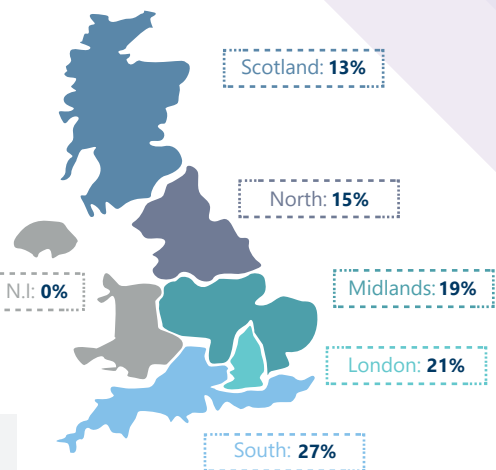
EMPLOYERS

48 Employers

Training Provider

QA	**67%**
Intequal	**13%**
Firebrand	**15%**

Levy paying employer

Yes	**38%**
No	**29%**
Don't know	**33%**

2017 turnover

Under £2 million	**17%**
£2 - 2.999 million	**8%**
£3 - 4.999 million	**10%**
£5 million GBP or more	**23%**
Prefer not to say/don't know	**42%**

Numbers of employees

Up to 49 employees	**31%**
50-199 employees	**17%**
200-999 employees	**10%**
1000 employees or more	**38%**
Don't know	**4%**

Scotland: **6%**
North: **21%**
Wales and N.I: **0%**
East & Midlands: **25%**
London: **17%**
South: **27%**
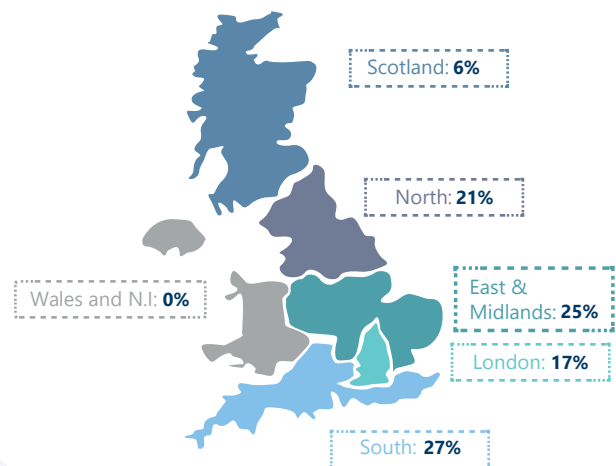
ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of results from research conducted to assess the Microsoft Apprenticeship Programme's overall impact and value and understand how it can be improved. This year's study follows on from research carried out in 2015, and again was conducted with current and former apprentices and employers who take on apprentices from the programme.

The results show that over the past three years, **Microsoft's apprenticeship programme has strengthened its ability to create impact amongst both apprentices and employers**, continuing to deliver immediate monetary benefits as well as longer-term value.

Apprentices see it as an opportunity for personal development and a driver of **social mobility.**

Amongst **employers**, there is a **fundamental shift in how the programme is perceived.** From being mainly a means to attract young people in a cost-efficient way, it is now described as a value creator for individual employers and the industry. Employers also mentioned a **more diverse workforce** as a key outcome of the programme, together with better productivity.

The supply-chain model and Microsoft presence are recognised as **key to the success** of the programme, delivering value especially in terms of brand recognition and ensuring quality training content.

There is an **expectation for Microsoft to grow its role further**, strengthening partnerships with learning partners and employers. Going forward, two main areas to improve the programme were identified: increase awareness of the programme amongst prospective apprentices and improve the programme's relevance through more flexibility in course content and structure.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

1. The impact of the programme

Over the past three years, Microsoft's apprenticeship programme has strengthened its reputation and is now clearly associated with immediate monetary benefits as well as longer-term value for both apprentices and employers. In particular, the results show considerable evolution in the way employers perceive the programme – it is now seen as a key strategic investment for employers and the industry as a whole. Those in the programme also recognise its impact on increasing social mobility and diversity.

Apprentices

The programme is seen by apprentices to enable not only their **career progression** but also their **personal development** and **life opportunities.**

In the short term, the programme brings about **tangible financial returns.** Apprentices estimate that they earn 31% more annually because of the programme, equating to approximately £5,200 more in annual salary. The programme is also said to offer apprentices more financial independence compared to their peers (75%), for example compared to those who have opted to go to university. 7 in 10 (71%) of apprentices also say the programme puts them on the right track to buy a house. Given the average age to complete the apprenticeship programme to be 20 years old, apprentices are at a distinct advantage compared to other young people in getting on the property ladder – the latest statistics show the average age of first-time property buyers in the UK to be 31 years old. [1]

Longer term, apprentices also believe the programme will improve their career prospects (84%) and see it as an opportunity to **jumpstart their career** (90%). Not only does it give apprentices a strong **knowledge base** (86%), it also allows them to **grow as an individual** (81%) and gives them a unique opportunity to **improve their path in life** (86%).

Apprenticeship as a means to achieve social mobility
Aside from professional and personal developments as well as financial gains, the programme is also seen as a way to achieve **social mobility.** 42% of apprentices come from lower social class backgrounds (C2DE). As an apprentice, they begin their careers on a higher social status (C1). 7 in 10 **apprentices believe the programme will help them achieve a higher socio-economic status** than their parents.

Data also indicates that current apprentices are more likely to come from higher social classes ABC1 (59%) than former apprentices (55%). Though this is just indicative, and further research is needed to see whether this finding consolidates and becomes statistically significant over time, the hypothesis is that as its reputation and awareness improve, the programme has increasingly become an attractive career path for those from all backgrounds, even those with less financial pressures.

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1 http://static.halifax.co.uk/assets/pdf/media-centre/press-releases/2018-08-11-FTB-stumping-up-209k-on-property-ladder-press-release.pdf

Employers

Since the last study in 2015, data highlights clear improvements in the impact the programme brings about and evolution in the way employers see the apprenticeship scheme accredited by Microsoft.

Taking part in the programme is now a **value-creating tool that brings crucial skills and diversity** to companies, but also plays an important part in ensuring a workforce capable of the demands of the industry in the future.

While employers interviewed in the qualitative phase of the research have voiced barriers from their peers to joining the programme, including the uncertainty of taking on a completely new type of employee and not having the support and guidance in doing so, the research clearly shows that – once joined the programme – employers do recognise wide positive impacts brought to their organisations. Over 8 in 10 employers of apprentices say they **would recommend the programme to other businesses** (83%) – showing that employers can be ambassadors of the programme in the industry.

A significant improvement in value vs. 2015
The programme's positive impact on employers fall under three key areas: **improved client service,** an elevated and more **diverse workforce**, and significant **financial benefits.** The programme is seen to broaden employees' skill bases (85%), inspire them (74%) and bring about a highly committed workforce (74%). Moreover, it has also brought about more diverse employees, for example in terms of age and background (77%).

Graph 1. Impact of the programme – Employers
Q8. In what ways has the Microsoft Apprenticeship Programme had an impact on your business? [Top 2 box, Agree]

Impact of the programme on employers

	Impact	2015 Comparable Results
...has broadened the skill base of the employees who have been through the apprenticeship scheme	85% ↑	73%
...has allowed us to better service our clients	79%	-
...has made our employees more diverse overall, e.g. younger, from different backgrounds	77%	-
...has inspired our employees	74% ↑	52%
...has allowed us to gain highly committed staff	74%	71%

Shift in emphasis from cost-saving to value creation

Since the last study carried out on the apprenticeship programme in 2015, there has been a clear **evolution in the motivations for joining the programme**, with emphasis shifting from cost-saving to recognition of the programme's value.
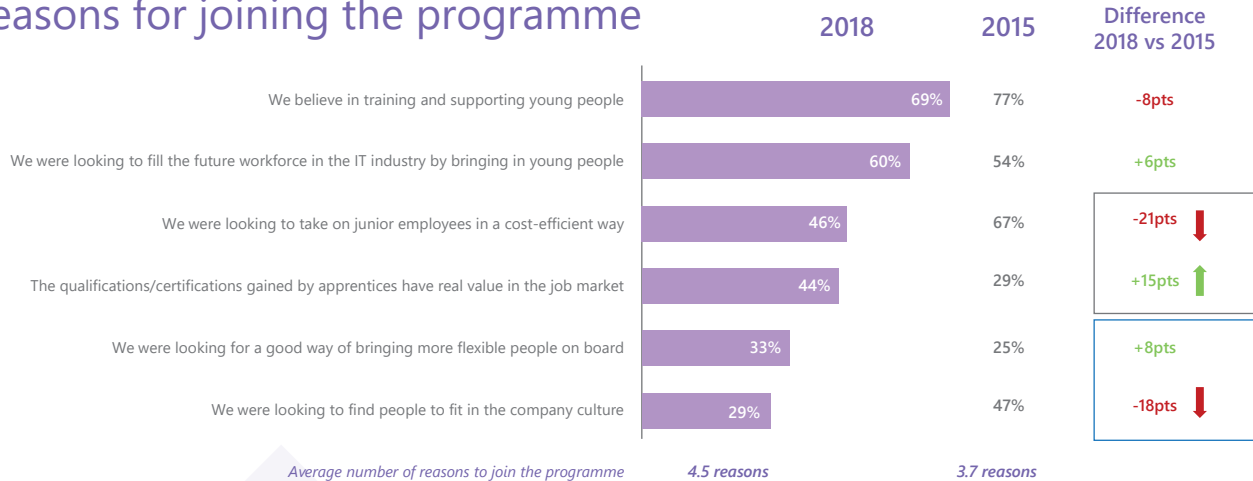
Belief in training and supporting young people (69%) and to bring in young people to fill the industry's future workforce (60%) continue to be the top drivers to join the programme. While the top motivators remain similar to those in 2015, there is a significant shift in the expectations the recruitment of young apprentices will bring to their business. **From joining the programme as a cost-saving opportunity to a stronger recognition in the value that qualifications of apprentices will bring.** There was a 21-percentage point drop in those who said they joined the programme as a way to take on junior employees in a cost-efficient way (46%) and a 15-percentage point increase in those who say a reason to join is because the qualifications/certifications gained by apprentices have real value in the job market (44%).

There is also a shift in the profile of people employers are looking to take on. There is less emphasis placed on finding people to fit the company culture (29%, minus 18-percentage points from 2015) and employers are now looking to bring on more flexible employees (33%, up 8-percentage points from 2015).

Graph 2. Reasons for joining the apprenticeship programme – Employers
Q1. *For which of the following reasons did your business join the apprenticeship programme?*

Reasons for joining the programme

	2018	2015	Difference 2018 vs 2015
We believe in training and supporting young people	69%	77%	-8pts
We were looking to fill the future workforce in the IT industry by bringing in young people	60%	54%	+6pts
We were looking to take on junior employees in a cost-efficient way	46%	67%	-21pts ↓
The qualifications/certifications gained by apprentices have real value in the job market	44%	29%	+15pts ↑
We were looking for a good way of bringing more flexible people on board	33%	25%	+8pts
We were looking to find people to fit in the company culture	29%	47%	-18pts ↓
Average number of reasons to join the programme	*4.5 reasons*	*3.7 reasons*	

Tangible and clear Impact
All this translates into a **significant increase in the overall programme's monetary impact** noted by employers: from £11,782 in 2015 to £36,840 this year the average estimated monetary value of Microsoft accredited apprenticeship on each business yearly.

Graph 3. Reasons for joining the apprenticeship programme – Employers
Q9. Thinking about factors such as company profit/turnover and productivity, and increasing skills and motivation to your team, if you had to put a monetary value on the impact of the apprenticeship programme PER YEAR, what would you say? Please consider all apprentices in the programme in a typical year.

Companies hiring apprentices have noted a **significant increase** in the monetary impact of the programme (vs. 2015)

£

£

Average estimated monetary value of the impact Microsoft apprenticeship has on each business yearly

11,782
2015

36,840
2018
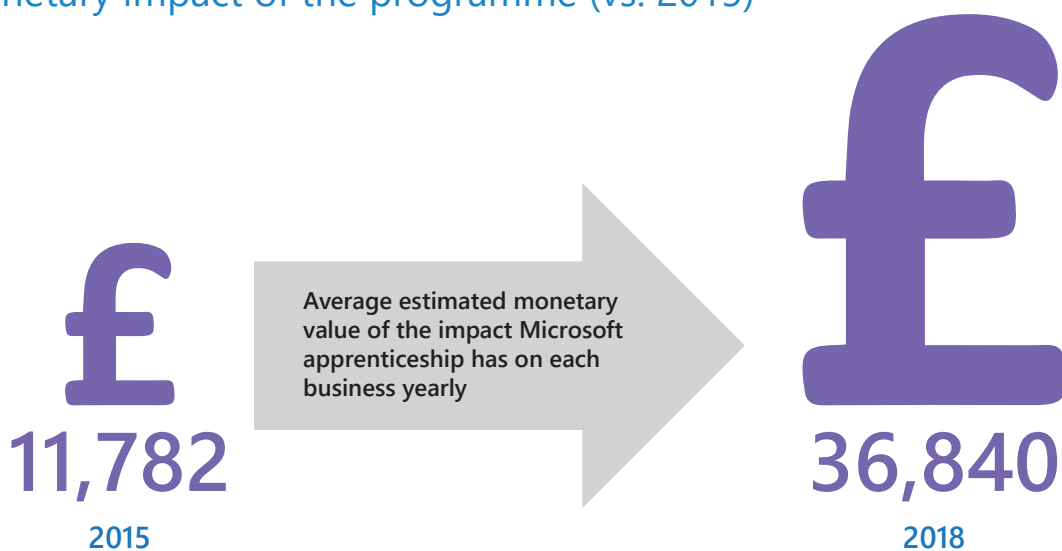
"The quality of apprentices I have seen so far is fantastic. [...] and we ended up more profitable" – Employer interviewed in the qualitative phase

2. The value of the supply chain and Microsoft's role

The current supply chain model, in particular, the complementary roles that Microsoft and learning partners play is the basis to the programme's success.

While Microsoft's reputation ensures quality training content, credibility and recognition, learning partners play a key role in bridging communication between actors and providing support.

Through qualitative interviews, apprentices have cited instructors from learning partners as engaged teachers and an important source of career advice. For employers, learning partners are crucial in everything from recruitment, training, and maintaining a dialogue with Microsoft to ensure the relevance of training content going forward.

Apprentices

Apprentices emphasise the benefit of **gaining valuable industry** and **personal experience** and **improve their job opportunities.**

9 in 10 current apprentices say the experience provided by the programme is really valued in the industry (89%) and that the programme has modern and **up-to-date content** (78%). Aside from industry experience, the programme also encourages **diversity** – 82% have said it allowed them to meet other apprentices from different backgrounds.

8 in 10 say it gives them a lot more **upwards options** than other apprenticeship programmes (77%) and 7 in 10 say it gives them the opportunity to work in better companies than other programmes (73%).

Graph 4. How apprentices see the programme
Q2. If you were to recommend this apprenticeship to someone considering to apply for it, how likely would you use each of the statements below about the programme? Q4. Which of the following benefits do you feel the apprenticeship deliver? [Top 2 box, Agree]

How apprentices see the programme

TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS	BETTER EXPERIENCES	DIVERSITY	PROGRAMME CONTENT
89% say it provides experience that is **really valued in the industry**	**77%** say it gives you a lot more **upwards options** than other programmes	**82%** say it allowed them to meet other apprenticeship from **different backgrounds**	**82%** say it has **modern and up-to-date** content
	73% say it gives you the opportunity to work in **better companies** than other apprenticeship programmes		

A distinctive programme enhanced by Microsoft
Among the many reasons why apprentices have joined the programme, two main themes that have emerged are around the **programme's distinctiveness** *(64%) and the* **appeal of the Microsoft name** *(55%). 1 in 2 current apprentices said they joined the programme because they wanted to gain skills they wouldn't have acquired elsewhere (51%), and one in two said the ability to gain Microsoft certifications and qualifications was a reason for joining as they are well recognised within the industry (48%).*
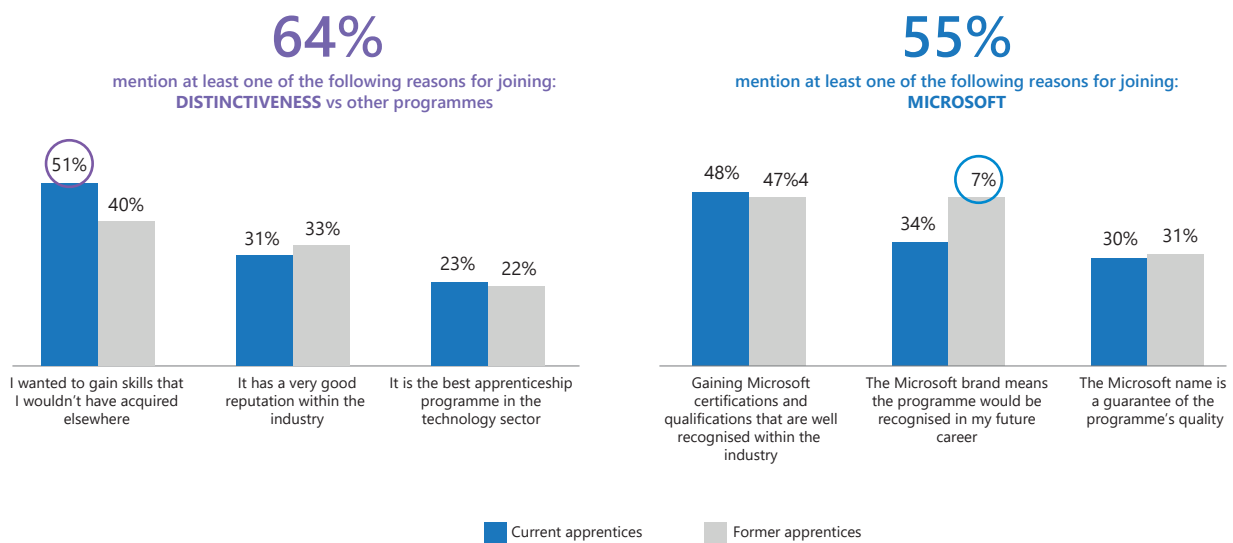
Graph 5. Reasons for joining the apprenticeship programme – Apprentices
Q1. For which of the following reasons did you apply to the <learning partner> apprenticeship accredited by Microsoft?

64%
mention at least one of the following reasons for joining:
DISTINCTIVENESS vs other programmes

	I wanted to gain skills that I wouldn't have acquired elsewhere	It has a very good reputation within the industry	It is the best apprenticeship programme in the technology sector
Current apprentices	51%	31%	23%
Former apprentices	40%	33%	22%

55%
mention at least one of the following reasons for joining:
MICROSOFT

	Gaining Microsoft certifications and qualifications that are well recognised within the industry	The Microsoft brand means the programme would be recognised in my future career	The Microsoft name is a guarantee of the programme's quality
Current apprentices	48%	34%	30%
Former apprentices	47%4	7%	31%

◼ Current apprentices   ◻ Former apprentices

Microsoft as a guarantee of quality, relevance and credibility
Apart from the appeal of Microsoft's branding, Microsoft's involvement in the programme also adds value by ensuring **quality, relevance, credibility** and **future opportunities.**

7 in 10 say Microsoft brings skills that will help them progress professionally in the future (67%) and provides access to a useful professional network (53%).

It delivers training content of the best standard (58%) and improves the quality of learning partners (49%).

It also makes it more credible (62%), **provide international status** to their CV (60%), and makes the programme more recognisable to their family and peers (53%).

The findings also highlight opportunities for Microsoft to improve its role in the supply chain model further by helping to improve the quality of learning partners and provide access to best-in-class technology.

Graph 6. How Microsoft adds value to the programme – Apprentices

Q4a. *Thinking more specifically about Microsoft's involvement in the programme, how do you think it adds or does not add value to the programme?*

How Microsoft adds value to the programme

Category	Value
Bringing skills that will help me progress professionaly in the future	67%
Ensuring credibility	62%
Ensuring better job opportunities	60%
Providing International status to my CV	60%
Delivering training content of the best standards	58%
Providing access to a useful professional network	53%
Making it more recognisable for my family and peers	53%
Creating the training material and ensuring the content is relevant to me	51%
Creating winning partnerships to all parties involved	51%
Improving the quality of my training provider	49%
Giving access to best-in-class technology	38%

■ Current apprentices

There is room to improve Microsoft's role in the supply chain model further

Employers

The importance of **Microsoft branding** in attracting apprentices and Microsoft's role in **bringing skills and gravitas** to the programme is well recognised by businesses. Employers of apprentices have said that Microsoft's involvement bring skills that will help their company grow in the future (60%), ensures credibility (58%), and makes the programme more recognisable for prospective apprentices (58%).

"There's a lack of good quality people in the market. It's not what you do, but how you do it – it's important for us to get people in their first jobs, so that we can teach them the how, shape them. It's hard to attract talent without Microsoft branding." – *Employer interviewed in the qualitative phase*

New apprenticeship Standards and Funding

A specific part of the research this year was focused on assessing the awareness and the perception of the recent regulatory change in the way apprenticeships are funded and delivered.
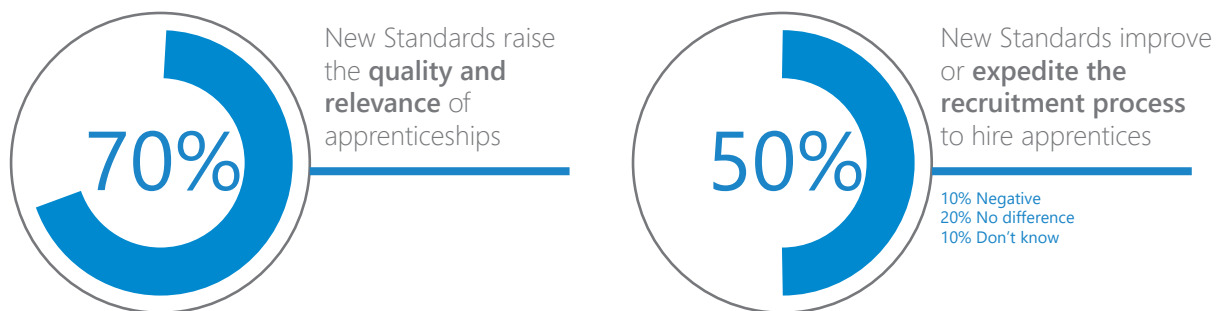
Most employers (71%) have noticed some change in the way the apprenticeship programme was delivered or funded in the last year. For most UK employers the **New Standards have raised the quality and relevance of apprenticeships** and generally expedited the recruitment process, though there is still room for improvement, given the relatively new system.

Graph 7. How the New Standards have impacted employers

Q10B. The government introduced a new apprenticeship Standards to replace previous apprenticeship frameworks in England. How do you think this has impacted apprenticeships and businesses who take on apprentices?

For most this has meant an improvement in the apprenticeship scheme, thanks to the New Standards

New apprenticeship Standards' impact on apprenticeships and businesses who take on apprentices

70% — New Standards raise the **quality and relevance** of apprenticeships

50% — New Standards improve or **expedite the recruitment process** to hire apprentices

10% Negative
20% No difference
10% Don't know

Whereas there is still **confusion on the new levy system,** 33% of business employers do not know whether their company pays a levy and cannot appreciate the possible impact of the reform.

3. Areas of evolution of the programme

Building on the positive experiences of the programme, both apprentices and employers would like to see Microsoft take on a greater, more active role. A **greater effort on branding** and **optimised contents** are two areas both stakeholder groups identified.

For apprentices, this includes building a **stronger presence and recognisability** of the Microsoft accredited apprenticeship amongst potential candidates in their school environment. For employers, this means **increasing the attractiveness of digital careers**, and also through **greater collaboration** with Microsoft and learning partners. Other areas to continuously improve is to ensure up-to-date, relevant and flexible training content.

Apprentices

Going forward, apprentices expect the programme to increase its saliency and continue to deliver great content. Improvements fall under these two main themes:

Content remains key
In terms of content, current apprentices would like to see **more communication within the supply chain,** i.e. between Microsoft, learning partners and businesses employing apprentices to ensure training content is relevant for the industry (46%). They would also like more flexibility in choosing modules relevant to their role (45%).

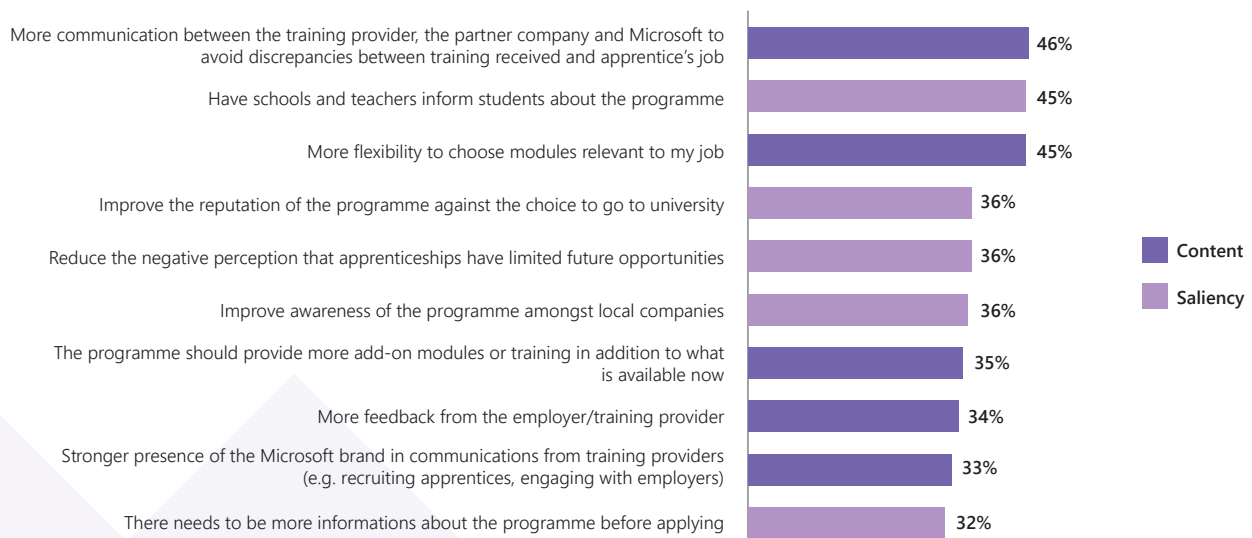### Increased external saliency and reputation are very welcomed
To terms of saliency, apprentices expect more effort put into **raising the awareness and reputation of apprenticeships among secondary educators** (46%) and local businesses (36%).

These include improving the reputation of the programme against the choice to go to university (36%) and reducing the negative perception that apprenticeships have limited future opportunities (36%).

Apprentices expect the programme to be more organically positioned within the decision-journey of potential future apprentices. This includes raising awareness of the programme through **promotion in schools and colleges** (84%), in career/job fairs for young people (60%), and on **social media** such as Facebook and LinkedIn (56%).

Graph 8. Top 10 reasons on how the programme can be improved – Apprentices
Q9. Which of the following should be improved in the future, in order to make the Microsoft-accredited programme better for people like you? [Select all that apply]

Reason	Percentage
More communication between the training provider, the partner company and Microsoft to avoid discrepancies between training received and apprentice's job	46%
Have schools and teachers inform students about the programme	45%
More flexibility to choose modules relevant to my job	45%
Improve the reputation of the programme against the choice to go to university	36%
Reduce the negative perception that apprenticeships have limited future opportunities	36%
Improve awareness of the programme amongst local companies	36%
The programme should provide more add-on modules or training in addition to what is available now	35%
More feedback from the employer/training provider	34%
Stronger presence of the Microsoft brand in communications from training providers (e.g. recruiting apprentices, engaging with employers)	33%
There needs to be more informations about the programme before applying	32%

Content
Saliency

The Potential for an alumni programme
The feedback for a potential alumni programme has been very positive. 9 in 10 current apprentices think it is a good idea (92%) and 6 in 10 said they would **actively participate** (58%). They envision the alumni programme to take the form of events hosted by Microsoft (79%), online forums (59%) and events involving local schools and colleges (53%).

Employers

As with apprentices, employers' expectations for continuous improvement are around content and awareness generation. In addition, there are expectations around diversity and the level of support they receive from Microsoft.

For employers, the utmost priority is to **ensure training content continues to be up-to-date** with the latest technology (57%). Some employers expressed interest in **additional modules or training in soft skills such as communication and customer service,** while others would like to see technical training in areas such as cybersecurity, cloud architecture, data analytics and artificial intelligence. Flexibility around the content and structure of the programme is also seen as key (45%).

Promoting a digital/tech career
In terms of awareness generation, employers would like to see **more promotion** around the benefits and potential of a tech/digital career to young people (45%) and improved relationships with secondary education to encourage interest and applicants to the sector (43%).

Diversity has become an area that employers would like to see improvement: 45% of employers would like to see a larger presence of female apprentices in the programme.

> *"It would be great if we can collaborate with Microsoft on experience days to promote apprenticeships. Emphasis on the impact tech has will be more attractive to women (rather than to 18- year old boys who already think tech is cool)."* – Employer interviewed in the qualitative phase

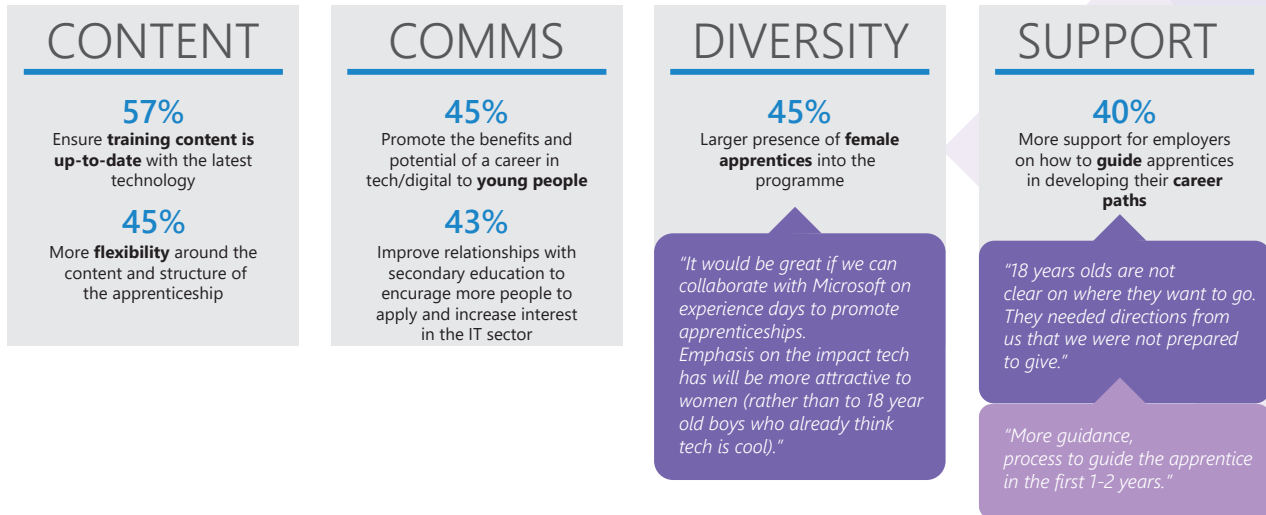### *Support and guidance in training apprentices*
Raised as one of the key barriers or concerns for businesses to join the programme, employers would like more **support on how to guide apprentices** in developing their career paths (40%).

> *"18-year olds are not clear on where they want to go. They needed direction from us that we were not prepared to give".* – Employer interviewed in the qualitative phase

Graph 9. Areas of improvement – Employers

Q5. Which of the following areas should be improved in the future, to make the apprenticeship programme better for your business? [Select all that apply]

CONTENT

57%
Ensure **training content is up-to-date** with the latest technology

45%
More **flexibility** around the content and structure of the apprenticeship

COMMS

45%
Promote the benefits and potential of a career in tech/digital to **young people**

43%
Improve relationships with secondary education to encourage more people to apply and increase interest in the IT sector

DIVERSITY

45%
Larger presence of **female apprentices** into the programme

"It would be great if we can collaborate with Microsoft on experience days to promote apprenticeships. Emphasis on the impact tech has will be more attractive to women (rather than to 18 year old boys who already think tech is cool)."

SUPPORT

40%
More support for employers on how to **guide** apprentices in developing their **career paths**

"18 years olds are not clear on where they want to go. They needed directions from us that we were not prepared to give."

"More guidance, process to guide the apprentice in the first 1-2 years."

CONCLUSION

Findings from this research highlight **opportunities for Microsoft to take the lead** in improving the apprenticeship programme **in collaboration with the other actors** in the programme's ecosystem.
These opportunities involve continuing and strengthening the dialogue with three audiences: government and policymakers, the programme's supply chain (learning partners, employers, apprentices), and the wider UK community of educators.

Government and policymakers

Apprentices and employers have expressed a desire for more flexibility and choice in the way the programme is structured and how training content can be selected. There is also demand for additional training content around both soft skills (e.g. communication and client service) and hard skills (e.g. cybersecurity, cloud architecture). In addition, the new levy system is still unfamiliar to many, creating inefficiencies on how the overall system works.

These findings highlight an opportunity for Microsoft and policymakers to work together to make sure the **programme's content** is **enhanced** and remain fit for purpose, answering to the call for additional modules and a better understanding of the levy system, as well as consolidation of the New Standards.

The wider community of educators in the UK

Apart from liaising with government officials, the results of the research point to huge potential and opportunities to raise awareness and the reputation of both apprenticeships in general and specifically Microsoft's Digital Apprenticeship in the UK.

Engaging with educators and influencers in the education industry is seen as key to **raise the profile of digital apprenticeships and increase consideration of these as a potential career choice** amongst **future candidates.** In particular, Microsoft's Digital Apprenticeship has the potential to be positioned as **a feasible and attractive alternative to university** for young people.

There is a consensus that a **larger digital presence** on job sites, career guidance websites and social media will also be an effective approach.

The programme's supply chain

Considering the changing regulatory environment and Microsoft's plans to grow the programme, there is room for Microsoft to deepen relationships with and between learning partners, employers and apprentices.

Employers and learning partners clearly need guidance on how to navigate the new levy system and have more relevant and flexible content and training modules. Employers are also looking for more **support** on how to take on and guide apprentices – the lack of initial direction has been mentioned as a key barrier to joining the programme, especially for smaller businesses.

Apprentices' response to the potential of an alumni programme has been overwhelmingly positive. An alumni programme would be an opportunity to enhance the apprentice's experience of the programme by providing current and former apprentices with a support network, potentially improving the programme's reputation. It can also be leveraged to better promote digital apprenticeships nationwide.
Given learning partners' key role in bridging communication between actors in the programme, they will be central to delivering and improving it as it evolves and grows in the future.

KEY FIGURES

• Current apprentices estimate that they earn 31% more annually because of the programme, equating to approximately £5,200 more in annual salary

• 75% of current apprentices say the programme gives them more financial independence compared to their peers, i.e. the opportunity to start their career free of university debt

• 90% of current apprentices say the programme gives them the opportunity to jumpstart their career

• 86% of current apprentices also said the programme gives them a strong knowledge base

• 72% of current apprentices believe the programme will help them achieve a higher socio-economic status than their parents

• 83% of employers say they would recommend the programme to other employers

• 74% of employers say the programme has allowed them to gain highly committed staff

• 77% of employers say the programme has made their employees more diverse overall

• 89% of current apprentices say the experience provided by the programme is really valued in the industry

• 67% of current apprentices say Microsoft adds value to the programme by bringing skills that will help them progress professionally in the future

• 71% of employers have noticed some change in the way the apprenticeship programme was delivered or funded in the last year

• 33% of employers do not know whether their company pays a levy or not

• 45% of current apprentices would also like more flexibility in choosing modules relevant to their role

• 45% of current apprentices would like to see schools and teachers inform students about the programme

• 92% of current apprentices think an alumni programme is a good idea and 58% say they would actively participate

• 45% of employers would like to see a larger presence of female apprentices in the programme

• 40% of employers would like more support on how to guide apprentices in developing their career paths