

Addressing learning challenges of COVID-19 for Higher Education Graduates

Organised by the University of Exeter Business School

This research explores how COVID-19 has changed the way the Higher Education (HE) apprentices learn in crises and the problems students have faced in their daily professional lives.

Why this is important to know?

Traditionally HE institution is viewed as a means for equipping graduates for their future employment. Degree of Apprenticeship (DA) programmes are developed by the HE institutions to meet the governmentally approved apprenticeship standards, which set out the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of an apprentice in a particular occupation.



Despite the fact that employability provision in universities will be more important than ever, Covid-19 has had a profound impact on changed learning experience of HE students across the world, including HE apprentices. The current unprecedented situation poses an important question – *do HE institutions prepare their students fit for practice in the real world?* Therefore, the study is conducted with three main purposes in mind:

- to understand better the learning challenges of HE apprentices during the pandemic and the skills necessary for their current and future employability;
- to provide a theoretical basis for support activities with the apprentices and staff may require;
- to provide a basis for the promulgation of specific policies, curriculum and practices aimed at addressing the learning challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak for HE graduates.

How the study will be conducted?

The research project utilises qualitative research methodology because the situation about the students' experience in response to COVID-19 pandemic is little known. Use of qualitative research methodology will enable us to analyse the changes in the learning experiences of HE students in the light of the social isolation and home working due to COVID-19 and help to gain a broader spectrum of insights. The primary data will be accumulated mostly to obtain first-hand insights and perceptions of current HE students experiencing COVID-19 pandemic.



Careers and employability provision in universities will be more important than ever, but it can't continue to be based on assumptions that are drawn from a different era....



University of Exeter

A group of researchers is appealing for volunteers to study the experiences of apprentices and those working with them and who might be concerned about HE apprentices' professional prospects during the COVID-19 pandemic

For more information please contact: O.Andrianova@exeter.ac.uk

Why have I been approached?

You have been approached from two reasons: first, as you are a student on any programme of DA at the University of Exeter or teaching staff currently working with DA students. Secondly, you might feel concerned about your employability or employability of other students. This therefore makes you more susceptible to having experienced forms of learning challenges in the COVID world.

What would taking part involve?

During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your workplace experiences when working and studying during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview will last 45-60 minutes depending on the length of your answers. You will only be asked to answer as much detail as you are comfortable with sharing. You are not required to answer all of the questions asked if you are uncomfortable with them. You can stop the interview at any point in time if you decide you need a break, whether you would like to end it early, or if you change your mind about participating in the study as a whole, in which case all information you have given will be destroyed. In order to ensure confidentiality during the interview, no names of people or institutions are to be revealed during the interview to avoid bias towards them in both mine and others' eyes. If people or institutions in your interview are to be referred to please do so under alternative names such as "Person 1" or "Company 1".

Interview schedule

1. How would you define 'employability'?
2. What is your motivation to join the DA programme?
3. How did your working and learning practices change due to the social distancing in response to COVID-19?
4. What aspects of lockdown or current restrictions affected you the most? Do you have any concerns about your current or future employability?
5. What challenges did/have you experienced during the lockdown or current restrictions in terms your study and work?
6. How did/have you deal/dealt with these challenges?
7. What is your opinion on how your study were/are currently designed to ensure fitness for your job? In other words, how effective are elements of the DA programme/study to support your current and future employability?

The interview will be conducted by MS Teams or Skype and audio recorded. The process is as follows:

- Please contact [Dr Olga Andrianova](#) to express your interest in participating in the research;
- Olga will then contact you to agree a slot for an interview and clarify any open questions;
- After the interview date and time are agreed, Olga will send you an Teams invite, including an **online consent form** to complete before the interview.



What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There will not be any payment given for participation in the interviews to ensure that no participants are swayed to take part in the study for simply financial benefit. This is to ensure all answers are completely truthful and not fabricated. However, you will contribute to wider research as the aim of this research is to bring light to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in order for more preventative measures to be put in place to avoid it.

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What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

According to the Ethics standard that University of Exeter follows, all participants should be aware that the findings of the research would be visible to the research team members, professional service staff and wider audience when the results will be published. However, this will not include any transcription of your interviews or any of your personal data in order to keep all information anonymous. Therefore, none of your personal information will be linked to the recordings or presented within the report, keeping your identity anonymous. If referenced to, a pseudonym will be used such as "Participant A". If the researchers on this project deem any of your answers to questions as being recognisable then we will be using replacement names or words to avoid such if quoted within my findings.

To avoid any psychological upset from the interview process, you will be given full ability to speak about only what you are comfortable sharing or to withdraw from the study. At the end of the interview you may wish to ask the interviewer to provide the information about people that you can contact if it has been upsetting to you in any way as this is not the aim of the study.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

If you wish to no longer participate at any point before the data is analysed (February 2021), then all of your information will be withdrawn from the study and destroyed. You may ask to do so in person or by email, whichever is more comfortable for you.

How will my information be kept confidential?

The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing informationgovernance@exeter.ac.uk . or at <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/ig/>

You have also the right if you wish to be informed if your information is used with any future studies, if you would like to be informed of such then your contact details can be kept so that the researchers can impart this information unto you.

Further information and contact details

Name of P-I:	Olga Andrianova
Email Address:	O.Andrianova@exeter.ac.uk
Role/Position:	Lecturer in Management
Department:	Degree Apprenticeships, Business School
Names of other Researchers	Christine Parkin Hughes Ian Deamer
Project number:	eUEBS003780 v2.0
Duration of Project:	from October 2020 to February 2021

You can also contact the following contact details: Gail Seymour, Research Ethics and Governance Manager g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 726621

For more information please contact: O.Andrianova@exeter.ac.uk