

**Stream:** Pedagogic Research

**Submission title:**

A student-centred investigation of the innovatory Graduate Level Apprenticeship degrees

**Presenter:**

Ella Taylor-Smith

In September 2017, the School of Computing welcomed Edinburgh Napier's first Graduate Level Apprenticeships in Scotland. Our first cohort are studying degrees in Software Development, Cybersecurity, and Information Technology Management for Business. Next year, the university welcomes more GLAs in these subjects, and also into SEBE and the Business School. We would like to share our first GLA-focused research study with you and invite you to collaborate on joint studies with us next year.

In the School of Computing, Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLAs) are undergraduate degrees in which the students are in full-time employment, studying on campus one day per week. Apprentices complete undergraduate honours degrees in four years. This is achieved by running modules through the summer and through Professional Practice modules: work-based learning, completed in the workplace. The students are paid employees, throughout, and their place on the course is dependent on their job. In contrast, many of our undergraduate students have to balance paid work, un-related to their degree, with their studies, and take out student loans. The fees of the apprentices and other Scottish-domiciled undergraduates are paid by the Scottish Government.

This initial GLA study investigates the apprentices' perceptions of these new degrees, focusing on their motivations, self-identity, and the challenge of balancing employment with their studies. This is contextualised by gathering parallel data from undergraduate students studying similar subjects, who have part-time jobs. Three qualitative research methods are used with each of these two groups of students: a short survey, a Rich Picture session, and semi-structured interviews. Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2010) describe a spectrum of university student identities, from students at elite universities, where being a university student becomes the individual's main source of identity, to students at their local post-1992 university, who try to balance paid work and family commitments with study. This results in diverse learner identities, from those who have a strong sense of themselves as successful learners to those whose learner identities are "fragile and unconfident" (p.9). This presentation reports on students' identities as both learners and employees, comparing the contexts of an integrated apprenticeship degree with undergraduate students managing additional part-time work.

**References:**

Berg, T., Bowen, T., Smith, C.F., & Smith, S. (2017). Visualising the future: surfacing student

perspectives on post-graduation prospects using rich pictures. *Higher Education Research & Development*, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2017.1325855.

Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2010). "Fitting in" or "standing out": working-class students in UK higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(1), 1–19.