



The Future of Apprenticeships in England

Apprenticeship Standard for Assistant Business Administrator at Level 2

Final Report

Executive Summary

Health Education England (HEE) commissioned Skills for Health (SfH) to investigate the viability of developing an apprenticeship standard for Business Administrator at Level 2. This grew out of the earlier investigation work in relation to Medical Administrators / GP assistants. Please note that where level is referred to this means academic level not NHS pay-band.

Outcome: The Expression of Interest was declined by Department for Education. The Chair, Anita Esser, and colleagues at Health Education England and Skills for Health, felt that, given the feedback received from DFE it was not appropriate to resubmit.

Employers are encouraged to consider the following standards instead:

1. Business Administrator standard at Level 3
2. Customer Service Practitioner at Level 2
3. Hospitality Team Member at Level 2 (which includes Reception duties)
4. Healthcare Support Worker at Level 2 (if also offering clinical care)

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Background

In 2016 Health Education England (HEE) commissioned Skills for Health (SfH) to investigate the viability of developing an apprenticeship standard at level 2 for Assistant Business Administrators. The rationale for initiating this work as follows:

- The Trailblazer Group that had developed the Business Administrator Standard at Level 3 were not interested in pursuing a standard at level 2, largely because the organisations involved in that group, including the Chair's organisation, did not use any level 2 business administrator roles.
- The health sector and NHS in particular employ a significant number of Assistant Business Administrators. Certification figures for the current Level 2 Business Administration Apprenticeship Framework are in the region of 3000 a year. For this reason it seemed appropriate to pursue this trailblazer by suggesting a trailblazer standard that could be used in all sectors, not just health.

A virtual stakeholder group was established, with Anita Esser, University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust acting as chair with the aim of submitting an expression of interest in January 2017.

Areas to address

Prior to submitting the Expression of Interest, the group Chair was made aware that Department of Education were hesitant about the need for this standard. The rationale was that they did not feel it offered sufficient stretch. In other words they were not certain that someone would take a full twelve months to become competent and that they would need to study off the job for 20% of the time (eg one day a week) to achieve this. Their second concern was that the development would be led entirely by NHS organisations and not reflect the needs of the wider community. Thirdly that the occupation of Business Administrator had already been defined at level 3 and that there was therefore no room for the same occupation at level 2.

The expression of interest was drafted with these concerns in mind and an effort was made to clarify as far as possible, both in the original EOI and via the email exchange following submission to show why the group felt that there was a need to develop a standard for this occupation.

Expression of Interest

Organisations named on the Expression of Interest were as follows:

- Aim Awards
- Birmingham Children's Hospital
- Central Manchester University Hospitals
- CIBTAC
- Key Training Ltd
- Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust
- Oxford University Hospitals Trust
- Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust
- Serco
- South Doc Services Ltd
- Trinity Health
- University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust

Only 50% of this supporting membership are healthcare employers. There are three small employers included in the list who have less than 50 employees.

Occupation

A very detailed description of the occupation was given as follows:

Overview:

Assistant Business Administrators provide administrative and secretarial support to managers and their teams, working in close co-operation with staff at various levels. They work within clear guidelines and processes. A large proportion of their work will be delegated by colleagues. Most have some limited autonomy to plan and prioritise their own work.

Responsibilities and duty of the role:

Tasks undertaken by Assistant Business Administrators vary depending on the sector in which they are employed. Whilst all carry out similar typical duties the focus of their role may be more weighted to one activity than another. For example in a small organisation the apprentice may deal with a wide range of activities, from dealing with post to copying to reception to ordering stationery, whereas in a larger organisation the role may focus more on typing, copying and sending documents.

Assistant business administrators produce letters, documents and other correspondence using word processing or other document software. This can include touch-typing. They will be able to produce documents from handwritten notes, audio files or from spoken instructions. Some may be developing or using notetaking skills and others may carry out simple data inputting or extraction for example in Excel. They understand the importance of version control and that they must check their work for errors or omissions, making corrections and updates as required. They understand how to organise and manage both electronic and paper filing systems so that items can be stored and retrieved easily. They follow legislation, protocols and in-house requirements for record keeping and for the layout, structure and tone of the documents and other correspondence that they produce. They are required to operate IT systems and view VDU equipment for significant periods of time and need to maintain a high level of concentration. They are often the first point of contact with the organisation whether it is by phone, email or in person. They can communicate with customers, employees, and other individuals to answer questions, disseminate or explain information. They take clear, accurate messages, can redirect calls as required or make call backs as directed. They have a role in meetings management, often booking the rooms and refreshments, keeping records of attendees and sharing papers. They can use office equipment eg photocopiers, faxes and/or other electronic devices required to complete their work. They are able to carry out simple fixes themselves such as loading or un-jamming paper and changing print cartridges or toners. They recognise when an engineer or regular service is required and can escalate faults to the appropriate person. They will sort and distribute post, franking and preparing mail for sending. They may need to contact couriers, the post office or other services to provide one-off or regular deliveries or collections and resolve issues where collections and deliveries have not been made. They may deal with travel requests, booking tickets and accommodation, and solving problems with the bookings process, ticket delivery, changes or cancellations as required. They may provide reception services, acting as the face of the organisation, meeting, greeting and directing visitors. They may offer and serve refreshments to visitors. When on reception, they often keep records of who is inside and who has left the building for both security and health and safety purposes. This may include recording personal and vehicle information, checking and/or issuing passes or liaising with security colleagues. They use a variety of communication methods to ensure that visitors feel welcome and they act to solve or seek help to solve any issues as they arise. They are required to maintain a high level of confidentiality when dealing with sensitive information or issues both when dealing with visitors in person

and when producing and storing documents or other files. They often maintain stationery stocks, placing simple orders or re-orders, sorting and tidying the storeroom and keeping records of stationery use or allocations. They may deal with petty cash and invoices. Assistant Business Administrators would not normally supervise other administrative staff but rather begin to develop working relationships with colleagues. They may sometimes buddy up with a colleague at a similar level to show them how a particular practice or process works in their organisation and role. They need a basic understanding of legislation, policies and procedures relating to their own employment rights and requirements, including managing their own personal performance and development. They also need to have a basic understanding of legislation, policies and procedures that relate to the role. This may include things like compliance, data protection, freedom of information, manual handling, health and safety, and/or equality and inclusion amongst others.

Differentiation

The following information was supplied to show the difference between the occupations at Level 2 and Level 3.

AREA	Proposed L2 Standard Content	Existing L3 Business Administrator Standard content
Communication	Basic communication with peers and colleagues including confidentiality	More advanced communication including 'agility and confidence', 'carrying authority appropriately', 'representing organisation' and 'Applies social media solutions'
Interpersonal Skills	As part of communication to develop positive relationships with colleagues working as part of a team	Ability to influence and challenge, act as 'role model' developing coaching skills
IT	Ability to use multiple software for recording data and producing documentation	Ability to analyse data and produce data analysis reports
Quality	Prioritises tasks and reflects to continuously improve work	'Shares best practice' across organisation, Applies problem solving to resolve challenging/complex complaints and is key contact for addressing issues
Planning and Organisation		Makes suggestions to working practices based on understanding of implications beyond the immediate environment
Project Management	No project management skills required	Project management principles and tools required to scope, plan, monitor and report and lead projects.
Coaching/Mentoring	Limited support to other staff	Developing people management skills through mentoring and coaching others
Reception Duties	Likely to include reception duties and customer service	No reception duties

Feedback

Unfortunately, despite best efforts to address the concerns raised before submission, the Expression of Interest was rejected. Feedback from DFE was as follows:

We are not able to approve your proposal for the following reasons:

- The proposal does not meet the application criteria requiring rigorous and substantial training of at least a year to achieve full competence, with off the job training accounting for at least 20% of the apprenticeship.
- Notwithstanding your helpful analysis of the differences between your proposed Level 2 standard and the existing Level 3 Business Administration standard, there is still significant overlap.

Fundamentally, the breadth and depth of the Level 3 standard means that there is insufficient room left for a separate Level 2 Business Administration standard. Whilst we recognise that business administration roles exist at that level, the training needed for full competence is not sufficient enough to justify an apprenticeship based on a standard at the lower level.

Summary

There is clear evidence that an administrative role at Level 2 is required within the health sector. However, it is not possible for a Trailblazer to proceed with developing a standard for Assistant Business Administrator at level 2.

Employers are encouraged to consider the following standards instead:

1. Business Administrator standard at Level 3
2. Customer Service Practitioner at Level 2
3. Hospitality Team Member at Level 2 (which includes Reception duties)
4. Healthcare Support Worker at Level 2 (if also offering clinical care)