

## Healthcare Assistant Practitioner Apprenticeship with Specialism in Arts in Health Level 5 Foundation Degree

### A Case Study

#### Background

Meaningful daily activity and participation is vital to any health context, both for physical and mental health needs. Evidence suggests that arts are an important cultural and therapeutic resource to assist with providing meaningful activity; particularly where people are unable to leave the ward environment. However, due to the limited number of professionals with skills in group work and creative activity engagement, there are often limitations to what can be provided on a day to day basis.

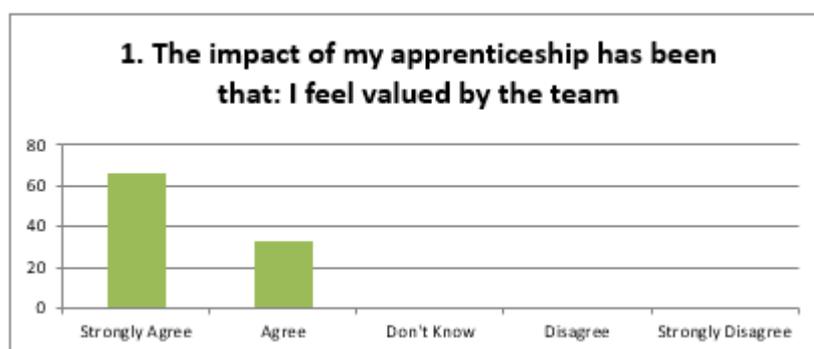
With the above in mind, in 2018 a pilot course was developed by Brunel University in consultation with Central North West London (CNWL) NHS Foundation Trust using the Assistant Practitioner Apprenticeship course. The Assistant Practitioner Apprenticeship offers an excellent foundation in health skills for developing a career in the NHS and a range of health contexts. This apprenticeship focuses on an important part of the assistant practitioner's role of offering evidence to inform clinical or therapeutic interventions.

#### Findings from the pilot

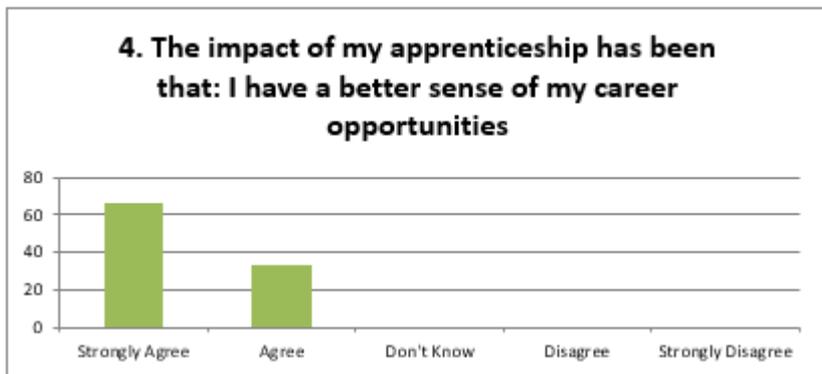
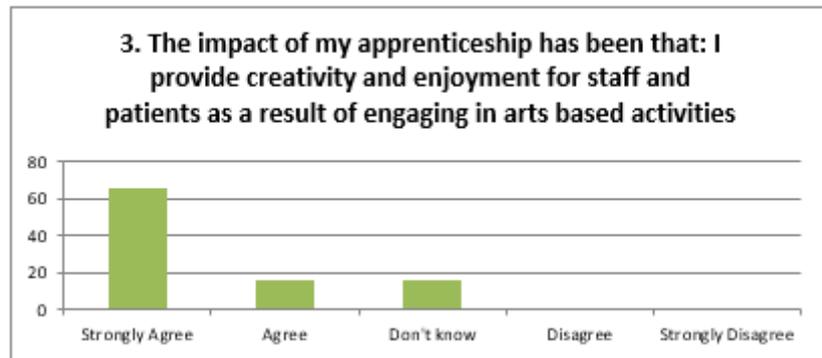
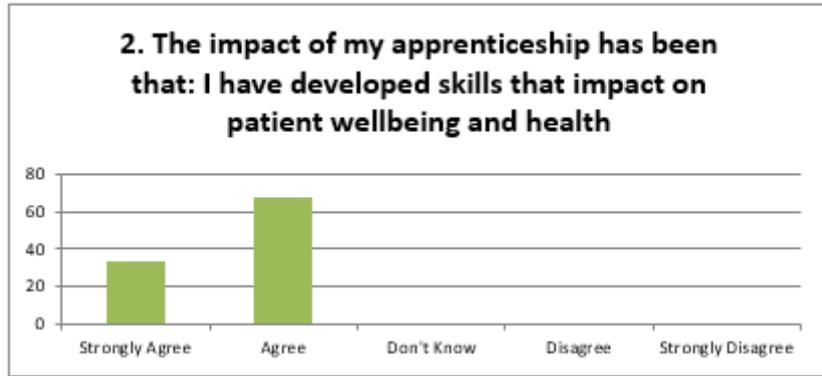
The pilot programme ran from May 2018-May 2019. The first intake starting in June 2018 with 7 Health Care Assistants (HCA) from CNWL being enrolled onto the course.

Brunel provided teaching ranging from an understanding of physiology to creative group work skills. As this course focussed on arts in health, Brunel also ensured that it featured training on music, art and writing. WW

To review the programme, the course included: tripartite meetings every 4-6 weeks (with the apprentice, university and Trust); surveys; and focus groups with the apprentices. The results of the survey can be seen below:  
practitioner's role of offering evidence to inform clinical or therapeutic interventions.



## Assistant Practitioner - Arts in Health Case Study



The review process resulted in a very positive appraisal of the apprentice's development in healthcare. This was particularly seen in terms of the apprentice's sense of role and value, as well as acquiring new skills.

Helen is one of the apprentices from the pilot and is a mature student. Helen is a motivated and valued member of the rehabilitation nursing team, and she clearly articulated the apprenticeship values. This apprenticeship training has enabled her to offer patients meaningful participation in a safe space. These are key component in rehabilitation services as patients may struggle to take up a new challenge as they face long standing difficulties in managing to support themselves, and patients often feel unsafe and insecure. Helen has been able to use her group skills to make a positive impact on patient care, offering a range and depth to her work, a fuller and richer engagement opportunity for her, her patients and the wider team around her. Helen has helped the team to enable creative and healthy ways of living.

## Assistant Practitioner - Arts in Health Case Study

To give a sense of the apprenticeship in context, Helen said:



*“I have received tremendous support from the staff team, medical, nursing and allied health care professionals, especially my line manager. Both staff and patients have embraced the initiative, and already we have seen real benefits. We are able to reach out and engage with patients who have complex needs which impact on their communication.*

*Art provides the universal medium of expression that allows the patients to ventilate their feelings in an appropriate, controlled and safe environment. It has been a pleasure and privilege to personally witness patients who have previously been distant, isolating themselves, now interact positively in the sessions expressing their hopes and dreams”.*

Helen is a motivated apprentice and valued member of the rehabilitation nursing team. Based on her learning and implementation of her acquired skills, a senior nursing colleague felt inspired to write about the apprenticeship. This was subsequently published in CNWL NHS Foundation Trust Rehabilitation newsletter.

*“I feel honoured that Birch Ward had the opportunity of embracing this service development and being part of such an exciting, unique and ground-breaking initiative, Helen’s enthusiasm is infectious and drives the project. I see such an initiative as the apprenticeship having a significant, positive influence on patient care, and can be a benchmark for other services. Not only this, it provides a career structure for Health Care Assistants to grow and develop, providing job enrichment and role extension”*

Helen has continued to demonstrate a commitment to working with her colleagues and patients to achieve better, safer and more compassionate care.

### Challenges

From the review process we identified that there were several important challenges that required attention.

#### 1. Supervision and management

There had been a range of questions about workforce development, good supervision and management practice. Whilst we assumed that this would fall under communication skills, we have now included an overview of management and healthcare organisations within the first taught module.

#### 2. Available time for projects

Whilst a strong focus has been on applying an understanding drawn from arts, humanities and social sciences, as well as interpersonal communication, note writing and reflective practice, there were issues regarding time available for applied creative project work.

Due to the busy nature of ward and community environments, protected time can be difficult to achieve. Wards and community contexts can be unpredictable, and often an extra pair of hands are needed and the Apprentice is frequently called upon. To overcome this challenge, we are using a range of creative approaches to engagement that go beyond the standard group work, including the use of digital media, creative open spaces and improvised work.

### 3. The right support offered at the right time

The apprentices have been meeting with their managers and mentors and receiving tripartite meetings. One of the significant changes that we implemented was supporting managers in considering best mentor options to provide input for the apprentice to learn about good practice in their health setting. This included occupational therapists, activity coordinators and nurses taking a leading role in supporting the apprentices. This was invaluable to ensuring the apprentices were guided by health practitioner familiar with applying creative skills.

### 4. Functional skills

Functional skills (English and Maths level 2) were taught whilst learning the core components of the apprenticeship. We found that this could be very demanding for some students. We have now offered to support care providers in finding a reliable trainer and funding to offer functional skills before commencing the apprenticeship.

### Going forward

There are plans to run the programme again from March 2020 with the additional changes and with an increased number of host employers, including mental health and primary care organisations. This apprenticeship can be for somebody at Band 3 wanting to develop their career in health or we can support recruitment into a vacant post at Band 3.

### For further information:

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- *Video* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=5&v=7uTdpsO55kQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=7uTdpsO55kQ)
- *Arts in Health*
  - » <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/arts-for-health-and-wellbeing-an-evaluation-framework>
  - » <http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/what-is-arts-in-health>
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