

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE INFORMATICS HEALTH SERVICE

A case study of how apprenticeships are successfully being introduced in informatics health services.



Claire Garner is an Enterprise Advisor and Health Ambassador for the NHS, and regularly undertakes the promotion of careers within the NHS. Claire has actively promoted the use of apprenticeships as a way of growing the Nottinghamshire Informatics Health Service (NHIS) service, both by employing apprentices and by encouraging staff to undertake an apprenticeship qualification to develop themselves.

In 2014, NHIS initially employed 5 apprentices and after the apprenticeship ended the apprentices were interviewed and offered substantive roles. Currently NHIS have 8 apprentices and are hoping to repeat this when the apprentices' contract ends, in the next 12- 18 months.

Once the apprentices have completed their apprenticeship, they are supported in applying for any vacancies within NHIS or applying for roles within the NHS.

Claire has created an apprenticeship programme and robust process for employing and managing apprentices. Meeting regularly (bi-monthly) with the apprentice/manager and mentor to ensure that the quality of the training is meeting the needs of the service and the apprentice. This is reviewed and objectives are set with a full training programme. Meetings are also set bi-monthly with all the NHIS apprentices for half a day and speakers will attend and offer support and advice on various topics. For example, a speaker from a service within NHIS or the NHS would provide support with CV writing, interview techniques, communication skills or information about career pathways and opportunities. The programme has worked so well that Claire has been asked to work with other NHS IT services and to share the apprenticeship model that is used within NHIS.

We asked Claire some further questions, read in full below.

1. What benefits have you seen since introducing apprenticeships in your department?

Introducing apprenticeships has brought far reaching benefits to the NHS as well as to NHIS, by employing apprentices it has given the service the opportunity to create career pathways. By creating lower band roles within teams, it has allowed apprentices to apply for these roles and then develop and transition within the team - for example applying for a Junior Trainer or Junior Web Developer role and progressing to a Trainer and Developer. The use of apprenticeships has enabled the service to grow and create a diverse workforce which is able to react to the ever changing demands within IT. Apprentices bring new and innovative ideas and input into new ways of working into the service. Having apprentices has also given staff the opportunity to become mentors. The mentors have been offered training and support to help them with their mentoring role. Like other areas of the NHS, NHIS has an ageing workforce so the use of apprenticeships has helped to address this issue.

2. Do you feel that apprenticeships continue to meet the developmental needs of staff?

Being able to use funds from the apprenticeship levy pot has meant that staff have been able to look at the availability of courses that could be funded in this way. Currently, there are 3 staff members who are undertaking a Digital & Technology Solutions Professional degree apprenticeship at Staffordshire University. I meet with staff who are interested in pursuing a qualification and we review their role and potential career journey. We research the type of qualifications and learning that is available and relevant to their job role.

3. How do you manage the 20% off-the-job (OTJ) requirement?

This could be a challenge at times, apprentices within NHIS use the absence application to request their OTJ time. This ensures that the apprentices and managers can monitor the time they are taking and can be used to provide evidence of the OTJ learning. It can be challenging if there is more than one person in the team doing the 20% OTJ learning and needs coordination by the manager to ensure the service is covered.

4. Do you have any additional comments or feedback around the use of apprenticeships?

NHIS has developed hugely by employing apprentices. The services within NHIS have advanced and grown by implementing career pathways and the opportunity for existing staff to mentor, nurture and develop the apprentices. Employing apprentices has helped with staff morale and injected new and innovative ideas within the teams and enabled NHIS to think differently.

5. Do you have any tips for employers considering hiring an apprentice?

I would recommend apprenticeships to all managers within the NHS. If you are considering having an apprentice it is important to ensure that you have the correct infrastructure/environment, such as a mentor to support them, a robust apprenticeship programme which includes meeting with the apprentice regularly and that you have the time to nurture and develop them. If you are willing to invest the time and give them the training and support you will reap the benefits and retain apprentices that will want to work hard and stay with the organisation.