

Case Study - Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust

The first NHS trust to join up hospital and community care, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust supports its community across a wide variety of areas. Since 2012, apprenticeships have helped the Trust meet the needs of the organisation and its patients by plugging important skills gaps, as well as giving back to the community through offering apprenticeships to those from disadvantaged groups. Having employed over 180 new apprentices since 2014 and with over 500 staff having undertaken apprenticeship qualifications, the organisation is now looking to introduce more degree apprenticeships and continue offering existing employees the opportunity to upskill and better their long-term career prospects with an apprenticeship.

Taking a proactive approach

Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust is committed to promoting a workplace culture that actively values difference, recognising that people from different backgrounds, with varied experiences can bring fresh perspective and ideas to the organisation. This ethos informs the Trust's proactive recruitment approach to apprenticeships by offering work experience opportunities as a first step, allowing the organisation to access and recruit from a wider range of backgrounds. The Trust currently offers apprenticeships across the organisation: from Engineering to Management, and IT to Healthcare Science.

"We're passionate about supporting our workforce and finding the right talent. We noticed that our entry requirements made it difficult for some people to apply – we realised we could reach a much wider pool of talent if we put the effort into broadening our recruitment approach, benefitting both us as an organisation and the community we serve. Apprenticeships are integral in developing the skills we need."

Helen Limmer, Deputy Head of Education

To help achieve this and attract diverse talent into the NHS, the Trust set up its Employability Hub in 2013, offering careers advice, interview tips, CV writing workshops – and bespoke work experience training programmes. The goal of this is to encourage those who come via the Hub to work towards an apprenticeship, which could then lead to a full-time role within the organisation. Since its inception, three have gone on to an apprenticeship with the Trust and four have gone on to secure full-time roles.

One programme run by the Hub is Step On, which is aimed at those who may face social exclusion - such as homeless people, ex-offenders and those with mental health issues.

This can lead to Step Further, which is a 6 to 12 month paid work experience route into a traineeship and/or apprenticeship.

As well as this, the Trust has a programme for supporting young people with a learning difficulty and/or disability (LDD). Aspire is a one-year programme to boost this group's skills, so that they are better able to gain meaningful paid employment. At least three from this programme have gone onto become an apprentice or permanently employed by the Trust.

"People with an LDD are part of a disadvantaged group, with many not getting the chance to show what they can do. We're passionate about giving everybody an equal opportunity."

Helen Limmer, Deputy Head of Education

Tackling skills gaps and retention rates

Beyond benefitting the individual, the Trust reaps many of the business benefits apprenticeships bring. One key outcome is that apprenticeships have contributed to tackling skills shortages in areas such as Business Administration, Customer Service and in the Trust's wards. To bridge these gaps further, the Trust is looking at further ways it can innovate in its use of apprenticeships. For example, due to a shortage of staff in administration areas, the Trust has created a rotational scheme for its Business Administration apprentices. These apprentices will also take on Ward Clerk duties, and consequently be able to assist more clinical staff with administrative responsibilities.

Meanwhile, it has launched an integrated apprenticeship with Devon Council that will see two apprentices spending time working across the whole care sector.

"The care sector has changing needs in modern society; it now needs to be closer to home. Having apprentices do four-month rotations in the acute ward, among the community, and in residential homes for people with dementia will give them the skills and experience to better understand how to care for the community. Ultimately ensuring our employees can implement this on-the-ground knowledge in their everyday roles."

Helen Limmer, Deputy Head of Education

Going forward, the Trust hopes it can roll out this integrated apprenticeship to more people and in a greater number of roles.

Securing the future of the organisation

The Trust is looking to make the most of its Levy funding. Among other moves, it plans to help secure its future through creating a pipeline of talent and offer further training opportunities to existing staff.



By offering Level 6 Degree apprenticeships in Nursing, the Trust hopes to offer its healthcare assistants the chance to upskill, while allowing other employees to climb the career ladder, too. The organisation is also helping senior staff expand their skills with a Level 6 apprenticeship in Management.

“We’ve had apprenticeships for years, and it’s amazing to see the benefits they bring to the organisation. Apprentices are motivated, hard-working and bring a fresh perspective. Apprenticeships bring so much value – to both the Trust and the community – that we’re planning to devote more time to identifying skills gaps and seeing how we can benefit from apprentices in every department.”

Helen Limmer, Deputy Head of Education