



South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group

Case Study from ESFA

Case Study - South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group

The South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group is a strategic alliance between City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust (CHSFT) and South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust (STFT). Having worked closely since 2016, the two Trusts are also collaborating on apprenticeships, with the view that together they can create a more effective regional response to some of the pressing skills and workforce issues being faced across the NHS. In particular, the Group is looking towards its new nursing degree apprenticeship, developed with the University of Sunderland, to help tackle one of the Group's key skills shortages.

Partnership approach

Since the introduction of the apprenticeship Levy in April 2017, the Group has had over 180 apprenticeship starts – 147 with CHSFT and 34 with STFT. Apprenticeships offered by the Group range from level 2 up to level 6, with a level 7 Advanced Clinical Practitioner apprenticeship starting in March 2019. Standards on offer include everything from Healthcare Support, Pharmacy Services, Business Administration, IT and Software, as well as Chartered Management Degree and Adult Nursing (starting in January 2019). Lower level apprenticeships are primarily offered to new starters, whilst higher level opportunities are reserved to upskill current employees.

“Apprenticeships have played a role in both Trusts for a number of years. As a combined Group, however, we have been able to look more closely at workforce needs across both organisations and determine how different types of apprenticeship can supplement supply by widening participation and ultimately helping us develop the skills we need.”

Dennis Little, Head of Workforce Development and Education

Boosting supply in nursing

One key area which the Group has been dedicated to developing is its nursing degree apprenticeship programme, in collaboration with the University of Sunderland – of which a cohort of 10 of the Group's existing employees are expected to enrol on in February 2019. Having identified nursing as an essential skills shortage across the region, and the NHS more widely, the Group decided that creating an apprenticeship would help develop existing staff and widen participation into the profession, boosting its much-needed supply of nurses in tandem with the more traditional recruitment routes.

“We wanted to create a programme for employees who have already demonstrated the skills and aptitude to go into the nursing profession. We want to be confident that investing in these individuals would benefit and stay within the Group in the long-term. Thereby, by upskilling our own staff we know these people already have the relevant experience and dedication to our organisation, and a locally sourced workforce are more likely to stay with us.”

Dennis Little, Head of Workforce Development and Education

Working closely with the University of Sunderland, the Group developed a specialised apprenticeship programme, based on the needs of the Group and relevant to those who would be enrolling on the programme.

“We didn’t want a programme which replicated the traditional nursing degree. Those enrolling on the programme are Healthcare Assistants, with significant prior knowledge and experience. That’s why we’ve incorporated elements like multiple entry points, to allow each individual to get the most out of their apprenticeship. This is not a case of workplace learning for employment, but workplace learning in employment, and that’s what an apprenticeship could help us achieve.”

Dennis Little, Head of Workforce Development and Education

The course also allows for specialisms in adult nursing, mental health and learning disabilities. And, with specialist apprenticeships often needing minimum numbers to go ahead, the collaborative working with multiple Trusts means that these specialisms can be accounted for.

Looking ahead

With nursing apprenticeships a big focus for the Group going forward, the Group has created a career pathway for its support staff. New entrants to Healthcare Assistant roles complete a level 2 Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeship linked to their completion of the Care Certificate, and those with potential can then be supported through a Senior Healthcare Support Worker Apprenticeship at level 3, which provides them with the entry requirements for a Nursing degree programme. Those who show potential as Healthcare Assistants at level 2 and level 3, may apply for selection for the nursing degree apprenticeship delivered by the University of Sunderland.

Also, following the successful collaboration with the University of Sunderland, the Group are keen to pursue more speciality apprenticeships – a programme for Advanced Practitioners will commence in 2019, and it is hoped other specialist apprenticeships could be offered.

“Exploring these higher-level, specialist apprenticeships would enable us to train registered professionals for specialist roles in different specialities. One area in which this could really benefit us is in a role such as District Nursing and is something we’d like to see developed going forward.”

Dennis Little, Head of Workforce Development and Education

As such, the Group hopes to continue its collaborative approach, working in partnership with other Trusts and Higher Education Institutes in the area to help address key skills issues.

“It makes sense to continue our partnership working. This way we can get even more out of apprenticeships and ensure we have the skills we need to continue providing high quality patient care across the region.”

Dennis Little, Head of Workforce Development and Education