

Case Study - West London NHS Trust

West London NHS Trust provides a full range of mental health, physical healthcare and community services for children, adults and older people living in the London boroughs of Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham and Hounslow, in addition to specialist and forensic mental health services, including high secure services at Broadmoor Hospital in Crowthorne, Berkshire. The Trust cares for around 99,000 people each year, serving a local population of 800,000 residents and employs 3,300 staff, of which over 50 are apprentices.

One of the Trust's nursing degree apprentices, Adam Cramp, recently took home the Our Health Heroes Apprenticeship of the Year award, run by Skills for Health.

Growing and sustaining talent

The trust knew they had award-worthy staff like Adam, who for whatever reason hadn't been able to progress in their careers. They asked themselves 'How do we give our staff an opportunity to develop in our organisation – because we want to retain them'. When West London Trust started looking at apprenticeships and specifically in this case the nursing degree apprenticeship, it was clear that this route would give people like Adam who wanted to progress, the opportunity to do so.

Historically supporting people like Adam to progress their career this way had been a challenge due to cost; the introduction of the apprenticeship levy enabled the Trust to fund a cohort of apprentices.

"For us the actual rationale behind why we wanted it was to be able to utilise the expertise that we had inhouse, so really growing our own."

Ali Webster - Assistant Director of Workforce

The Trust selected fourteen of their Healthcare Assistants out of a group of seventy that had applied for the apprenticeship, recruiting staff from across the organisation. In order to sustain this approach, the trust decided to remunerate their apprentices on a 'spot salary'. Whilst this would see them take a salary reduction initially, it was a way to support backfill costs and for long-term apprentices like Adam to be recruited into Registered Nurse posts upon completion of their apprenticeship, whereby they would see their earnings potential grow considerably.

HCA's cost - backfill cost = Spot salary

Recruitment Process

The Trust held several events on the recruitment pathway, including a Q&A session with service managers, Buckinghamshire New University and apprentices. Over an afternoon tea, they discussed topics such as; what the programme would look like, what apprentices would be learning, the value of apprenticeships, and an opportunity to answer a range of questions. They also offered interview skills workshops to help applicants feel prepared for the interview process at university. The West London apprentices achieved top marks and the feedback received was that the calibre was incredibly high.

“We wanted to make sure we weren’t setting people up to fail, so we did as much prep as possible to utilise the expertise that we had inhouse, so really growing our own.”

Ali Webster - Assistant Director of Workforce

Adding value

The Trust has recognised that having apprentices in their workforce has numerous benefits, as the apprentices are part of the established workforce they are able to share learning from their course in the workplace and are much more reflective of their practice. Equally because of their lived experience in a clinical setting, apprentices offer an added dimension to their theoretical studies at university.

“There has been some incredible feedback, we had our first tripartite meeting at the end of last year. For me what was fantastic is that all the apprentices came along with their mentors and the feedback received was that the apprentices are so much further forward than equivalent student nurses that they had.”

Ali Webster - Assistant Director of Workforce

Retaining talent and improving supply

The Trusts apprenticeship programme has provided a new workforce supply solution, that otherwise wouldn’t have existed, whilst also providing an opportunity to retain staff for longer than before.

“As with any other Trusts, our Trust has a shortage of registered nurses, so we are looking at various approaches, for example bringing in nurse associates to try to bridge the gap, the whole idea is to have a range of supply. It is important for us to make sure we are growing our own as well. How can we say that the workforce is our priority, if the only way we are recruiting nurses and other staff is externally? We want to promote our Trust as somewhere where you can grow in your career.”

Ali Webster - Assistant Director of Workforce

Return on investment

Development at West London is held in high regard. The organisation took a medium-term view that in three-years' time (and year-on-year after that) they will have a regular supply of registered nurses, who are loyal, share and live out the Trust's values.

An honest approach

The Trust clearly focuses on quality learning, the levy may have allowed West London to take on more than fourteen apprentices, however taking more may have reduced the quality for all those involved. In the first instance they focused on how to support their apprentices throughout their journey and what infrastructure they would need to take on a larger number of apprentices in the future.

"For other trusts thinking of starting on the same journey - if you can't do it properly, don't bother."

Ali Webster - Assistant Director of Workforce

Looking ahead

With success under their belts, the Trust is now looking at the value that apprentices can add in other areas of the organisation and other professional groups (such as Allied Health Professions, support staff and management). The levy enables them to do that and grow their own workforce in ways previously unimaginable.

This coming year – West London has launched a new development hub, with a range of assessments, courses and short DVDs. The Trust has also created a support worker programme providing mock interviews that apprentices can use to prepare. The Trust is continuously looking for other ways that they can support their apprentices, and applications for this year's nursing degree apprenticeship has just opened at the Trust.

"I think that communication is the key, so people know what they are signing up for and the support from managers is vital."

Ali Webster - Assistant Director of Workforce

For more information visit West London NHS Trust website's here: www.westlondon.nhs.uk

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