



Case Study - East Suffolk & North Essex Foundation Trust

The East Suffolk & North Essex NHS Foundation Trust serves over 350,000 people across east Suffolk and north Essex. The Trust started its apprenticeship programme back in 2010, as a way to widen career opportunities in its local community, offering 40-50 places a year in response to immediate workforce needs. Since the introduction of the Levy in April 2017, the Trust has injected additional funding and resource into its apprenticeship programme – significantly widening the standards on offer to both new starters and existing employees. In implementing this, the Trust are looking to address longer-term workforce needs, particularly in clinical areas like nursing, and help its existing staff continue to progress in their careers – all with the ultimate goal of improving patient care.

Taking the next steps

The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy has allowed the East Suffolk & North Essex NHS Foundation Trust, to take the next step with its apprenticeship programme. Having worked with apprentices since 2010, primarily in administration and support roles, the Trust was familiar with the benefits apprenticeships could bring to its patients and 4,500-strong workforce. However, with a fairly small and irregular cohort, apprenticeships were largely brought in to service an immediate need rather than as part of a longer-term approach.

“Prior to the introduction of the Levy we were only partially engaged with apprenticeships. They helped us fulfil our public duty to the wider community, in improving access to a career, and offered the hospital assistance in administration roles, but it wasn’t something we thought could benefit employees, in all departments, at every level. The Levy has injected significant funding for apprenticeships into the Trust, allowing us to double our apprenticeship numbers and reassess how apprenticeships can have real, long-term benefits for our staff and our patients.”

Tracey Whale, Lead Clinical Educator

Investing in the workforce

Since the Levy, the Trust’s apprenticeship focus has been on introducing new standards for its existing employees, with around 85% of its 104 apprenticeship starts in 2017/18 coming from this group. On offer are a range of clinical and non-clinical roles in business and medical administration, team leadership, IT, nursing and healthcare assistance – ranging from level 2 through to degree level. And, the Trust is open to introducing further standards if requested by an employee and/or department.

“Focusing our efforts on upskilling our current staff through apprenticeships is a huge opportunity for us. We’re based in a rural area, so we don’t have a transient employee base and many of our staff stay with us long-term. Therefore, investing in our workforce is key to ensuring we continue to improve patient care and apprenticeships allow us to do this.”

Tracey Whale, Lead Clinical Educator

This sentiment is being applied to staff at all levels of the organisation, with many of the Trust’s most senior staff also embracing apprenticeships – particularly in management and team leadership higher and degree standards.

“Getting top level staff on board with apprenticeships was initially a challenge – there were certainly some misconceptions around what an apprenticeship was and what it could offer. We’ve worked really hard to address these and now, for our leadership apprenticeship, we have 3 cohorts at Level 5, 2 cohorts at Level 3 and a burgeoning degree level cohort also.”

Tracey Whale, Lead Clinical Educator

This success has been down to the Trust’s hard work using internal communications. This has included creating posters, YouTube videos and using outpatient screens to promote apprenticeships, as well as holding one-to-ones with managers and staff, presenting at team meetings, and hosting exhibitions.

Grow your own talent

As well as upskilling staff, apprenticeships are also serving the Trust in helping address prevalent skills shortages, both in the organisation and across the wider NHS. Nursing is one major area where this is the case and the Trust’s Registered Nursing Degree Apprenticeship is proving a useful way to address this.

“Our nursing apprenticeship has helped us twofold. On the one hand, we’ve been able to offer many of our healthcare assistants, those who are already familiar with the hospital’s way of working and our values, a chance to progress in their careers and become qualified nurses. Having an apprenticeship in place also benefits us in that we can establish a captive employee base. Many of our student nurses train with us whilst at university but, once qualified, will return home or move elsewhere in the country, as the removal of the student nurse bursary appears to have widened the geographical area that students are recruited from. Registered nurse vacancies are high nationally, however, with apprenticeships we can grow our own nursing talent.”

Tracey Whale, Lead Clinical Educator

As such, the Trust has been involved with the recently approved Level 5 Nursing Associate Trailblazer.

“Working with partners is essential in facing this nationwide nursing shortage. We want to be at the forefront of tackling this and help develop a solution in any way we can – getting involved in the Trailblazer made perfect sense.”

Tracey Whale, Lead Clinical Educator

Working in partnership

Working in partnership with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as well as other local public sector organisations with apprenticeships is something which the Trust is hoping to do more of to tackle regional skills challenges and offer better patient care.

Prior to the Levy, the Trust worked with the community and social services to establish an integrated apprenticeship for support workers – whereby each apprentice spends four months in each area.

“These integrated apprenticeships were an incredible opportunity for the apprentices as they were able to get a well-rounded experience at the hospital, in the community and working with social services. By working in partnership with other services, our apprentices were able to gain a wider breadth of skills – such as learning disability experience – that they were then able to bring back to the Trust in full-time roles.”

Tracey Whale, Lead Clinical Educator

This integrated apprenticeship is something which the Trust is looking to continue in the next year and roll out in a wider range of roles.

Going forward

In light of the Levy, apprenticeships at the Trust have entered a new phase and look to continue to grow. Having reached its 2.3% public sector apprenticeship starts target, the Trust wants to continue to build its apprenticeship offer for its current staff, as well as open more places to new starters on the programme.

“Going forward, we’ll continue to explore what standards are available and match our work-force need. However, the Levy has opened up a number of really exciting opportunities for us. Patient care is our first priority. It doesn’t matter if staff have direct patient contact or not, the Levy funding has allowed us to offer staff the chance to build on their existing skills and responsibilities, ultimately developing a better patient service.”

Tracey Whale, Lead Clinical Educator