

Apprenticeships: Developing NHS Leaders of the Future

The Challenge

Changing demands on health and care services are creating different development needs among staff in NHS-funded services across England. As the NHS we need to equip and encourage leaders at every level of the NHS to develop leadership capabilities among their staff and themselves. This will help protect and improve services for patients in the short term and for the next 20 years.

In Merseyside a key driver to the implementation of leadership apprenticeships was the increasing need to ensure the NHS Trusts developed leaders for the future, with a strategic view on the wider health economy and all its stakeholders.

What they did

Six trusts from the 'Merseyside NHS Apprenticeship Group' came together to develop a system wide approach to adopting the Senior Leader apprenticeship across the region. The six Trusts nominated 36 existing NHS staff to undertake the level 7 senior leadership apprenticeship.

In partnership with the University of Chester, the Trusts collaborated to ensure that best practice and learning from other sectors was included in the apprenticeship to expand the knowledge of the apprentices. In addition learners were able to undertake either an MBA or MSc as part of the apprenticeship and the programme was tailored to allow learners to APEL prior postgrad modules and contextualise and apply their learning in the workplace, covering topics; which were directly translatable to everyday NHS practice, such as multidisciplinary working, estates rationalisation, and enhancing medical education across multiple sites.

Those undertaking the MSc route, were able to individualise the apprenticeship to their area of work, focussed on clinical specialisms and patient care whilst embracing the business planning, leadership and change management aspects of the apprenticeship. The MBA route allowed for the more purist development to senior roles including aspiring Executive Directors.

"I had no idea that you could take an apprenticeship when you'd been in the working world for as long as I have, especially seeing as I've already got an undergraduate degree."

Sally McCreith, Compliance Manager, Medical Education

Outcomes and Successes

Working with the University of Chester for nearly a year prior to the release of the apprenticeship allowed the early development of the programme and enabled potential learners to be identified in preparation. As a result, the first Senior Leader apprentices started within 3-weeks of the funding band publication.

“Apprenticeships are helping us to build a strong future workforce and increase the skills of our existing staff – that’s great news for Aintree, our patients and the NHS as a whole.”

Ruth Hoyte, Director HR & OD

The 36 learners started on programme in March 2018 and are now nearing the end of their first year of study. All 36 are still on programme and have completed six 20 credit Level 7 modules and are starting their dissertations.

A full evaluation of the outcomes of the apprenticeship will be undertaken when all learners have completed, however after a year of study the programme has been successful in:

- Establishing an education partnership on which to build future apprenticeship leadership programmes
- Created a system wide leadership development programme for NHS staff
- Promoted the use of apprenticeships in the NHS at a senior level
- Created a talent pipeline; learners for the apprenticeship were identified from appraisals and had been identified in talent planning or succession plans
- Learners have demonstrated a greater understating of strategy and co-design when looking at innovation and improvements
- Having health professionals from a wide range of specialisms from across the health economy has allowed greater understanding and joined up thinking
- Working in collaboration with other Trusts has supported the ethos of education supporting patient care and achieved more than one Trust could have individually