

## MEET THE CHAIR



## PHYSIOTHERAPIST AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST TRAILBLAZER

**This month we are introducing to you the chair of the level 6 Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist Trailblazer groups, Anita Cooper.**

In Lincolnshire we had been working together with colleagues from Sheffield Hallam University since 2005 delivering the Lincolnshire Practice Based Learning BSc (Hons) degree in both Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy. This had developed out of a real need to **'grow our own'** in Lincolnshire due to recruitment challenges. This programme was hugely successful with cohorts in alternate years from 2005 to 2017 producing high quality Occupational therapy and Physiotherapy graduates who were based locally.

Unfortunately, the education commissioning framework changed these programmes which meant that the 2017 cohort would be the last. This was not an option for us in Lincolnshire and so we started to have discussions about the potential to develop the Degree apprenticeship.

We are also very lucky within the county to have the Lincolnshire Talent Academy which works across the organisations to deliver proactive services to aid recruitment and development of our current and future workforce, whilst also ensuring the integration of skills across the health and care system. Claire Flavell, Strategic Lead of the talent Academy, with her knowledge of Apprenticeship pathways, Apprenticeship levy management and System-wide delivery was a key person in supporting our ambitions.

I was nominated by colleagues to be the chair of the Occupational Therapy Trailblazer because of my knowledge of the Practice Based learning programme and experience of successfully implementing this locally and this was supported by colleagues at a Degree Apprenticeship workshop at the Royal College of Occupational Therapists in November 2016. I was then asked to consider chairing the Physiotherapy trailblazer so that the two developed in tandem. I agreed to do this with the support of Claire Flavell as Co-chair. I had no real idea of what this would entail at the start, but I was passionate about this being an excellent opportunity for developing our future workforce.

The trailblazer groups were established in April 2017 and included members from NHS, Social care, voluntary sector and private organisations from across the country. We also had invaluable representation from Sheffield Hallam University, Coventry University, the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and Skills for Health.

The commitment from everyone involved to work together to get this right was incredible but I particularly want to thank Jan Parfitt from Skills for Health whose hard work and support was immeasurable. Throughout the development of the standard and more so of the End Point Assessment (EPA) plan the guidance from the Institute was changing and although challenging at times, on reflection, this really did make us think hard about what we were trying to achieve and getting the best possible outcome for both professions.

The success of getting the standards and the EPA approved and published was fantastic but the hard work doesn't stop there! The work of the HEI's to develop Degree apprenticeship programmes that meet the needs of providers and are approved by HCPC and accredited by the Professional bodies; Local discussions and negotiations within provider organisations to allocate levy funding, identify posts, agree banding, write job descriptions; develop recruitment processes in collaboration with the HEI's etc.

However, we are now delighted to say that we have our first cohort of Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy apprentices at Sheffield Hallam University who are settling in well. Coventry University and a number of other HEI's have approved programmes being recruited to for commencement in the Autumn or next Spring.

This has been an amazing experience and one that I hope will continue to develop, providing an excellent opportunity to shape and grow our workforce for the future.

**Download the standards below:**

[Physiotherapist \(Degree\)](#)  
[Occupational Therapist \(Degree\)](#)