

APPRENTICES SUPPORTING THE FRONT LINE COVID-19 EFFORT: A CASE STUDY



Meet Katherine Upton-Hicks who is a Team Leader at Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust.

Katherine is a Team Leader within the Chichester Healthy Child Programme and is currently undertaking the L7 Senior Leader (Degree) apprenticeship.

We spoke to her about how her apprenticeship had prepared her to support her team and stakeholders through the Covid-19 challenge.

1

How has your role changed as a result of COVID-19? How are you managing the “usual” challenges of an apprenticeship with additional pressures?

I've stayed as a team lead throughout Covid-19, but the teams have changed rapidly due to half of the workforce being re-deployed to other services. We now run 'hubs' rather than individual teams. There are 4 original teams now in our hub where I share team lead responsibilities with one other remaining team leader.

I did not want to take a break in learning, as the current situation, as challenging as it is has been, it's also been incredibly valuable in terms of my MBA level learning and developing thought processes to manage challenges. My university have also been incredibly understanding and accommodating by extending deadlines and continuing to provide online, remote learning resources.

2

How are you feeling about this? Do you feel your apprenticeship has helped you to prepare for these unprecedented times?

Covid-19 has been stressful for us all, and the Healthy Child Project has been no exception to that. The process of re-deploying staff, and setting up a new skeletal service has been hard work and very stressful for employees. They have to work in a whole new way which doesn't always feel comfortable, especially due to the service we offer. The workload has felt relentless, not just in terms of considering service delivery, but in managing staff emotions and expectations.

I had only just started my apprenticeship in January 2020, so we were only weeks into our apprenticeship journey before lockdown began. However, I do think that the learning the apprenticeship has provided, even in this short time has been hugely beneficial to my thinking, and how I will think & behave when it comes to the re-normalisation process when we are out the other end.

3

How will your experiences contribute to your apprenticeship and learning when you return to programme?

I have already started to reflect on the circumstances in practice and how my apprenticeship learning will benefit my practice going forward. I think that this situation with Covid-19 can only provide a richer learning experience especially within the field of a MBA leadership qualification. Covid-19 impacts upon every aspect of the organisation and all individuals within it, although it is a lot of work I definitely think I, and the Trust, can benefit from my progression.

For apprenticeship updates, resources and guidance related to Coronavirus (Covid-19) please visit [HASO](https://haso.org.uk).



I see being able to study for an MBA as a real gift and opportunity and I am grateful to the NHS and the apprenticeship system for giving me this opportunity. I would never be able to fund this myself or would my Trust be able to afford it if it was not available via an apprenticeship. Being able to upskill future NHS leaders with an MBA qualification exposes you to other management worlds beyond the NHS to learn from and share experiences and knowledge with.

As the largest employer within the UK, it's vital that the NHS trains its existing and future leaders to the highest level possible, and opens up routes to senior leadership in ways other than traditional approaches of hierarchy or those that have access to self-funded routes of CPPD. I'm hoping that studying at MBA level will enable me to put into practice the academic business models and frameworks that can lead to enhanced service design and delivery and effective staff management and leadership which will benefit stakeholders, employees and at the heart of everything, service users.

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