

# CREATING MATERNITY SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES AT SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS

## **How Sheffield Teaching Hospitals introduced the maternity support worker apprenticeship and how the Covid-19 EPA flexibilities has allowed the apprentices to complete on-time**

In April 2019, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals set out on an exciting new journey – they started their first cohort of Maternity Support Worker Apprentices.

Working in partnership with Sheffield College, 11 apprentices took to their studies. Ranging in age from 19 to 50, they were already employees of the Trust and had been working in healthcare support worker roles. Some had worked for the Trust for 10 years and others were new to the role; but what they all had in common was the aspiration to work in maternity and a desire to learn and expand their skills.

There were hurdles along the way as with all new courses, but the apprenticeship provided several key benefits to the wards and to the learners. Once the apprentices were gaining new skills and knowledge, the labour and postnatal wards found that the apprentices relieved work pressures, they could support the midwives in more ways, and they were viewed as valuable members of the team.

The apprentices were also able to apply a much more holistic approach to women and babies, and they became less task focused. The underpinning knowledge in physiology and evidence based practice that the apprenticeship provided gave the apprentices much more depth to their practice. For example, learning about key public health issues such as feeding, safe sleeping and mental health meant they were able to take a more active role and apply their new knowledge in the workplace.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there had been initial concern that the apprentices would have to take a break in learning or be redeployed, however the apprentices were able to stay in their maternity support worker roles and were able to continue with their learning.

The apprentices were due to complete their End Point Assessment (EPA) in the summer of 2020, however the EPA included an 'observation of practice in the workplace', and due to Covid-19 the ability for this observation to take place was severely impacted and the Trust was unsure when the learners would be able to complete.

In April 2020, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), published their Covid-19 EPA flexibilities, which included the ability for Maternity Support Worker Apprentices to replace the observation assessment with a reflective statement. This flexibility meant that the apprentices were able to complete their apprenticeship in May 2020. All the apprentices passed their EPA and seven achieved distinctions. This fantastic achievement has meant that all the learners have all been able to complete their apprenticeship on time and will be able to join the workforce as Maternity Support Workers.

The apprenticeship has been such a success at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals, that they are looking to run future cohorts.

Kayli-Rose Green, MSW apprentice said:

***“EPA flexibility makes me feel less anxious. To know that the EPA doesn’t need to be delayed due to Covid-19. Because I’ve put so much work into this so far.”***



Gemma Hall, MSW apprentice said:

***“What a relief to know that that there’s a plan to help us finish the apprenticeship.”***

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



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