



MEET THE CHAIRS

MIDWIFE TRAILBLAZER

We spoke with Gloria Rowland, Barts Health NHS Trust and Sally Ashton-May, Health Education England who are joint chairs of the Midwife Apprenticeship Trailblazer group.

So, Gloria and Sally, please tell us a bit about your day jobs?

Sally

I am the lead Midwife at Health Education England (HEE) with both a professional and operational remit. I sit within the National Nursing & Midwifery Team but also provide clinical expert resource and leadership to the national Maternity Programme. Health Education England's purpose is to support the delivery of excellent healthcare and health improvement to the patients and public of England by ensuring that the workforce of today and tomorrow has the right numbers, skills, values and behaviours, at the right time and in the right place. Therefore, within the maternity programme portfolio of work we lead on delivery of increasing midwifery student training placement and supporting workforce modelling for midwifery and other maternity healthcare workers. The programme of work is extensive but from a midwifery perspective includes RePAIR in midwifery and Advanced Clinical Practice in Midwifery.

Gloria

I am the Director of Midwifery at Barts Health NHS Trust, the largest maternity service in the UK with about 16,000 births per annum. My core role is setting strategic vision and direction for maternity services. I provide the overall professional midwifery leadership at my current Trust. I am the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) of the East London Local Maternity System (ELMS) leading and fostering innovative ideas of implementing the national maternity review (Better Births) strategy, NHS Long Term Plan, Saving Babies Live care bundle and Leadership for managing COVID-19 pandemic.

Why did you step up to be chair of the Midwife Trailblazer?

Sally

As a member of HEE and as a midwife I have always had a keen interest in education, developing alternative routes into midwifery and system working. I also worked closely with the national development and implementation of the Nursing Associate role and apprenticeship and recognised the opportunity the Registered Midwifery Degree Apprenticeship represents for widening participation for our maternity support worker workforce.

Gloria

I am passionate about having the right staff and building succession plans at every level that will continuously support safety and improvement of maternity care. I enjoy pioneering innovation that strengthens midwifery profession, building capability and capacity of the maternity workforce. Having a new route into the midwifery position through the apprenticeship scheme paves a new pathway for our maternity support workers. This scheme will make our maternity support workers feel valued which will have a positive impact on morale and job satisfaction.

It has been an interesting journey with the Midwife Trailblazer. Two versions of the standard have been developed in quick succession. Could you tell us a bit more about why that was?

Both

The first standard was developed at pace following a request from the Department of Health & Social Care and we worked with the trailblazer group that had been informally created by a group of employers working with the Lead Midwife for Education from the University of Greenwich. The standard was developed against the existing NMC Midwifery Standards (2009) to enable some registered midwife apprenticeship programmes to be piloted and to create an alternative route into midwifery, that supports the HEE government mandated requirement to increase midwifery student training places by 25 % by 2023 in accordance with the Maternity Workforce Transformation Strategy.

The second standard (NMC 2019) was required because a year after the first was approved, the NMC published the Future Midwife Standards (2019) requiring the apprenticeship to be developed to meet these, enabling Universities to develop apprenticeships and seek approval for delivery. With these standards now in place, wider uptake than the pilot is hoped for.

The second version of the standard has now been approved for delivery. Congratulations.

Looking back what were the challenges?

Both

The initial challenge was to work at high speed with the trailblazer group to ensure the standards could be developed and used to develop registered midwife apprenticeship programmes that could be started ahead of the forthcoming NMC standards change.

The second was to engage a number of Universities and provider organisations to develop and run programmes against the first apprenticeship standard in the knowledge they would need to change the following year but we developed a support package to trial the programmes and learning from them was incorporated into the development of the second standard.

The time frames were very tight but the support of our lead from Skills for Health Lucy Blinko and from Bhavena Patel from the Institute, coupled with the positive, solution finding approach from the multi organisational membership which included, in addition to forward-thinking Maternity Service providers, HEIS, the RCM and NMC ensured delivery and we were fortunate on both occasions that we were not required to make significant changes or additions.

Another major challenge was that with the first standard, the end point assessment (EPA) was non-integrated. This meant that the students may be registered as a midwife via NMC but not completed the apprenticeship programme until the EPA is done. However, we are glad that the new midwifery apprenticeship EPA is now integrated with the NMC midwifery registration requirements.

And what achievements are you most proud of?

Both

We are both proud of the registered midwife apprentices that have started their journey into our profession and the educators, midwives and midwifery leaders that facilitated this opportunity and are supporting them.

Secondly but equally importantly, we are proud of the collaborative, professional working within the trailblazer group, the commitment to developing the first apprenticeship standard whilst knowing the process would need to be repeated in a short space of time and willingness to come back together to develop the second standard.

Do you have any tips for other Trailblazer chairs?

Sally

This trailblazer was incredibly fortunate to have Gloria as the co-chair, she is a very senior and experienced Director of Midwifery held in high esteem within the profession. This coupled with her extensive clinical knowledge and expertise meant she was able to steer the group effectively. Between us we supported effective communication and supportive challenge that enabled us to move at pace.

Gloria

Tips for other Trailblazer chairs would include ensuring wide group membership of relevant and influential stakeholders, for midwifery this included in addition to the providers, universities, the Nursing & Midwifery Council and the Royal College of Midwives. This level of engagement enabled us to work through difficult issues and form consensus which meant the consultation in the wider midwifery arena returned less queries and challenges and speeded up approval processes.

The first apprenticeship was part of a pilot. Please can you tell us a bit more about the pilot sites and what has happened to date?

Both

There are 3 pilot sites that were supported by Health Education England to run the first apprenticeships against the first Registered Midwifery Degree Apprenticeship Standard.

The University of Greenwich and partnering Trusts developed a 4-year programme that commenced in January 2020, apprentices were drawn from existing maternity support workers and have been found to be excellent students that bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience in the maternity arena that supports their learning as student midwives. They have had 100% retention of their apprentices (MSWs drawn from service) in the 1st year of training which is an incredible achievement and very rare and indicates the value/benefit of this route.

The University of West London Pilot is a 3-year programme that was due to start in April but was deferred to October 2020 due to wave 1 Covid-19.

The University of Bedford Pilot is a Post Registration 20-month programme for Registered Nurses wishing to become midwives as their next career step. The programme started in February 2020 but had to be deferred to October 2020 due to Covid-19 as these nursing registrants were required to go back into their RN roles to support the workforce.

The first-year feedback has been very positive from students, HEIs and Trust's perspective.

Some of the comments from the provider's feedback include enthusiastic, passionate, engaging and committed students.

The short-term investment made in these programmes by the provider Trusts is expected to provide longer term gains in respect of retention as these individuals are mature, understand the NHS system and are already well established in the Trusts and less likely to drop out of the programme or change carer pathway.

How has Covid-19 impacted this?

Both

There was minimum disruption (4 weeks) to clinical placement during the first wave of Covid-19 pandemic. The apprenticeship students were deployed back to their employers to work as maternity support workers. The students went back after four weeks to continue their programme but modified as lectures were carried out through virtual platforms.

As more organisations implement the standards, what challenges do you envisage?

Both

The most significant challenge, as previously seen in Registered Nurse Apprenticeships, is the ability of provider Trusts to fund apprentices to undertake the programme. The backfill costs to release staff for study can prove inhibitive, even whilst recognising the importance of developing the grow your own supply pathway from maternity support workers to midwives and the longer-term financial gain of retention, the financial challenge is real.

Do you have any top tips for people considering implementing this apprenticeship?

Both

- Financial support from providers to implement the project was initially challenging. Recommendation for Trusts planning to commence the programme is early development of business case and strong buying from key stakeholders such as Director of Midwifery, Chief Nurses, Chief Executive and Director of Finance.
- Inclusion of the midwifery apprenticeship funding in the maternity yearly business planning cycle.
- Prepare the maternity support worker's workforce in your organisation to undertake pre-admission gap analysis and develop a programme to help them meet the university entry criteria.



[Click here](https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/) to download the Midwife standard and end-point assessment plan.