

# WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN APPRENTICESHIP LEAD



**We spoke with Paul  
Marijetic (Head of  
Apprenticeships),  
about what it's like to  
implement healthcare  
apprenticeships at  
Royal Free London  
NHS Foundation  
Trust.**

Paul is the Head of Apprenticeships at Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust.

The trust employs 10,000 staff in London providing acute hospital based services. Paul's day job involves developing and implementing strategies to utilise apprenticeships for recruitment, staff development and staff retention.

He also is responsible for managing the Trust's approved apprenticeship delivery as a main provider.

This means they can deliver apprenticeships to their own employees and to external apprentices.



**Royal Free London  
NHS Foundation Trust**

## **1. What is your organisation's approach to apprenticeships?**

There are a variety of approaches but none of them involve needing to spend the levy or meeting public sector targets. We have developed the building blocks to deliver quality apprenticeships and by getting this structure and framework right the targets will look after themselves. Some apprenticeships are linked to workforce planning others have come out of an individual development need through the appraisal process.

Procurement is different dependent on the anticipated numbers of apprenticeships and subject area but always follow public sector procurement rules e.g. we procured, in a competitive tendering process, for business administration apprenticeships just for our Trust. We did so because we had specific needs and had the numbers to make it worthwhile. In other areas we have led on the procurement across the STP Area for all Trusts. In all commissioning opportunities we get approval from Finance and Executive to tender before we start. This keeps them informed and smooths the process when it gets to the contracting stage.

## **2. Which apprenticeships do you deliver?**

Currently we have 33 different apprenticeship subject matters within our Trust. They are in diverse areas such as Surveying, Accountancy, Electrician as well as Nursing Associate, Occupational Therapy, Cardio Physiology and Ophthalmology to name a few. We offer whatever apprenticeships are required providing there is a training provider that delivers it. As a Main Provider we deliver Team Leader and Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeships to our staff and are planning, with partners, to deliver other apprenticeships to primary care and other Trusts.

## **3. Which Training Providers and EPAOs are you partnering with?**

We have had over 400 apprentices on 33 different programmes with 28 training providers and EPAOs. We are also a training provider ourselves and we work with City & Guilds and Innovate for EPA. As I have worked in apprenticeships for over ten years including as Head of Apprenticeships for a large London FE College I have a good idea of what a good provider looks like (poacher turned gamekeeper!). In commissioning I take into account success rates, Ofsted reports as well as setting explicit specifications and questions designed to elicit the required information which will also form the basis of the contract. If they have worked with other Trusts I will also contact them for their opinion of the provider. HEE has contact details of all the apprenticeship leads and will put you in touch should you need it.

## **4. What steps have you taken towards setting up apprenticeships?**

We have been delivering healthcare support worker apprenticeships as a supporting provider since 2017. With the new Register of Apprenticeship Training Provider (ROATP) process being brought in we got approval from the Executive Team to become a main training provider. We applied and was approved in July 2019, the first NHS Trust in England to achieve this status under the new process. We are now delivering apprenticeships to our own staff and drawing down the funding.

Two other key areas in setting up apprenticeships was through recruitment. Our policy, approved by the Executive Team, is that every vacant band 2-6 admin and clerical post must be an apprenticeship and every apprenticeship is a permanent contract. This means we utilise apprenticeships for recruitment but it also allows for career progression linked to training for existing staff as they can apply as well. The fact that it is an apprenticeship it encourages staff to apply for it as they feel supported as there is training as well. We have also changed the recruitment of our nursing assistants, we recruit them for their attitude and values and if they are appointable but have no previous experience in an acute hospital and their English and maths is of a suitable standard, they will become apprentices.

## **5. What are your apprentice numbers like?**

We have had over 400 apprenticeships starts and with over 275 currently on programme.

In our own delivery of apprenticeships we have 50 learners that have completed the Healthcare Support Worker apprenticeship. Our success rate is 84% which is over 30 percentage points above the national rate of 51.8%. We have 100% pass rate for those that took the EPA and this breaks down into pass 19%, 58% merit and 23% distinction.

Currently have we have 25 Healthcare Support Worker apprentices on programme and have started our first cohort of 15 Team Leader Apprenticeships.

## **6. What has been the hardest part?**

You couldn't have a 'hardest part' without mentioning COVID-19 and the extraordinary way our apprentices have stepped up to the plate in very difficult circumstances. We had a cohort of young Healthcare Support Worker apprentices start in Feb 2020 and in November 2020. When the next time a manager doesn't want an apprentice because they want 'someone to hit the ground running' I think this will blow that myth right out of the water!

Having a poor training provider is challenging, especially for the apprentice. We had some legacy training providers that had poor delivery. They were not delivering what the apprentice needed or what we wanted but despite challenging the performance, things never improved. You couldn't swap the apprentice to another provider because there wasn't enough funding in their account to make it worth the while of an alternative training provider. You are stuck either managing a bad apprenticeship or the apprentice quits thereby not achieving. There is no recourse to this other than never using them again, which with these two training provider we did but it didn't help the apprentices that were with them.

## **7. What has been the best part?**

In addition to seeing the apprentices' pride in their achievement, it is sceptical recruiting managers having to take on an apprentice but coming back to you some time later saying how brilliant that apprentices is. You have not only won over hearts and minds, but you have created a powerful advocate.

## **8. Do you have any tips for other apprenticeship leads?**

- Utilise the network of Apprenticeship Leads or create your own network of leads. The knowledge within that group is vital in navigating the myriad of bureaucracies associated with apprenticeships. They are also the best source of knowing the good training providers.
- Responsibility for apprenticeships is often given to someone ‘on top of their other work’ and yet it needs to be resourced like any other service. As a minimum it requires a lead and administrative support. If you think about your levy amount, what other department would have that amount of turnover managed by just one member of staff. Makes a case for additional support through the business case of the amount of yearly levy as annual turnover.
- If you are talking to a training provider the first person you will speak to is a salesperson, they may be called something different but that is effectively what they are and some work on commission. As a result, it is in their interest to ‘sell’ their services. If you are interested in discussing further, always insist the trainer or curriculum lead attend, not just the salesperson. You will get a better understanding of the content, the delivery, and their understanding of the work environment than the salesperson who will only have the basic information.
- Sometimes there are no financial or economic justifications in the short term for taking on an apprentice. You must look at the bigger picture and find justification through that. It can be increasing diversity in the workplace, recruiting from the local community, working with disadvantaged young people, retaining staff, being known as an employer that develops people and therefore becoming an employer of choice or it’s just the right thing to do.

## **9. What are the next steps for you?**

As a main provider we are in preparation mode for an Ofsted inspection. As a new provider we have yet to have the new provider visit and whilst there is no doubt a backlog at Ofsted, we want to make sure that we are not only delivering high quality apprenticeships (which we know) but can prove it and show it to Ofsted.

We are planning the delivery of apprenticeships across the STP area in partnership with a community group. We will utilise the expertise at source in primary care where needed. This will start in March 2021 and we are exploring similar opportunities with sector specialists in mammography.

We hope to start our first registered nursing degree apprenticeships soon. We have a complete pathway to develop our staff with apprenticeships through delivering Healthcare Support Worker level 2 to Nursing Associate Level 5 and now the final link for our Registered Nursing Associates is to develop through apprenticeships to become registered nurses. The funding from HEE has proved critical in enabling us to take this final step.

## **10. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?**

As a main provider we can deliver apprenticeships to both our staff and other NHS Staff. As we have this status, we can work with other Trusts in partnerships to deliver to their staff or subcontract that Trust if they have the supporting provider status for them to deliver. It would be good to explore this further with specialist areas within the NHS, where there are no training providers. We can create the delivery of apprenticeships by the NHS for the NHS.