

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN APPRENTICESHIP MANAGER



We spoke with Lesley Cradduck (Apprenticeship Manager), about what it's like to implement healthcare apprenticeships at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust



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

Our People Plan outlines our pledge and commitment to staff development and to utilising apprenticeships where possible to help meet this objective. We have a Workforce Development and Education Training Group that meets monthly and apprenticeships are a core agenda item. Applications for levy funding from individuals and teams are reviewed and approved at this meeting. Our levy spend is also reviewed at this meeting. New developments are discussed and both myself and the trust Strategic Education Lead are responsible for ensuring our service leads are aware of any new and emerging apprenticeship standards.

We are currently working with our recruitment team to increase the number of staff recruited into apprenticeship posts. We are involved in the Kickstart scheme as well as other preparation for work programmes and are confident that these placements will lead to apprenticeships. Workforce planning can be a challenge, but we recognise it is key to securing robust apprenticeship opportunities in the trust.

2. Which apprenticeships do you deliver/are you planning to offer?

We offer a wide range of apprenticeships in the Nursing family, Healthcare and Senior Healthcare Support, Adult Care, Lead Adult Care; Leader in Adult Care, Nursing Associate; Registered Nursing and Advanced Clinical Practice. In the Allied Health Professions (AHP) family we offer the Senior Healthcare Support Work, Physiotherapy, Trainee Assistant Practitioner and Social Work.

We have staff on a range of non-clinical apprenticeships including Hospitality, Business Administrator, Team Leader, Operations Manager, Chartered Manager, Senior Leader, Project Management and Data Analyst. And a range of ICT apprenticeships from level 2 to level 6, Finance at levels 3, 4 and 7, HR Business Partners levels 3 and 5, Learning and Development level 3 and Learning and Skills Teacher level 5. We are looking forward to starting Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner and are looking closely at other AHP opportunities including Occupational Therapy, Dietetics, Podiatry and Speech and Language Therapy.

3. Which providers and EPAOs are you partnering with?

We have a wide range of Further Education, Higher Education Institutions and Training providers. Often, we will use different providers for the same standard as our aim is to meet the apprentice and their teams' needs. Sometimes a different delivery model is needed or a different geographical location as our trust has such a large geographical footprint.

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

We have set up a range of working groups that are exploring ways of increasing the number of apprentices we have in our trust. Our widening participation work will serve as a pipeline to apprenticeships in the trust. Our professional leads are involved in work with Health Education England (HEE) on regional procurement opportunities, this really encourages the needed workforce planning in relation to the numbers they would like to see in their teams, and helps to raise awareness of what is available to them as a potential apprenticeship.

We are proposing changes to our recruitment processes that will encourage recruiters to think about apprenticeship as a route into the trust. I work closely with our widening participation lead and we are delivering awareness sessions in a range of settings and organisations that should lead to an increase in the numbers of apprentices we recruit externally. For existing staff we have engagement events and all key personnel attend the education governance meeting and our apprenticeship sub-group meeting.

5. What are your apprentices numbers like?

At the time of writing, we have 320 apprentices on programme, the majority are doing clinical apprenticeships. In the next few months, we will have recruited a further 40 Level 2 Healthcare Support Worker apprentices and have plans to offer 37 Kickstart placements, which should lead to Customer Service apprenticeships. Our Nursing Associate Programme remains our biggest apprenticeship programme and we are looking forward to starting another 11 apprentices on this programme in the coming months.

6. What has been the hardest part?

The most challenging thing is to get apprenticeships firmly planted in peoples' minds as a viable development route. The term 'apprentice' can be the barrier, managers just don't recognise that this is an opportunity for them and their staff. The perception of the apprenticeship can also be a barrier, staff don't always embrace the fact that their apprenticeship relates to both work and the study time. The real successes are when the managers, staff teams and the individuals recognise the apprenticeship is 'all week' and the learning can and should go on outside of the training sessions. Spending the levy is difficult and in an ideal world if we had more flexibility with how we could use this, we could dramatically increase the numbers of apprentices we have across the whole sector.

7. What has been the best part?

The progression that has been offered to staff (too many to mention), healthcare support staff who have gone on to do professional degree apprenticeships, staff who have had promotions as a result of just starting an apprenticeship and when undertaking skills analysis start to recognise their existing skills and worth. As a previous provider I am particularly proud of our own 59 successful apprentices, 42% of whom have gone on to degree and foundation degree level apprenticeships.

It has been really enjoyable working with a wide range of service leads, training providers and academics and learning about areas of work I knew nothing about. I was a teacher (and always at my core a general nurse) so to come into a trust like Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust with its diverse range of services is brilliant, you never stop learning. It is exciting and very rewarding to work with managers and help them to see and develop apprenticeship pathways that are going to massively impact on our patients' quality of care.

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

Network with other apprentice leads especially in your own Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STP). Work with organisations like HEE – their expertise is invaluable and you should get to know your apprenticeship relationship manager. Keep on repeating the same messages internally in your organisation, apprenticeships are our world but drop out of the thought patterns of some service leads, they need nudging and reminding to look at potential apprenticeships they can offer.

9. What are the next steps for you?

I still have lots to do, I have been in post since 2017 but until last year I combined this role with running our own apprenticeship centre, this took all of my time so I feel like I am just getting started with promoting the apprenticeship agenda the way that it should be promoted and embedded in the trust.

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

We have a very good apprenticeship lead network in our region and have great support from all the apprenticeship leads in this group. We also get great support from our Apprenticeship Relationship Manager at HEE. I am very involved in the widening participation work, we started a Careers Ambassador group in the trust and are currently working with our local Careers Hub to create a range of online resources and video tours for local schools and colleges.