



MEET THE CHAIRS ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONER TRAILBLAZER

We spoke with Steve Nelson and Tim Birch who are the co-chairs of the Level 6 Environmental Health Practitioner Trailblazer Group.

So, Steve and Tim, please tell us a bit about your day jobs?

Tim

Tim is the Compliance and Enforcement Manager for the Food and Health and Safety Team at Manchester City Council. He is also a qualified Environmental Health Practitioner. Tim's team is responsible for regulating a wide variety of businesses to ensure they serve safe food to the public and that workplaces are safe environments for employees. Tim's Environmental Health Practitioners identify hazards and assess the risks in businesses by undertaking inspections, investigations and responding to complaints to support businesses in complying with the law and taking appropriate enforcement action when standards pose a risk to public health.

Steve

Steve is the Operations Director for NSF International, a global public health and safety organisation. Part of his remit is to oversee the delivery of 45000 health and food safety 2nd party audits within the UK and Europe for a range of private sector clients, both global and local.

Why did you step up to be the chair of the Environmental Health Practitioner trailblazer group?

Steve

Through his role, Steve was aware of the need for maintaining a constant talent pipeline of suitably qualified, confident, engaging team of Environmental Health Practitioners.

The UK Food Safety environment is going through several changes currently and the development of an apprenticeship to increase the opportunities for new Environmental Health Practitioners to enter the profession will enhance the talent pipeline.

“By being co-chair of the trailblazer group, I was able to include private sector issues alongside my co-chair from the public sector. We wanted to ensure that the apprentices come out work ready for both private and public sector, increasing their choices of employment and employability once the programme has concluded.” - Steve

Tim

For Tim, as a local authority employer, it has become increasingly difficult to recruit staff with the necessary qualifications and practical skills despite increasing resource demands. The number of training routes and funding for an Environmental Health Practitioner has reduced over the last 10 years so an apprenticeship is an ideal way of increasing participation and enabling employers to develop existing staff and create new training posts.

“I was excited by the opportunity to be able to directly influence the apprenticeship development and therefore the Environmental Health profession.” - Tim

Who was involved in the trailblazer group?

Both

The group had representation from local authority, private sector employers, the professional body and universities with a wide range of skills and experience across the Environmental Health profession. This diversity provided ample opportunity to discuss and address the issues with creating a workable and hopefully desirable apprenticeship programme.

“As 40% of all Environmental Health Practitioners now work in the private sector it was very important that the apprenticeship recognised and reflected all the employment opportunities available to a prospective Environmental Health Practitioner and fully satisfied all employers’ requirements.”

The standard has now been approved and the End Point Assessment Plan has been submitted for approval. Looking back, what were the challenges?

Both

The initial challenge was to overcome any traditional but restrictive ideas of what an Environmental Health programme contains to ensure that the apprenticeship met the modern needs of an apprentice and an employer. Other challenges included:

- Different learning opportunities that Local Authority based apprentices could experience compared to those of the private sector, whose remit is not as encompassing.

- Private sector Environmental Health Practitioners do not have the same powers as Local Authority, so a compromise was required to ensure whichever route the apprentice took the final outcomes were the same.
- Costings were an issue with each university having different processes.
- Gaining the interest from other private sector business, with just enough involvement secured to ensure the process met the requirements of the Institute.
- Ensuring the apprenticeship met with any external criteria. The professional body was going through a period of change to its qualifications and membership criteria and the government regulator was progressing a large-scale change to food industry regulation.

“A big challenge was ensuring that the apprenticeship met the needs of private sector employers as well as public sector local authorities, as there are distinct differences in some of the duties that apprentices will undertake in each sector.”

What achievements are you most proud of?

Both

Helping to ensure that the Environmental Health profession has an apprenticeship route that encourages organisations and employees to invest in the profession and provide a more sustainable resource for the future.

“My background is not from the same technical Health and Food Safety baseline as many of my colleagues on the trailblazer group. So, for me, being part of the team to get this over the line in a workable programme with the inclusion of the nontechnical elements was something I will always be proud of.” - Steve

We are also very proud of working in a successful partnership with all employers, universities and the professional body, but particularly ensuring a public and private sector partnership that communicated and collaborated well to overcome differences and ultimately achieve the same aim.

Do you have any tips for other Trailblazer chairs?

Both

Ensure that at the start of the process you engage with professional bodies (or indeed any agencies and organisations) as well as the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and keep them updated. Invite them to your workshops and speak to them about anything you are unsure of as soon as possible.

“A top tip is to get to know your Skills for Health contact and maximise their expert knowledge of the process. The support from the Skills for Health team was invaluable to the chairs and ensured efficient progress through the whole process.”

The process may seem like a long one at times but do not give up it is certainly rewarding and worth it.

As organisations prepare to implement this standard, what challenges do you foresee?

Both

- Providing sufficient variety for the apprentice through the period of the programme
- Having enough cash flow and investment allocated to the apprentice to pay for the non-earning (revenue generating) days
- The risk that once the apprenticeship has concluded the apprentice will seek employment elsewhere for more variety, exposure to other aspects of an Environmental Health Practitioner role that are not possible in the private sector

But these can be overcome by:

- ensuring the support of your HR department particularly around the financial processes and the apprenticeship levy
- ensuring there is enough management/supervision time given to the apprenticeship process along with existing responsibilities

“I feel very optimistic about the Environmental Health Practitioner apprenticeship opportunity. When it is up and running there will likely be an over subscription of employees in some organisations wishing to engage with the process. A challenge will be managing expectations and the amount of overall employee time that can be allocated to development within their existing jobs.” - Tim

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

Both

- Consider what you want at the end of the process and engage with as many private sector companies in the same field before progressing too far down the route.
- Make your senior management structure aware of the long-term benefits of developing their existing work force via the apprenticeship.

* Environmental Health Professionals are at the forefront of public health, as every aspect of environmental health is designed to improve the public's health and wellbeing. The five main areas of environmental health are: noise and environmental pollution, food safety and hygiene, workplace (occupational) health, housing standards and public health. Environmental health professionals work to meet statutory regulations. Find out more about a career as an Environmental Health Practitioner [here](#).



Download the Environmental Health Practitioner standard and Assessment Plan [here](#).