

# WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN APPRENTICESHIP LEAD



## We spoke with Karen Hookham, about what it's like to implement healthcare apprenticeships at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

The trust employs circa 10,000 staff providing hospital and community health services across Northumberland and North Tyneside. Karen's day job involves a range of tasks including strategic planning of programme development and delivery, recruitment and selection of apprentices, responsibility for the apprenticeship levy income and expenditure and leading and managing the apprenticeship team with a collective and compassionate leadership style ethos.



Northumbria Healthcare  
NHS Foundation Trust

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

The organisation is extremely proactive in the use of the apprenticeship offer to develop and progress the workforce. Apprenticeships are seen as a vital part of our workforce planning. As an employer provider we offer a number of level 2 – 3 apprenticeships in-house. These are promoted through our business units and via our internal communications channels. To develop our external apprenticeship programmes I network with area specialists, managers, as well as HEI's and HEE North to implement a variety of programmes that meet all apprenticeship standards. It is crucial that all requirements and agreements are met from an organisational, development and apprenticeship service point of view.

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

At present as an employer provider we deliver six programmes in-house: Customer Service Practitioner level 2, Business Administrator level 3, Team Leader level 3, Payroll Administrator level 3, Healthcare Support Worker level 2 and Senior Healthcare Support Worker level 3.

We support a further 25 apprenticeship standards :

- Accountancy or Taxation Professional
- Assistant Accountant
- Carpentry & Joinery
- Advanced Carpentry & Joinery
- Advanced Clinical Practitioner
- Chartered Manager
- Customer Service Specialist
- Digital Technology Solutions
- District Nurse
- Electrical Engineering
- Healthcare Assistant Practitioner
- Healthcare Science Practitioner
- HR Advisor
- HR Consultant Partner
- Learning Skills Teacher
- Operations Manager
- Pharmacy Technician
- Project Manager
- Registered Nurse
- Science Maintenance Technician
- Senior Leader
- Social Worker
- Nursing Associate

With our continuous focus on workforce development we are delighted in being able to offer the below in the near future:

- Sewing machinist's, Cutters, and Upholsters
- Physiotherapist
- Radiologists
- Public Health Practitioners
- Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner
- Podiatrist
- Pharmacy Assistants

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

- Teesside University
- Northumbria University
- Sunderland University
- Sunderland College
- Derwentside College
- Kaplan Financial Ltd
- HFMA (Healthcare Financial Management Association)
- Open University
- QA
- Buttercups
- Be Pro
- NGTC Group
- Northumbria University
- F & T Group Training Association

Throughout engagement with and selection of our partner training providers, we work closely with the department specialists, the register of training providers, as well as the NHS procurement services. A number of apprenticeship programmes are supported regionally in collaboration with Health Education England and our Talent for Care Relationship Manager.

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

Prior to 2017 we were an established provider of apprenticeships under the Frameworks and since the introduction of the apprenticeship standards, I have been involved in the planning, development, delivery and improvement of the organisation's apprenticeship programmes both internally and externally. Our first internal programme was the Business Administrator Level 3 apprenticeship in 2017 and whilst developing this programme, I worked in collaboration with the apprenticeship team and subject specialists to create qualitative curriculum content mapped to the standard and which meets the assessment plan. The complex part was choosing the end point assessment organisation, ensuring that the qualitative and quantitative content met the assessment criteria. Once this was established the organisation advertised internally to deliver the first cohort. Nominees had to have sign off from their manager who also authorised the 20% off-the-job learning. On reflection, I would say that the team were both curious and nervous until the first cohort went through their end point assessment with success. Since this first exciting initiative, the apprenticeship team have supported an additional six cohorts with continued success.

To deliver the external apprenticeship programmes, I work closely with the specialist leads, our talent for care manager, procurement and training providers to ensure we are meeting our workforce development goals as well as getting the best outcome for all of our business units and supporting the delivery of excellent patient care. Things that need to be considered are: the curriculum standard that the apprenticeship programmes are delivered to, what support is available at the HEI's and in the workplace and that there is a suitably qualified and experienced supervisor/mentor to support the apprentices.

In relation to upskilling our colleagues we ensure they are supported and understand the expectations of the programme and that they are fully aware of what is required. No external apprenticeship programmes are delivered until appropriate service level agreements are in place and are shared with NHS shared business services. I work with business units/department managers to establish that the applicants meet the entry requirements for higher degree apprenticeships with our partnered universities. If there is a requirement for backfill whilst the apprentice is attending their apprenticeship programme I support managers to complete and to consider the funds they may need.

I ensure that I keep the specialist up to date of requirements for example with functional skills, Maths and English. I support numerous hugely successful open evenings, expressions of interests, which all leads to opportunities for recruitment and selection through interviewing. The specialist lead then makes the decision on who is successful for selection.

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

Our apprenticeship numbers are growing year on year. Covid did have an impact as it will have done with all other organisations. We managed to keep the majority of our apprentices on programmes, which has been down to the support from my dedicated team. We have a delivery plan and monitor this to support our public sector duty.

Since the levy began in 2017 through to end of June 2021 we have had 739 people commence apprenticeships in the organisation across 30 different standards. We have had a number of successful completions with numbers increasing.

Throughout the same time period more than 80% of our level 2 apprentices have successfully completed their apprenticeships and gained employment within the Trust, which is fantastic. We are delighted in now seeing these apprentices progressing onto level 3 apprenticeship programme opportunities and into higher job roles.

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

Keeping the programmes running over the last 18 months, during a pandemic has been challenging. We have done our best to ensure everyone has been supported. Half of our team were redeployed for around six months to support front line clinical roles. It was really important that we did support colleagues.

Being new into the role it is also my own self-doubt (Imposter syndrome) that gets the better of me sometimes! I am my own greatest critic and this is something I am working on.

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

The best part of the job is seeing the numbers of those registering onto a variety of programmes increase. It is also very rewarding seeing the range of programmes that we offer increasing. I love to see people achieve and to progress in their career.

I have personally seen this with learners that I have supported from level 2 through to level 3 into successful careers, an example of this is one of the healthcare apprentices who is now a ward manager. To see these colleagues, develop into management roles is hugely rewarding. Collaborating with the various business units and departments to highlight the success of apprenticeships and how they can support their workforce is also something I very much enjoy.

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

- Have support from your executive team, this will ensure you get buy in from the wider organisation.
- Keep up to date and understand the apprenticeship levy and requirements of an employer provider, be clear on what is required by the ESFA and Ofsted and get as much support from your account managers and wider teams
- Keep up to date as things change.
- Make sure you have a supportive team behind you so that you are set up for success as this is always a huge benefit.

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

Next steps for me in the organisation would be to ensure the profile of apprenticeships remains high on the agenda and encompasses the corporate social responsibility pledge, supporting our workforce to grow, raising the profile of what Northumbria can offer.

Personally, for my own development I would like to continue to develop my networking skills, and leadership skills to support my team and actively be involved in mentoring of colleagues.