



MEET THE CHAIRS ENHANCED CLINICAL PRACTITIONER TRAILBLAZER

We spoke with Sue Haines, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust and Samantha Cook, Central Manchester NHS Foundation Trust who are joint chairs of the Enhanced Clinical Practitioner Apprenticeship Trailblazer group.

So, Sue and Sam, please tell us a bit about your day jobs?

Sam

I am the manager of the Greater Manchester Critical Care Skills Institute. A unique organisation in the NHS which provides education and training to critical care staff in the Greater Manchester area. This includes a collaborative agreement with a local Higher Education Institution. I manage a team of practice educators from all across Greater Manchester to deliver critical care education, adhering to agreed standards and encouraging a consistent approach to staff induction, development and assessment across multiple organisations.

Sue

I am an Assistant Director of Nursing at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, an acute care NHS organisation. I lead on work to develop new professional development opportunities and career pathways, to value, develop and retain nurses and other healthcare professionals. I also work proactively with partners across our Integrated Care System to raise the profile, influence and recognition of nurses and midwives across health and social care and I'm the East Midlands representative on the Royal College of Nursing - Professional Nursing Committee. With my colleague Professor Joanne Cooper, I lead the Institute of Care Excellence. The Institute is a collaboration of centres for nursing research, education and practice development. We work to advance and support the delivery of world-class care for patients, carers and families, generate new knowledge, innovations and education. We provide education and support for an established Trust wide programme of shared governance (shared decision making) and clinical leadership development.

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

Sam

Being active in critical care nurse education on a national level, I wanted to see through what I started! Discussions with colleagues from across the country led to the idea of establishing an apprenticeship standard to accommodate qualified staff. This would target existing staff, a staff group who can be overlooked, but in certain areas of healthcare do require further formal qualification. Stepping up to co-chair this exciting opportunity to assist employers to recruit and develop existing staff with necessary qualifications was something I could do to contribute in a meaningful way.

Sue

I am passionate about the importance of education and research, to develop skills, knowledge and competencies and creating clearer career pathways for nurses and other clinical professionals, that recognise the value of clinical knowledge and expertise to develop and retain staff. In 2018 I was a member of an East Midlands regional nursing workforce group lead by Directors of Nursing who recognised the opportunities that apprenticeships could offer to develop the clinical professional workforce. As a result, in January 2019 supported by Health Education England (HEE) and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) we hosted a national employer engagement and apprenticeship scoping workshop in Nottingham. This confirmed wide spread support, from a range of employers across health and social care, different specialities and professions. I was delighted to have the opportunity to take on the co-chair role of this trailblazer with Sam.

The title of this standard has changed from Specialist Clinical Practitioner to Enhanced Clinical Practitioner.

Could you tell us a bit more about why that was?

Both

This trailblazer has involved large numbers of employer stakeholders and wide spread consultation across professions. Following our first consultation period it became apparent that the term 'specialist practitioner' was causing confusion, as specialist knowledge can be articulated across many clinical roles, involving all levels of complexity and applied at any level of practice. Evidence reviewed and discussed by the Trailblazer group included a national workforce modelling project led by Professor Alison Leary involving employer stakeholders commissioned by HEE, which was underway at the same time as the Trailblazer. This work described 'enhanced' practice which clearly met the workforce needs and expectations of employers for this apprenticeship standard and 'Enhanced Clinical Practitioner' was agreed as a better fit for this role.

The standard has now been published. Congratulations.

Looking back, what were the challenges?

Sam

Challenges encountered along the way were mainly unexpected, for example, a global pandemic which following our first face to face meeting as a Trailblazer group meant we would not be able to meet face to face again! This certainly tested my IT skills and we were very ably assisted by our colleagues from Skills for Health and the experience has been positive. Costings were quite a challenge, with differences in approaches from different organisations.

Sue

I would agree with Sam, after one meeting the pandemic required us to rapidly learn new IT skills, to undertake a trailblazer group virtually, learning about the processes required for trailblazers to progress and enabling widespread consultation, evidence review and continuity. The support and guidance of colleagues at Skills for Health has been outstanding, keeping us on track throughout.

And what achievements are you most proud of?

Sam

Getting the Enhanced Clinical Practitioner recognised and ensuring that existing staff within the Healthcare Professions have an option offered under the apprenticeship scheme. Also the collaborative approach taken by all professions to achieve this apprenticeship, employers, universities and professionals from different healthcare backgrounds have all shared this vision and managed to overcome the challenges to achieve the same goal.

Sue

I'm proud of the collaboration and team working that has resulted in the development of the Enhanced Clinical Practitioner standard and the new career pathways this offers. The standard provides new opportunities to truly value, recognise, attract, develop and retain clinical professionals working at an enhanced level of practice, across a diverse range of health and social care settings and professions.

Do you have any tips for other Trailblazer chairs?

Both

To remain as flexible as possible in approaching issues highlighted by the process of the Trailblazer, for us there were some challenges to our development around language, terminology and which professions would be suitable to access the apprenticeship standard once available.

It was important to remain flexible and accepting that other professions see things in a different way which can all enhance the development. The opportunity to work together as co-chairs has been an excellent learning experience, supporting, sharing and learning from each other.

As organisations get ready to implement the standard when it becomes available, what challenges do you envisage?

Sam

I think for some areas ensuring that apprentices get 20% of their time "off-the-job" will be challenging but something I think is unique, to guarantee that staff have protected time out of their work to dedicate to their learning and education. This will be quite different for organisations to schedule in. It's important to work with human resources to ensure that apprentices' contracts reflect the commitments from all parties.

Sue

Each employer's situation will be different. Implementing and supporting a new apprenticeship standard can be complex, especially if new to apprenticeships. As the Enhanced Clinical Practitioner standard has a wide reach across specialities and professions, a clear strategic approach to implementation in organisations will be important and engaging clinical practitioners, managers and educators in planning and prioritising right from the start.

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

Sam

Engage with others who are offering apprenticeships in their organisation and promote the importance of developing existing staff, the impact this can have on staff retention and the value of this to health care as a whole.

Sue

We've certainly found networking and partnership-working central to successful implementation in my own organisation and across our integrated care system; including managers, clinical educators, human resources, apprenticeship leads, HEI colleagues and practitioners working together. We are really seeing the benefits of this now for clinical careers, with growing numbers of apprenticeships from entry level right up to advanced clinical practice and higher level apprenticeships.



Download the the standard and EPA [here](#).