

Resource developed jointly by the HASO and Skills for Health teams

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# Meet the Mentor



## Suzanne Boyle

**Suzanne is an apprenticeship mentor at Royal United Hospitals Bath, and is currently mentoring 4 apprentices completing the Senior Healthcare Support Worker, Healthcare Assistant Practitioner and Diagnostic Radiographer apprenticeship programmes.**

### **Suzanne, tell us how did you become a mentor?**

I have been a mentor / supervisor / manager for undergraduate students for over 20 years and my role has developed and expanded over this period of time. I now line manage a number of staff on different clinical apprenticeships as well as acting as a clinical supervisor, assessor, mentor & line manager on a daily basis.

### **What kind of individual support do you give the apprentices?**

Weekly meetings, one to one case discussions, working through queries and doubts. Providing support to avoid burnout.



### **How has your organisation benefitted from the apprenticeship programme?**

Our organisation has benefitted by offering these apprenticeships because we gain highly trained staff, who have been supported to develop their existing knowledge and skills within a supportive and enthusiastic team.

Enabling them to either work more effectively in their existing role or to gain additional skills. Thus allowing them to work in a different or extended role, ultimately benefiting the service we provide to our patients.



## How have you benefitted from being a mentor?

For me, the main benefit is to see staff who, without access to an apprenticeship pathway, would not be able to undertake these learning opportunities or to develop their skills in a formal way. I feel very privileged to be able to offer them the support they need and to enable each individual to challenge themselves to achieve new skills both in a clinical setting, but also as they work towards their formal academic qualification.

By supporting the staff as a mentor, I see a really positive change within the clinical team they work in, as well as being able to deliver excellent patient centred services. We are challenged to look at all aspects of care as our apprentices question us as part of their own learning and understanding of processes and procedures.

## What have been your biggest challenges whilst being a mentor?

My biggest challenge is managing expectations from staff wanting to access an apprenticeship. Since we have introduced regular apprenticeship opportunities within our department, they have become very popular and we have a significant number of staff who would like to take up these development opportunities. It is a balance between managing existing training posts within our workforce development plan and offering new posts to support existing staff and aid retention by being able to support development in a suitable and timely manner.

Another challenge comes when staff want to access a very specific apprenticeship, with a specific end role, but do not have the underlying qualifications. I actually love these situations, which may sound strange, but it gives me the opportunity to really get to know the individual, to find out if they are asking for a specific apprenticeship because that's the only one they are aware of, or if it is actually their desired goal. We then explore together what pathways can be accessed to help them achieve entry requirements so that they can access a specific apprenticeship in the future.

## And your biggest successes?

Mentoring staff who have had significant problems in school education settings and have felt they aren't clever enough to undertake further education.

By being able to support them to have the confidence to access further education via apprenticeships, and successfully develop their skills to produce academic work they are really pleased and proud of, is extremely rewarding.



## What do you hope to do next?

Next steps involve developing a formalised application process for staff within our department, alongside apprenticeship training posts being written into future workforce development plans so that we know each year we can support 'x' number of training posts.

Another factor is looking at recruiting onto apprenticeship training posts from applicants outside of the department - this could be by offering a training pathway for youngsters undertaking T Levels in healthcare from local HEI's we already work alongside. We also need to explore offering posts to A-Level leavers as an alternative to the undergraduate student route as I recognise that university education isn't accessible to all for a variety of reasons. We are likely to increase our chances to recruit excellent candidates who would really appreciate an apprenticeship and would ultimately benefit our future workforce.

## What tips do you have for people wanting to become a mentor?

Get to know your staff and what they want to achieve from any learning opportunities / apprenticeships, as misinformation or having a staff member on the wrong type of apprenticeship can hinder their chances to succeed.

Identify colleagues who can support you as you will not have all the knowledge you need as an individual, particularly if you're new to the role. To be an effective mentor, you also need to recognise that it is a constant state of learning for you too, in a really positive way.

You also need to have time to do the role effectively - this is probably going to be your biggest barrier as we recover from a pandemic and workflow increases.