

# FE COLLEGE PROVISION OF REGISTERED NURSE DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP

The Integrated Care System (ICS) in Somerset has taken on Registered Nurse Degree Apprentices recently. They are leading the way nationally on delivering the Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship through a Further Education College, Bridgwater and Taunton College. We spoke with both ICS and Bridgwater and Taunton College to find out more.

## Integrated Care System Somerset



### 1. Why did you want to invest in the Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship (RNDA) route?

The Integrated Care System (ICS) in Somerset need to bolster the recruitment of UK graduate nurses to become more sustainable and reduce reliance on international recruitment. We felt the RNDA route would widen access and attract a different pool of people into

nursing careers who might not otherwise be able to train. The apprenticeship provides an opportunity for us to achieve our “train here work here” ambition as an ICS. The route also gives flexibility as a progression route from the Nursing Associate apprenticeship and opens a route into registered nursing for our own staff, without them having to leave the county to go to university.

We commissioned research which indicated that many people locally are unable or unwilling to leave Somerset to go to university but do want a career in nursing. RNDA provides a solution especially for adult and mental health nursing, attracting a mix of younger people and mature entrants.



The Health Education England (HEE) funding offer was important to help us get started with RNDAs, as the employer commitment is considerable. We are however hoping to support regular cohorts of RNDAs going forwards as part of our nursing supply strategy.

## **2. Why did you want to partner with a Further Education (FE) College rather than a Higher Education Institution (HEI)?**

Geographical proximity. We have no HEI based within Somerset. Bridgwater and Taunton College were an obvious choice of partner for us as they are the largest college with a main campus opposite our largest acute hospital. They had a higher education offer as the University Centre Somerset, had experience in delivering the nursing associate pilot programme and we had an existing partnership in place which was delivering good outcomes.

FE colleges have significant expertise in apprenticeships, Bridgwater and Taunton College are recognised by Ofsted as outstanding for their apprenticeship provision, as well as winning the Association of Colleges (AoC) Beacon Award for employer engagement in 2020/21. Working with a partner that understands that apprenticeships are employer led is vital, we share a common objective to provide high quality education that delivers the skills required. The FE College solution enables us to build joined up career pathways and employer relationships with students at an earlier stage, from T Level through to Degree Level.

## **3. What were the main challenges for you in setting this up?**

- Employer confidence in the College to support HEI programmes. This has been a journey and a partnership that has developed over many years. The College's experience in successfully delivering the Trainee Nursing Associate (TNA) pilot programme really helped with assuring employers that the education was of a high quality.
- The length of time it took to get approval. Post-pilot it was frustrating for all parties that the College had to start from scratch in terms of approval, despite a successful pilot, as the Trainee Nursing Associate (TNA) programme moved from Health Education England (HEE) to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) in terms of governance.

- Compliance with procurement rules for apprenticeships whilst needing to agree the College would be preferred provider. The College needed reassurance that their investment in the resources required to deliver a nursing programme would be protected. We created a legally compliant Joint Service Agreement to address this which has further cemented the partnership.
- Service managers needing lots of information and support to agree to take on RNDAs, and a consistent process for recruiting. Funding has helped with engagement as it contributes to the operational cost of employing an apprentice. NHS Trust Learning and Development Teams have undertaken significant internal promotion of the role, as well as the complexity of organising online interview days with college staff and service users.

#### 4. How has your experience been to date?

Very positive experience working with the College, this is an active two-way partnership that works well.

Recruiting the apprentices was somewhat rushed due to the short time between NMC approval and funding deadlines. This resulted in little time to 'warm up' the market, as a result we did not get as many quality applications as we would have liked. We expect this to improve in future. Of those enrolled onto the RNDA 41% were already employed and progressed internally, 59% were new recruits.

#### 5. What are your future plans for the RNDA programme?

We would like to achieve a business-as-usual annual intake for Adult and Mental Health Registered Nurse Degree Apprentice (RNDA) and APL RNDA which is clearly tied into feeder programmes (T Level, L3 Apprentice, Nursing Associate, Access to HE) so that we can offer apprenticeships to individuals who we have already built relationships with and are committed to working for us. This route will sit alongside the traditional undergraduate pathway into nursing.

# Bridgwater and Taunton College



#### 1. Why, as an FE College, did you want to provide the RNDA route?

The University Centre Somerset, which is part of Bridgwater and Taunton College, has delivered Nursing Associate (NA) apprenticeships with health employers in Somerset since 2017.

This innovative partnership was established to successfully bid to become a pilot site for Nursing Associates and our shared vision of “train here work here” has gone from strength to strength. When the RNDA apprenticeship standard was published it became part of that vision as well as the direct entry BSc Nursing degree.

We launched the full nursing pathway in September 2021, from T Level through to degree (both apprenticeship and direct entry), all supported by our employer partners across the ICS.

## **2. How did you establish this partnership in your local system?**

Our aim is to deliver skills that support progression into jobs, as such engaging with employer stakeholders is vital. We have a long-standing partnership with our NHS Trusts in the county, as well as with primary care and social care. Publication of the Talent for Care strategic framework in 2014 saw a gear change in the development of progression pathways for the support workforce, and our partnership working in Somerset became more strategic as a result. Recognising our need to engage an HEI partner to deliver nurse education, we were fortunate in securing the University of the West of England (UWE) as a partner who have provided support and quality assurance throughout.

We have an enjoyable working relationship which really helps when you are attempting transformation on this scale. Our partnership with employers across the ICS remains dynamic and ambitious, and we are all fully committed to providing workforce skills solutions for our communities.

## **3. What were the main challenges for you in setting this up?**

The main challenge was ensuring that we had the staffing, facilities, and governance in place to satisfy the requirements of the NMC. We were fortunate in securing funding from HEE and more recently from the Office for Students which has contributed to the build of our digitally equipped Clinical Skills and Simulation Centre. We have also recruited a new team of Nurse Educators who are passionate about education and developing future nurses. Our partners at UWE provide mentoring and ongoing support in terms of governance, and despite the nerves we satisfied the NMC at our approval event without any conditions and received five commendations.

## **4. How has the experience been to date?**

In terms of the RNDA, we were delighted to have received over 125 applications for the RNDA and APL RNDA routes and this has resulted in 40 apprentices starting their nursing journey with us this academic year. Those who were not successful this time have been provided feedback and signposted to support in order to be able to reapply in the future.

Of the RNDAs we have enrolled, they are 94% female with an average age of 26. 76% of apprentices have a Somerset postcode, 18% from Devon and 6% from West Yorkshire which was pleasantly unexpected.

We are an 'Ofsted outstanding' provider of apprenticeships and the team have an excellent grasp of delivering complex apprenticeship standards. Our RNDAs have had a brilliant start and their feedback is positive.

## **5. What are your future plans for the RNDA and other degree level programmes?**

Employers across the ICS are planning on supporting an annual RNDA and APL RNDA intake and we look forward to supporting this ongoing pathway.

In addition to the RNDA we also have a well-established Trainee Nursing Associate programme and enrol in September and April each year. We have been training Nursing Associates since 2017 and are delighted to see some qualified Nursing Associates progressing to join the APL RNDA cohort.

As well as being approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Council to deliver the Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship, we are also approved to deliver the direct entry BSc Nursing degree. UCAS applications are currently open, and we are now interviewing for our first undergraduate cohort which enrolls in September 2022.