

# Christopher Cunliffe

## Level 6 Operating Department Practitioner (integrated degree)



Warrington and Halton  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

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You can access the standard [here](#).

Operating Department Practitioners (ODPs) are registered healthcare professionals specialising in caring for people of all ages before, during and after surgery. ODPs therefore mainly work in operating departments. They work alongside other professionals (such as doctors and nurses) and take a lead role in ensuring a patient is safe during each stage of a patient's journey through the operating theatre. ODPs must continually make professional decisions to ensure the patient receives the best care before, during and after their surgery.

Meet Christopher Cunliffe, a Level 6 Operating Department Practitioner (integrated degree) apprentice working at Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust .

We spoke with Christopher about his apprenticeship journey, keep reading to find out more.



## **1. What apprenticeship are you studying and what does it involve?**

The apprenticeship I have just completed is the BSc (hons) Operating Department Practitioner, at the University of Bolton. The study is split between on-the-job training, in the Operating Theatres at Warrington Hospital, and theory-based learning, which was completed at the University of Bolton. This means that you are working whilst you study, which can be tough at times, but it gives you the experience and development, traditional means of study cannot offer.

## **2. Why did you want to do the apprenticeship?**

The idea of doing the apprenticeship was exciting, as it was a new scheme, and opened doors for my career in theatres. Being a practical learner, I found learning on-the-job worked well for me. This resulted in me gaining a vast amount of knowledge and training, in key areas needed for the role of ODP (Operating Department Practitioner), which I would not have got if I had studied the conventional way, full time at university.

In addition, the benefits of working whilst you learn is that it gives you the financial support needed. Being a father of three I would have struggled to go to university, surviving on my wife's wage alone. Sadly this is a situation a lot of people, like me, find themselves in. To better yourself and face financial hardship or leave things as they are. Without this support, I would have never been in the situation I am today, a newly qualified ODP, which I am incredibly grateful for.

## **3. What is your current role?**

I am currently a newly qualified ODP, at the CSTM Theatres Department, at Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals. Currently I am an unregistered professional, but I have applied for my registration, from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Hopefully, following my application to the HCPC, I will be a registered ODP soon.

The role of an ODP involves working across the three areas of the perioperative environment. As an Anaesthetic ODP I work alongside the Anaesthetist during assessments and the delivery of care, by preparing and assisting with the application of a wide range of specialised anaesthetic equipment and ensuring that the patient's needs are met. As a Surgical ODP I work alongside the surgical team, preparing and handling the correct instruments for the surgery being performed, whilst maintaining a safe theatre environment. As a Recovery ODP I would support and monitor patients after surgery, for example treating post-operative pain. I would also be involved with the continuing re-assessment of a patient's needs, until they are fit enough to be discharged back to the ward.

## **4. How did you get into your current role?**

I have been with the trust since 2007, when I started as a domestic in Warrington Theatres, with the intentions only to stay for the summer. However, following a restructuring of domestic services I was reallocated to the wards, where I instantly enjoyed chatting to the patients, during the tea rounds. Gaining rapport with the patients came natural to me, so in 2012 I made the leap to Healthcare Assistant.

<https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/>

I worked as an HCA on Ward C21, which was Cardiology at the time. I enjoyed all my responsibilities and duties as an HCA. Yet difficult at times, I found the role extremely rewarding, and always went that that extra mile to promote patient-centred care. However, I always felt like I could offer more, and wanted to pursue my interests in clinical skills.

In 2014 I applied for the position of Assistant Practitioner, which saw me returning to theatre. Within this role I learnt how to scrub for a vast variety of orthopaedic procedures, such as carpal tunnel decompressions, total knee replacements, and ACL reconstructions to name a few. However, even though I had succeeded within my role and excelled at my duties, I never felt complete or perceived myself as a qualified member of staff. Because of this I started proactively looking for courses, which could help me achieve my goals.

Then in 2018, I successfully secured a place on the very first Apprenticeship Operating Department Practitioners program. I started the program in January 2019 and completed it in January 2022.

### **5. What has been your proudest achievement on your apprenticeship to date?**

My proudest achievement was hearing that I had passed all my exams and had completed the course, and I knew that all my hard work was worth it. This was made even more special as I knew that I was part of the very first Apprentice ODP cohort to have completed the program in the country. I will always be immensely proud of this fact, and it is something that my 19 university peers can relate to. I cannot wait to see them all again, at graduation, and celebrate this properly.

### **6. What do you want to do once you complete your apprenticeship?**

Following the completion of my Apprenticeship I intend to settle into my new role of Operating Department Practitioner, and learn how to work as the autonomous practitioner that I have trained three years for. In the future, I would like to pursue a Masters degree and continue my education further. I would also like to be involved with the teaching/mentoring of the next cohorts of Apprentice ODPs (Operating Department Practitioner), as I feel that once being where they are now, I would be the perfect mentor.

### **7. What would you say to someone considering an apprenticeship?**

Do it... If theatre is an area you have an interest or passion in, just do it. Training alongside, my now peers, has been the best experience of my life, and it is a job that I honestly can say I love to do. I get up every morning glad to come to work, as I get to meet and care for the most interesting people, whilst working with some of the best, exceptionally talented and funny people I have ever known.

**"This is my work family,  
and I am proud to say that."**