

## Higher Education Provider Guide

# Recognising Talent for Care: Pathways for Progression

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## Recognising the value of the Senior Healthcare Support Worker Apprenticeship

The Senior Healthcare Support Worker (SHCSW) apprenticeship standard has been recently revised to be delivered over 24 months (rather than 18 months) and includes a new mandatory level 3 Diploma in Healthcare Support qualification. It is designed to prepare apprentices for progression into registered health practitioner or health professional occupations, including nursing and midwifery. The SHCSW apprenticeship is an excellent preparation for higher education (HE) healthcare programmes and a key means to promote the career progression of your staff.

Having that initial hands-on experience is vital in healthcare, learning to be more than just the health professional but how to care. I see so many times students pass through our doors that strive to be a nurse but without the hands-on caring side of the profession.

With the Apprenticeship you are working from the ground up, starting as a Healthcare Support Worker, gaining skills, knowledge and most important experience. You are learning how to give quality care, how to talk to people, how to work as part of a team structure, with a notion of what caring actually means, but also developing an awareness of what it means to work in the Health Sector along with gaining the interpersonal aspect required of the job.



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## Introduction

This guide is an introduction to the work commissioned by Health Education England (HEE) led by [Middlesex University](#) in partnership the [Open University \(OU\)](#), [University Vocational Awards Council \(UVAC\)](#) and [Credit Works](#), to promote career progression opportunities within healthcare and facilitate access to higher education (HE).

Building on the [HEE Talent for Care national strategic framework \(HEE, 2014\)](#), with its focus on widening access and participation, diversifying the workforce supply and supporting individuals to develop in their long-term career, our work focused on the [level 3 Senior Healthcare Support Worker \(SHCSW\) apprenticeship](#) as a key means to meet employers' workforce needs. Specifically, to make sure that the professional learning required to successfully complete the apprenticeship is appropriately recognised by HE providers (HEPs) to facilitate career progression to relevant HE healthcare programmes.

We are seeking your 'sign-up' to a **National Progression Agreement** that aims to support the delivery of the Council of Deans for Health (CoDH) strategy<sup>1</sup> that:

Universities work in close collaboration with local employers to develop and deliver healthcare apprenticeships and widen access to healthcare careers...

New qualifications at level 3 in England must ensure the ability to progress into healthcare higher education...

Apprenticeships provide another route into healthcare careers for learners...

Programme outcomes should enable student choice and be aligned closely with entrance requirements

<sup>1</sup> Council of Deans of Health (2021) *CoDH Written Submission: HEE Strategic Framework Call for Evidence*, CoDH

# The Senior Healthcare Support Worker Apprenticeship

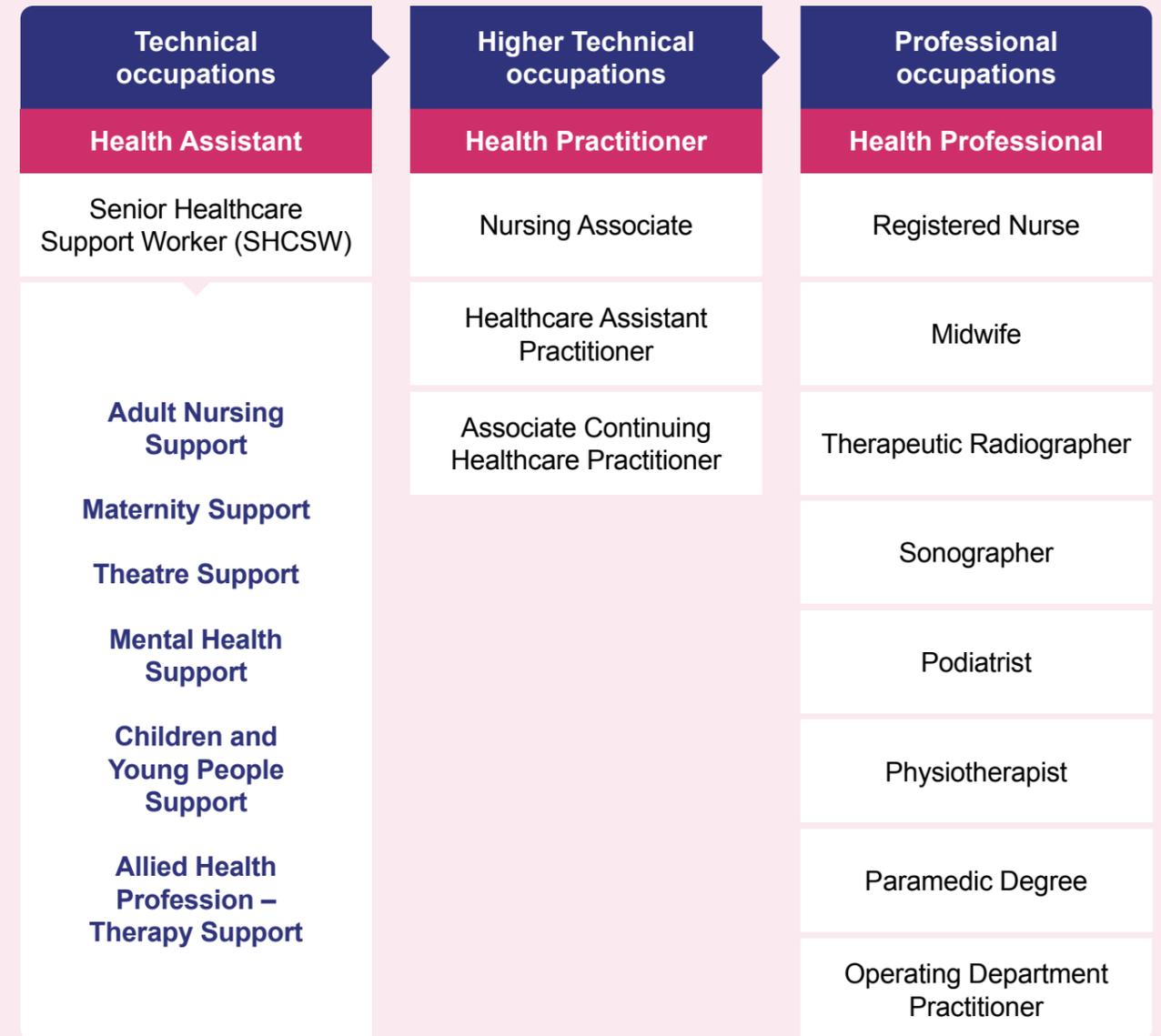
This is a very important apprenticeship to help employers in the healthcare sector meet their workforce challenges. It has multiple pathways and covers different occupations and healthcare settings – from hospitals, community teams, day-case units, birthing centres, individuals’ homes, nursing or care homes, hospices and general practice – and is significant in providing a broad range of progression and widening access opportunities for multiple job roles and professions.

The broad purpose of the SHCSW is to support registered healthcare professionals in the delivery of ‘high quality and compassionate specialist health and social care for a range of people’ (IfATE, 2022). The SHCSW apprenticeship standard has been recently revised, includes a new mandatory level 3 Diploma in Healthcare Support and is intended to prepare apprentices for progression into health practitioner or health professional occupations, including nursing and midwifery.

The health occupational map presented by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) show how progression from the SHCSW apprenticeship is mapped to higher technical occupations and registered professional roles.



## Progression pathways



Learn more

[www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/occupational-maps/](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/occupational-maps/)  
[haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/pathways/](http://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk/pathways/)

## Tackling the problem with progression

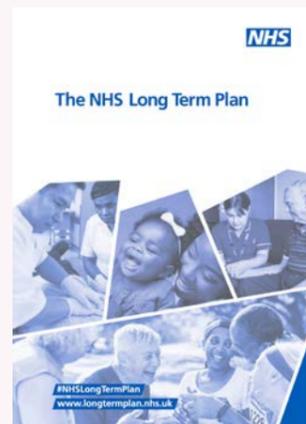
We know that HEP admissions tutors want to be assured that the SHCSW apprenticeship gives adequate preparation for HE level learning on healthcare programmes. However, HEE wish to address how, to date, completion of the SHCSW is not supporting access to HE and why barriers still exist in relation to apprentice progression in the healthcare sector.

### Turning away motivated and qualified staff

The NHS (2019) reports that 14,000 applicants to nursing fail to get accepted onto courses. At a time of staff shortage across the NHS alongside high rates of vacancies and staff turnover, it is unacceptable that many thousands of highly motivated and well-qualified applicants with appropriate work-based experience and work-integrated skills who wish to join or progress in the health service are being denied entry.

A number of HEPs have admission tariffs well above the level set by others and above that which are deemed to meet appropriate entry standards by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)<sup>2</sup>. Essentially, there is no greater need than for healthcare workers to have perceptible progression pathways into nursing and allied health professional roles. Indeed, 'the win' for employers and HEPs is that 'in role' learners gain access to higher level roles and the professions as a result of recognition of their prior learning and practice.

It is clear that employers know that the SHCSW apprenticeship is an excellent preparation for progressing to registered healthcare professions, such as nursing and midwifery. This is because they have the specific benefit of working directly with registered healthcare professionals for two years, while in training. By supporting registered healthcare professionals on a daily basis they gain invaluable insights into the requirements and expectations of these key roles.



# 14,000

The NHS (2019) reports that 14,000 well-qualified applicants to nursing fail to get accepted onto courses

2. NHS (2019) The NHS Long Term Plan, NHS

## Tackling inequalities

the level 3 Apprenticeship is a great foundation of experience, knowledge and skills an opportunity to pursue a career progression which would lead them into a Nursing profession.

The challenge for HEPs now is to 'tackle persistent inequalities' and respond more positively to 'non-traditional' entrants in their required Office for Students (OfS) Access and Participation Plans and recognition of the SHCSW to support appropriate progression. This work is intended to help HEPs to meet government requirements and at the same time, facilitate SHCSW access and entry to HE healthcare professional programmes.

Apprenticeships offer important opportunities for widening social participation in the NHS healthcare workforce. They also provide essential career ladders for staff both for new entrants and early/mid careerists. One of the main reasons for people leaving the health and adult social care sector is that they do not receive the development and career progression they need or aspire to.



# Responding to Policy Drivers

Our work contributes to delivering on social mobility and 'levelling-up' by enabling a wider range of people to access professional careers in the healthcare sector. It aligns very well with the HEE Talent for Care strategy, designed to develop the healthcare support workforce, and drivers include recommendations arising from the review of care failures in the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust (the Francis Report, 2013), and the subsequent review of healthcare assistants (the Cavendish Review, 2022).

Our work contributes to delivering on social mobility and 'levelling-up' by enabling a wider range of people to access professional careers in the healthcare sector.

## Valuing support staff

...valuing support staff and getting formal recognition through nationally consistent standards that staff could carry with them from job to job.



Talent for Care is about:

## Simplifying career progression

...simplifying potential progression routes for support staff, especially for those who want to get into training for registered professions (HEE, 2014)

In 2021, the Council of Deans of Health (CoDH), in its [response to HEE's Strategic Framework Call for Evidence](#) submitted the following statements:

New qualifications at level 3 in England must ensure the ability to progress into healthcare higher education... programme outcomes should enable student choice and be aligned closely with entrance requirements

The government must ensure that... no decision about future provision restricts access to higher level education or has a negative impact on widening access and participation

Universities work in close collaboration with local employers to develop and deliver healthcare apprenticeships and widen access to healthcare careers. Apprenticeships provide another route into healthcare careers for learners.

The work of supporting progression in and through work and in creating routes into healthcare professions aligns with these national initiatives to maximise its social mobility, widening participation, diversity and inclusion impact. The impetus provided by the challenging policy landscape positively positions the SHCSW apprenticeship to maximise the consistency of recognition by HE.



This project's work is very timely and has relevance to wider skills policy shifts because it not only aligns with the [Philip Augar \(2022\) recommendations](#) on post-18 education and funding by enabling a wider range of people to access professional careers in the healthcare and adult social care sectors but also ties with the [Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022](#) and the introduction of the [Lifelong Loan Entitlement from 2025](#) which will underpin the introduction of what we hope is a more consistent national further education (FE) and HE credit system. So, our ambitions are high.

[Learn more](#)

[www.councilofdeans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/020921-Council-of-Deans-of-Health-HEE-Strategic-Framework-Call-for-Evidence.pdf](http://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/020921-Council-of-Deans-of-Health-HEE-Strategic-Framework-Call-for-Evidence.pdf)

# The SHCSW Apprenticeship as Preparation for Higher Education

Our work has carefully considered the SHCSW apprenticeship standard, and we offer a clear articulation of the learning value of this apprenticeship as a work-based programme, to support appropriate progression onto HE. We know that this apprenticeship offers fantastic preparation for progressing careers in the healthcare sector which in turn meets employers' workforce development needs.

We also know completion of this standard provides an excellent stepping-in point to higher technical and professional occupations because using our evidence of learning both on-and off-the-job, there is clear alignment of both the level 3 SHCSW with the level 3 [SEEC descriptors \(2021\)](#) which indicates that on completion of the apprenticeship programme, learners are equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to undertake higher level learning. The mandatory qualification also incorporates study skills that help apprentices prepare to progress onto HE.



## Learn more



[www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/senior-healthcare-support-worker-v1-3](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/senior-healthcare-support-worker-v1-3)

[seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SEEC-Credit-Level-Descriptors-2021.pdf](http://seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SEEC-Credit-Level-Descriptors-2021.pdf)

Using SEEC Credit Level Descriptors is important to achieving consistency of approach to articulating the learning expectation of the SHCSW apprenticeship so that all HEPs understand its value. As identified in the [QAA HE Credit Framework for England \(2021\)](#), SEEC level descriptors are designed to enable learning that is described in the same way to gain equivalent recognition, so they are a HE sector recognised tool to benchmark learning in apprenticeships.

## SEEC Level 3 Descriptors

At level 3, the SEEC level descriptors indicate that a learner:

- Applies an understanding of pre-defined areas of knowledge and skills in familiar learning, work or practice contexts.
- Acts largely under direction, working within pre-defined guidelines and using predefined techniques.
- Takes responsibility for initiating and completing tasks as well as the evaluation of own capabilities.
- Uses pre-defined principles to analyse, evaluate, organise and communicate information.
- Develops projects and/or activities to support own and/or others learning, work or practice.

## SHCSW Apprenticeship

In order to successfully complete the SHCSW Apprenticeship, learners will have:

- Demonstrated the achievement of Level 2 English and maths
- Passed the mandatory level 3 Diploma in Healthcare Support
- Satisfied their employer that they have the capability to demonstrate the required knowledge, skills and behaviours that determine occupational competence

There is clear alignment between the **SEEC level 3 descriptors** and the **SHCSW apprenticeship standard**, with our mapping indicating a particularly strong prevalence of:

Problem solving

Research and enquiry

Project and activity design and development

Ethical awareness and application

Personal responsibility and leadership

In addition, once the above has been achieved, learners would have also undertaken a final assessment of their knowledge, skills and behaviours, which includes:

An observation of practice with questions

A professional discussion that is underpinned by a portfolio of evidence

## Recognising the value of on and off-the-job learning

The SHCSW apprenticeship is not just about the mandatory qualification. An apprenticeship must include both on-the-job and off-the-job learning to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be fully occupationally competent. In addition to off-the-job training<sup>3</sup>, apprentices must have ‘the opportunity to apply these new skills in a real work environment (in a productive job role) through on-the-job training’ (ESFA, 2022, p. 7). This means that to establish the total amount of learning undertaken, both on and off-the-job learning hours need to be considered.

Working with an expert panel of healthcare sector trailblazer employers, we know that SHCSW apprentices will be expected to complete on and off-the-job learning, including the level 3 mandatory qualification, that amounts to **over 1,200 learning hours** during the two years of training. This is estimated to equate to a credit value of 120 credits<sup>4</sup>, which is twice the size of the QAA Access to HE qualification.



# 1,200

SHCSW apprentices will be expected to complete... 1,200 learning hours during the two years of training. This is estimated to equate to a credit value of 120 credits<sup>3</sup>.

3. DfE (2022) Apprenticeship funding rules for main providers, August 2022 to July 2023: Version 1, London: ESFA

4. The number of credits is based on the estimated learning hours (where one credit typically represents 10 notional hours of learning). (QAA, 2021)

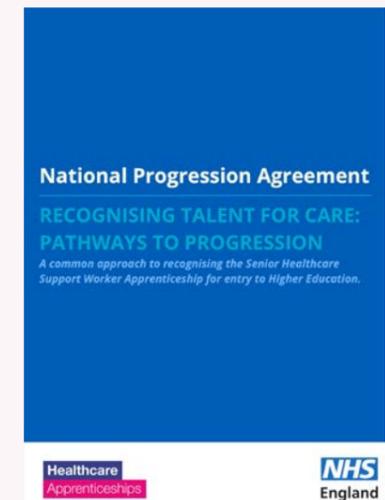
## Call to action

To establish clear progression routes to HE, in partnership with employers, and to assist with ‘opening doors’ to the professions in healthcare, we wish to formalise HEP recognition of the SHCSW apprenticeship standard for entry to HE level healthcare apprenticeships and undergraduate programmes.

**We invite you to sign a National Progression Agreement** on behalf of your institution to help ensure there is consistency of recognition for the SHCSW standard across the HE sector.

**Please contact us [HERE](#).**

**Signing the National Progression Agreement** will signal that you are committed to addressing the workforce challenges that the healthcare sector faces (as described above) and will help your employer partners support apprentices who progress to the higher education healthcare programmes.



## Contact

To find out more, please visit our website:  
[haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk](https://haso.skillsforhealth.org.uk) or email us at  
[nhsapprenticeships@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:nhsapprenticeships@hee.nhs.uk)