

OXFORD HEALTH NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust are a Main Provider and rated Good by Ofsted. Lucy Hunte spoke with Becky Elsworth - Head of Learning and Development and Apprenticeship Manager about their journey.



Why did you decide to become a provider and deliver your own apprenticeships?

We started as an employer provider in March 2017 looking at simply using the apprenticeships as a route for developing our own staff. However, I think for me it's become abundantly clear that there is not enough employer engagement in apprenticeship delivery. Providers do not deliver programmes contextualised for the NHS and as we had the internal expertise it made sense for us to explore that further and ensure we could get the skilled workforce that we needed.

A good example of this is the recently launched Level 3 Peer Worker apprenticeship standard. I saw the tender go out and the successful bidders were not healthcare providers so rather than work with a provider who doesn't understand the NHS we decided to deliver it ourselves.

I believe that NHS providers should be engaged in education and that we shouldn't be just passive in this and let other training providers develop courses that may not be fit for purpose. We should be more proactive. Another thing to consider is income generation. Becoming a Main Provider allows us to deliver externally, and it is a really good opportunity for NHS Trusts to generate additional income that we can then invest in other education. Our levy is just over £1 million pounds, and we are on track to overspend this and are looking for levy transfers to support our growth. The levy allows us to have a ring fence pot of money when typically, education budgets are very stretched, so we needed a plan to ensure we maximise this opportunity. I am passionate about widening participation so taking control of our apprenticeship delivery has allowed me to drive that agenda forward.

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What apprenticeship standards do you deliver?

We deliver the Level 3 Senior Healthcare Support Worker, and we offer 2 different courses. We have one aimed at young nurse cadets and that is an extended programme acknowledging that 16 and 17-year-olds need a little bit more time with regards to skill and behaviours development as

well as the knowledge. We also run one for existing staff which is a shortened programme which recognises that they will probably come with existing skills and behaviours, and really, it's the knowledge that we need to focus on.

We also offer the Level 3 Business Administration and the Level 5 Operations or Departmental Manager as non-clinical programmes in their entirety.

We also have sub-contracting arrangements to deliver part of the Level 5 Nursing Associate and Level 6 Registered Nurse top up and we deliver at least 30% on both of those programmes. This means we have control over the clinical skills parts of those programmes.

We also deliver, in partnership with Buckinghamshire New University, the Level 6 Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner. We deliver the content of the apprenticeship standard, and they sign off the qualification. We have had great success with this programme, and we have a 72% distinction rate. We also deliver the Level 7 Academic Professional and we recognise it as a way of upskilling our own staff in learning and development and as an alternative to a PGCE. We've had thirty of our own staff complete this apprenticeship so far. As mentioned we are also delivering the Level 3 Peer Worker now as well. This means we will have an infrastructure for peer support workers and our mental health side of the trust and our first cohort of 9 apprentices has just started. We don't deliver all of our apprenticeships so we also buy in external training providers to deliver the Level 6 Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Speech and Language Therapist, Dietitian and Podiatrist and the Level 7 Senior Leader. We also have some in Estates and Facilities and currently we use 26 different apprenticeship standards.

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In terms of your infrastructure, did you already have teaching and assessing staff or did you have to recruit?

We had a very, very small team in the beginning, there were only 3 1/2 of us when I first started in the department, who had a role in delivering things like the Care Certificate and vocational qualifications. We had a history of developing and delivering the Level 3 Certificate in Mental Health and we used to deliver that for a small cohort of staff every year so some of us already had kind of a core understanding of assessing and vocational education.

We have expanded the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust team as we have grown our provision and all of our programmes are fully costed so we can determine the teaching and practice support staff that we need to deliver quality education programmes. We upskill our team and ensure they have the required CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and up to date qualifications and to ensure they are comfortable with apprenticeship language such as EPA (End Point Assessment), IQA (Internal Quality Assurance), EQA (External Quality Assurance) etc. We now have a team of 33 people.

You were rated a Good provider by Ofsted in August 2022 and your initial monitoring visit in October 2019 was reasonable progress in all 3 themes but they did flag some concerns. How did you prepare for the full inspection?

I think the monitoring visit was really much harder than a full inspection. We had a new inspector and it didn't feel collaborative. We were new to apprenticeship delivery and all quite nervous so the 36 hour NPMV (New Provider monitoring Visit) felt way more intense than our week long full inspection. My advice is to be fully prepared and not to view the inspection like a CQC visit as they are entirely different. I was the nominee as the apprenticeship manager and on our NPMV we were advised that we were operating like an NHS Trust and not an education provider, so we really took that on board.



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We were told from an Ofsted perspective; they want to know where you are and where you're headed. They don't expect things to be perfect, but you need to be aware of any issues and have a plan to address and improve. It was really interesting advice and so we had to shift our mindsets slightly into recognising what the risks were but highlighting those as a journey not just risks.

I was also advised to ensure my team had all the same knowledge as me to minimise the risk that if I was to be away for any reason my team would not be successful. It was not said as a criticism as they acknowledged we were so early in our journey and the advice was as we expanded I needed to relinquish some responsibility and control to those programme leads and make sure they are skilled up and that really resonated with me and by our full inspection we had made all those changes. I felt much more confident going into the full inspection and it was actually an enjoyable experience for the whole team. We felt very supported and that the inspector wanted to work with us in an open and honest way. We were even given some constructive advice about ESFA audits which was not in scope of Ofsted but the inspector wanted to make sure we were fully prepared.

Between the NPMV and the full inspection we have really looked at our safeguarding arrangements and had a strategic oversight group and Ofsted were very pleased with our progress. We actually paid for the services of an external safeguarding specialist from education, and it was the best money we could have spent. The consultant just helped us so much in terms of how we needed to word things for education and not just generic NHS safeguarding and why it should be different. So we now have really robust processes in place and I'm really pleased with our safeguarding. We've got a lot to do still, but we have a monthly education CPD session now for all staff involved in apprenticeship delivery.

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Finally, what would be your hints and tips and pitfalls to avoid for a NHS Trust considering becoming a main provider?

The biggest thing for me is we get really nice feedback on our apprenticeship delivery and the opportunities that they give to staff. We choose our standards very carefully to meet our workforce needs. We haven't taken on anything that felt unrealistic and wasn't fully costed and planned and that is really key. We took onboard the feedback from the NPMV so were prepared for our full inspection. They will ask about British values and they will ask about online safety so just be able to articulate what you have in place. Apprenticeship delivery can't just be about income generation, you need to ensure you have the infrastructure in place to deliver high quality apprenticeships to develop your workforce.



Becky Elsworth
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and Apprenticeship Manager