

# **BASILDON AND THURROCK UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST**

## **Introduction**

Basildon and Thurrock NHS Trust has a tradition of employing apprentices, but has taken a more dedicated approach over the last two and a half years. The Trust has offered a variety of apprenticeship programmes through employing apprentices or offering apprenticeships to their existing staff. This has resulted in 108 new starts between April 2016 and March 2017, and they expect this to increase following the introduction of the public sector target. Around half of the Trust's apprentices are existing staff, who have been offered apprenticeships as part of their development. The apprenticeship offer forms a key part of the Trust's workforce development approach.

Apprenticeships within the Trust cover a variety of roles – including business administration, customer service, clinical healthcare, medical engineering, management and perioperative support. They are planning to expand the apprenticeships they offer to include higher level apprenticeships and more standards as these become available.

Responsibility for the recruitment of apprentices sits within the Talent For Care Strategy, specifically the 'Get Into the NHS' strand. Internally there is a drive to change the recruitment culture of the organisation to first consider if a position is suitable for an apprenticeship. When a vacancy is identified, the Talent For Care Coordinator works with training providers to establish if there is a suitable apprenticeship framework or standard for the vacancy.

## **Ensuring diversity of opportunity**

The Trust has previously recruited apprentices based on a Health Education England target, but this will change with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy and public sector target. The Trust believes the changes will open opportunities around higher level apprenticeships, which may help address the staff skills shortage especially in clinical areas such as Audiology, Cardiac Physiology, Occupational Therapy, Radiography, Procurement and Medical Engineering. The Trust will expand their apprenticeship offer, primarily to existing staff, as further standards are developed. This will help to ensure the Trust has staff with the right skills in the right role to meet future needs. Apprenticeships offer training and development opportunities for a wider range of staff who work within areas or roles which previously have had limited access to development opportunities. They are seen as having the potential to provide varied career path opportunities supporting the recruitment and retention of staff.

Recruitment of apprentices is business led, taking into account workforce planning needs. However, there is also an understanding that there can be seasonality to recruiting external apprentices, i.e. summer months when students receive exam results and are

making decisions about their future. The vision underpinning apprenticeships is that of talent growth and retention across the organisation.

The Trust uses marketing and communications to attract new apprentices (internally and externally) and break down misconceptions about apprenticeships amongst existing staff (e.g. age profile and roles suitable for apprenticeship). They capitalised on National Apprenticeship Week to promote apprenticeships externally and to existing staff.

*“It’s about investing in our staff and showing our staff, and future staff, that we believe in them, that we want to support them, that we want them to grow.” Director*

Apprenticeships for new staff are primarily advertised through the National Apprenticeship website, and then through NHS Jobs. The Trust conducts extensive work with schools and colleges to promote opportunities, along with participation in local recruitment days in shopping centres.

### **Training and support**

The Trust believes that support for managers and apprentices is very important to ensure a successful apprenticeship experience. When a manager identifies that a position may be suitable for an apprenticeship, they work closely with the Talent For Care Coordinator to ensure that the most appropriate framework or standard is selected. The manager is supported and guided through the mechanisms of the apprenticeship process, so they are equipped to support the apprentice. Managers are also encouraged to allocate a buddy to their apprentice to provide support with some of the practical day to day elements of the job.

Apprentices within support functions, e.g. administration and business support, benefit from rotation to different roles within their departments, developing their skills and providing a broader range of experiences. For the clinically based apprenticeships, rotation is yet to be established but is being considered for the future across the local health and social system.

As far as is possible the Trust supports all the training delivered onsite either through using in-house training teams or training providers. For the more specialist apprenticeships e.g. medical engineering, plumbing, electrical, and finance, the apprentice attends the relevant college. This facilitates the shift patterns of staff and allows a creative approach to meeting the 20% off the job learning target. Staff can coincide their training with the start and end of their shift, or can utilise non-ward based experiences towards the learning requirement.

The Trust is planning to become an apprenticeship employer provider which they believe will add further value to the organisation as they would be able to tailor the delivery of the apprenticeship to better fit the needs of both the apprentice and the service.

The Trust believes in celebrating success and this year has included an ‘Apprentice of the Year’ category in their staff awards. The individual will be nominated by a member of staff

or their manager and the award will reflect what they have contributed, how they conduct themselves in their job, and how they have gone above and beyond.

The Trust monitors the success of apprenticeships by tracking the number of starts, withdrawals and outcomes of particular frameworks. This information is used to inform programme development, the recruitment process and start points of different cohorts. The Trust welcomes apprentices from all backgrounds and accepts that some apprentices may need extra support to adapt to the work place, or to address practical difficulties such as childcare needs.

*“We offer apprenticeship opportunities to both young and older individuals as it is great to take on young people, but older individuals also have a lot to offer as they can bring more experience to the organisation.”* Talent for Care Coordinator

Whilst there is no guarantee of a job for new starters at the end of the apprenticeship, as far as is possible, the Trust seeks to retain apprentices. This is in line with the approach of embedding apprenticeships within talent development and the philosophy that by investing well in an individual they will want to remain with the Trust. The majority of apprentices employed to date have been recruited into permanent roles within the department they started in, or have progressed onto the next level of apprenticeship.

### **Benefits to the organisation and the individual**

The Trust benefits in many ways from employing apprentices. Apprenticeships allow the Trust to ‘grow their own’ in a way that suits their needs and organisational culture. There is recognition that by investing time and resource into an individual they will be more likely to stay with the organisation. Converter apprenticeships help the Trust to meet their apprenticeship target without needing to find additional funds for salary. They also offer the opportunity to upskill and develop existing staff. The levy will offer the opportunity for the

*“As an organisation we are developing an [apprenticeship] institute. The institute isn’t just about education and training, it will be about quality improvement, it will be about innovation...and ultimately make the patient experience better at the end of it.”* Director

*“It’s a really good opportunity to grow your own. It gives us an opportunity to see if the individuals work for us, and also, equally, gives the young individual an opportunity to see whether the sector they’ve chose is right for them.”* Talent for Care Coordinator

Trust to have more control over the commissioning of external providers, ensuring a more rigorous standard is upheld.

Apprenticeships enhance the diversity of the organisation - ensuring new ways of thinking and enthusiasm, and extending the range of different experiences to draw on.

For the individual, a converter apprenticeship allows them to retain their terms and conditions whilst gaining new skills and career development. The Trust accepts that apprentices can sometimes use apprenticeships to test out career paths.

### Apprentice views

Alex\* is doing a Level 2 Clinical Healthcare Support apprenticeship having previously studied a BTEC Level 3 in Health and Social Care. Alex applied via NHS Jobs for a Training Health Care Assistant role, and was pleased when it turned out to be an apprenticeship. The apprenticeship began with two week's induction to prepare for the ward, followed by two weeks of shadowing. While initially finding it overwhelming, Alex is now really enjoying the experience. Alex's manager is hopeful that they can retain her at the end of the year, and when the nursing apprenticeship standards are developed Alex would like to apply.

Alex values the theoretical learning as it covers a broad spectrum of topics which can be put into practice on the ward. She feels that the longer period of learning in smaller segments involved in apprenticeships suits her personally – it enables her to get to grips with the practical and theory of the role in a way which wouldn't be possible through more traditional classroom based courses.

*"I thought this apprenticeship...would be a perfect blend of using my knowledge...I can still be in a hospital setting and still learn more at the same time. I want to go to do my nursing. I thought the two would go hand in hand to get me the most experience ready."* Clinical Healthcare Support Apprentice

Jo\* is a Customer Service apprentice who initially came to the Trust via the Prince's Trust 'Get Into Healthcare' work experience placement. Having no further education

*"It was a step-forward and if I didn't do it, then I wouldn't have a chance of getting a job...I haven't got to worry about childcare...the apprenticeship is quite good, otherwise I wouldn't have a job, because I'd be worrying about how it would work."* Customer Service Apprentice

qualifications and due to raising a family, Jo had not worked for eight years, which resulted in difficulties getting into work. The Prince's Trust worked in partnership with the Trust to secure the apprenticeship, and Jobcentre Plus provided practical support and advice for moving into work. Following a successful placement, the Trust was keen to retain Jo and an apprenticeship was seen as the appropriate route so she could get the experience and qualifications needed. Jo sees the benefit of

experiencing different aspects of customer service and the opportunities which are available once you are employed within an organisation such as the NHS. Jo has experienced personal challenges with childcare and passing some of the assessments, but with the support and flexibility of their manager she has come to an arrangement to help support her personal and apprenticeship requirements.

## Challenges

As with many employers, the Trust has to challenge negative views of apprenticeships – whether from previous poor experience, bad press or simply a need to redefine understanding of what an apprenticeship is or who they are for. The Trust counteracts this by promoting the benefits of apprenticeships in a realistic manner - acknowledging that there are risks, and that investment of time is needed, but that the benefits will be worth the input. There is celebration of success through case studies and internal magazine articles. The Trust is branding apprenticeships and changes as a result of the levy and target as “Career and Talent Development” to help staff understand the purpose of apprenticeships.

*“The culture is gradually changing in the organisation, and more departments are considering taking on apprentices in their department, rather than the way that they would have generally gone out to recruitment.”* Talent for Care Coordinator

The Trust faces a specific challenge with the Training Healthcare Assistant programme in balancing the staffing needs of the ward with the apprentice’s learning requirements. The 20% off the job training equates to 1 day a week, requiring a flexible and creative approach to managing and defining how this is used. One of the ways that is planned is for the apprentice to spend one day a week shadowing on a different ward.

The Trust sees a challenge in spending the levy amount as they do not think there is a sufficient range of health related standards currently available to meet the needs of the organisation. The Trust is aware of more standards being developed and is hopeful that this challenge will be reduced in coming years as more standards become available.

Going forward there will be a challenge of aligning new apprenticeships such as nursing with the existing university based qualifications, so that they are given parity of esteem on the wards and the different learning styles and requirements catered for.

## Replicability

The following factors have been important to the success of the Trust’s apprenticeship programme:

- **Creative recruitment:** The Trust values the role that the local community has in shaping and developing the organisation. They hope that by recruiting locally, across all career paths, there will be a positive impact on retention of staff. The apprenticeship route opens up the possibility to train in a specialism for people who would otherwise be deterred by the fee paying route, e.g.

*“If we can build the Trust with our community then they’re going to have some ownership about the organisation, its values, its culture, because it will mean something to them.”* Director

parents looking to return to work. Aside from traditional recruitment routes, the Trust has engaged with The Prince's Trust 'Get Into Healthcare' programme to support a number of individuals on a work placement in the hospital, which resulted in recruitment to the apprenticeship programme.

- **Embedding apprenticeships in the training and development offer to current staff:** Apprenticeships are integral to the development of staff for the next stage of

*"The new apprenticeship standards being developed through Trailblazers help to give us a little bit more variety of apprenticeships that we can offer to our staff....it's just...one way of helping to develop our staff."* Talent for Care Coordinator

their career, and shaping the workforce to meet future needs. Learning and Organisational Development staff are in constant communication with managers about staff development needs and aligning these with the opportunities offered by apprenticeships. If an existing member of staff wishes to undertake an apprenticeship they should have it identified in their personal development and have the

support of their manager. Support of the manager is important to a successful apprenticeship, especially for the ward based apprenticeships where it can be more logistically challenging to book out time for assessor meetings and learning time.

- **Pathways for careers:** Apprenticeships can be the starting point for developing a career pathway, and this and the possible routes are promoted to staff. An important routeway for the Trust, which fits with the belief of 'Grow your own' is that from Healthcare Assistant to qualified Nurse. Following completion of the Training Healthcare Assistant programme (Clinical Healthcare Level

*"It's a great opportunity for us...the individual comes to us with no skills and we...support them through and then they...become a qualified nurse at the end of it. They've learned that with the values and behaviours of the Trust as well, so we've nurtured them all the way along."* Talent for Care Coordinator

2), the individual can progress to Clinical Healthcare Support Level 3 and then to Foundation Degree Level 5. A further 18 months of work-based learning is required to become a qualified nurse. This route is longer than the traditional degree option, but the Trust believes that the diversity of entry routes works well for different learning styles and life circumstances.