

COUNTY DURHAM AND DARLINGTON NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

The organisation

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, with a workforce of 8,500 staff, promotes employment and development opportunities for new and existing employees from the local community. Alongside signing the Talent for Care Partnership Pledge, these opportunities include an apprenticeship programme across both clinical and non-clinical occupations.

The approach

The Trust has recruited young people (aged 16-24) into a rolling programme of Healthcare Assistant (band 2) apprenticeships. This approach allows new and existing talent to be identified and developed.

Apprentices are supported by their managers, the Talent for Care Coordinator, a mentor and tutors at their learning provider. Fifty-two young apprentices have been recruited in three cohorts, with an additional 13 having started in March 2017, with more to follow in September 2017. Out of the 37 leavers, 21 gained full time employment with the Trust and 5 went onto a pre-registration degree in nursing. The remaining 11 were early leavers who decided that the role was not for them.

The existing workforce, including many who have worked at the Trust for several years, can progress through apprenticeships. Over the past four years approximately 390 apprentices, of which 348 are adult existing staff, have been trained.

Expertise and knowledge of apprenticeships - including reforms, processes and standards - are shared to create awareness and 'buy-in' from departments, who may not previously have considered the benefits of apprenticeships.

It is critical for the Trust to maximise the return on investment made into the apprenticeship levy, and they see information and forward planning as vital tools in the process. A matrix highlights potential apprenticeships in a range of occupations, which alongside an annual training needs analysis, assists with planning and demonstrates how and where the apprenticeship levy may be spent.

Alongside its current working relationship with Derwentside College, the Trust is investigating a range of higher and degree apprenticeships and additional training providers i.e. universities, to extend and grow its apprenticeship programme to meet workforce needs.

The challenges

To limit potential challenges the Trust believes that strong partnerships with training providers are important, so they are responsive, flexible in their approach to delivery, and will provide a consistent high quality service.

There are also strategic and operational challenges around the levy and public sector target, including how to maximise a return on the levy investment. Work is in progress to resolve how posts will be backfilled when employees are on a nursing apprenticeship or when there are several individuals from the same team who require 20% of their time in off-the-job training.

The benefits

The Trust is keen to use apprenticeships to support progression pathways for both their existing workforce and new entrants in order to meet the public sector target and identified shortages in both clinical and non-clinical occupations. Traditional routes and recruitment methods for nursing staff are not meeting the critical skills shortage. The apprenticeship approach could allow some existing Healthcare Support Workers to progress to nursing roles whilst remaining as employees of the Trust.

Administration staff have the opportunity to retrain, via an apprenticeship, in a specialised corporate skill, which means the Trust retains keen, motivated employees who can utilise their skills in a different area. The Trust's levy contribution provides an opportunity to fund re-training of other employees who are in re-deployment situations in the future, or who may choose to convert to a different job role.

Apprentices work in an environment where they can flourish, develop their knowledge and skills, improve their confidence, and gain knowledge about progression routes to other jobs. This increases their loyalty and improves patient care. They bring new ideas and contribute to the team, which increases job satisfaction for staff who support them.