

COUNTY DURHAM & DARLINGTON NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

Introduction

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust is one of the largest integrated care providers in England, serving a population of around 600,000, with a workforce of 8,500 staff. Becoming an employer of choice is an important element of delivering the NHS workforce plan. The Trust aims to become an exemplary employer by promoting good development and employment opportunities for the existing workforce and new entrants from the local community. Over the last few years the Trust has been working hard to offer a range of opportunities, including establishing a robust apprenticeship programme and being one of the first to sign the Talent for Care Partnership Pledge.

The current offer includes apprenticeships across both clinical and non-clinical occupations, which are offered to both existing staff and new entrants.

The Trust has been successful in embedding the recruitment of young people (16-24 years old) into clinical workforce development plans resulting in a rolling programme of young apprentices in the role of Healthcare Assistant (band 2). This approach has been designed with career pathways in mind, where new and existing talent can be identified and developed. This allows individuals to progress to the highest levels helping to meet skill shortages and resulting in a 'grow your own' staff model. The apprenticeship is scheduled as a six month rotational programme to offer experience across different areas. Apprentices are supported through their journey by their managers, the Talent for Care Coordinator, a mentor and by tutors at the college they attend. So far, approximately 52 young apprentices have been recruited in three cohorts, with the next intake of 13 starting in March 2017 and a further cohort in September 2017. A total of 15 apprentices are still on the programme. 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.

Simultaneously, the existing workforce, many who have worked at the Trust for several years, are encouraged to consider development and progression opportunities through apprenticeship training. Over the past four years

Apprenticeships Offered

- Clinical Healthcare Support, Levels 2 & 3
- Healthcare Support Services, Levels 2 & 3
- Higher Apprenticeship Health (Assistant Practitioner), Level 4/5
- Hospitality Services, Level 2
- Information Technology, Level 2
- Business Administration, Levels 2, 3 & 4
- Customer Service, Levels 2 & 3
- Team Leading, Level 2
- Management, Levels 3, 4 & 5

"Apprenticeships are for all. Have a go – don't think too hard about it – the benefits are huge! Go ahead, just try it – I did." Mature Apprentice in Health & Social Care

approximately 390 apprentices, of which 348 are adult existing staff, have been trained. Apprenticeships are promoted via the intranet bulletin, posters, existing apprentices, the learning and development team and managers.

Building an apprenticeship programme

The Learning and Organisational Development Manager has used their experience and expertise to grow the Trust's apprenticeship programme over the last four years. Expertise and knowledge of apprenticeships, including reforms, processes and standards are shared. This includes, where appropriate, with senior managers, within the immediate learning and development team as well as across the organisation. This helps to create awareness of apprenticeships and secure 'buy-in' from departments, who may not previously have thought of apprenticeships as a suitable training programme for their staff. The Trust investigates

"Four years ago, when I first started working in the organisation there was only two apprentices. I had come from a much smaller organisation where there were hundreds of apprentices, so I was keen to grow the programme within the Trust." Learning and OD Manager

opportunities for the introduction of apprenticeships in occupations (e.g. catering) where they have not previously been used and with the help of their training provider move quickly forward to develop an apprenticeship offer for members of staff.

It is critical to the Trust that they maximise the return on investment made into the apprenticeship levy, and see information and forward planning as important tools in the process. A matrix has been produced to highlight potential apprenticeships in a range of occupations across the Trust. This enables managers to quickly see apprenticeship opportunities and the Learning and Occupational Development Team to identify associated costs. This process, together with annual training needs analysis, assists with planning apprenticeships and demonstrates how and where the apprenticeship levy may be spent.

Opportunities to raise awareness of apprenticeships both within the Trust and externally are on-going throughout the year. This aims to make the most of existing events such as Apprenticeship Week and their links with Derwentside College. As awareness increases, so do requests for information about apprenticeships from different staff members not only for their own teams, but for their relatives as well.

Growing apprenticeships to meet workforce needs and the public sector target

Each year, in October, the Trust carries out a training needs analysis. Through this activity, and the workforce return, apprenticeship opportunities for existing staff, are identified and offered to managers as a way of meeting their workforce needs. Apprenticeship opportunities in health (assistant practitioner), cybersecurity, management and accounting

occupations were identified through the most recent review. As such in May, a group of 15 employees will commence on the Higher Apprenticeship (Assistant Practitioners).

For new entrants, the Trust recommends that every new member of staff recruited to a vacancy at Bands 1-4 should be considered for an apprenticeship, if appropriate. This approach has helped to build awareness of the different types of apprenticeships available and ensures new members of staff get the training needed to improve patient care.

The Trust is keen to use apprenticeships to support progression pathways for both their existing workforce and new entrants in order to meet identified shortages in both clinical

“There is a nursing apprenticeship coming out soon, so I was hoping to do that. I would like to be a midwife and would like to achieve this through the apprenticeship route.” Apprentice Healthcare Assistant

and non-clinical occupations. It is anticipated that this will facilitate a culture of ‘grow your own’, where staff feel valued and recognised. There is a recognition that traditional routes and recruitment methods for nursing staff are not meeting a critical skills shortage within the trust, and that an alternative approach through apprenticeship training could allow some existing Healthcare Support Workers to progress to nursing role whilst remaining as employees of the Trust. A number of current

apprentices and other employees have already expressed an interest in this route.

Apprenticeship progression pathways have been mapped across several occupations. Managers are encouraged to share these with their staff at induction and appraisals so individuals can see clear progression pathways should they wish to advance their career. From the Trust’s perspective this provides a consistent approach to manage talent and improve retention rates.

A recent review and restructuring of administration roles has resulted in displaced staff having the opportunity to retrain, via an apprenticeship, in a specialised corporate skill. This has resulted in the Trust retaining keen, motivated employees who can utilise their skills in a different area, creating a win-win situation for the organisation and staff. The Trust’s levy contribution provides an opportunity to fund the re-training of other employees who may find themselves in similar re-deployment situations in the future or who may choose to convert to a different job role.

“If we ever have to redeploy people, we’ve got a fantastic pot of money (the levy) to be able to do it and we’ve done our first one. I think that is really exciting as our previous training budget was next to nothing.” Learning and OD Manager

Collaborative working with training providers and NHS Trusts

The Trust has established an excellent working relationship with Derwentside College which they consider crucial to the success of their current apprenticeship offer. This relationship has also been a valuable source of information and support relating to apprenticeship reforms. The partnership ensures that the Trust receives a reliable, consistent, timely and responsive service from the college to meet their apprenticeship needs.

“I work with Derwentside College and they give such a high level of service which really makes a difference. The success of this relationship is paramount and it is really important.” Learning and OD Manager

Over the past few years, working with the college, the Trust has taken on regular cohorts of young people as apprentice Healthcare Assistants. The college has supported the Trust with advertising vacancies, screening initial applications and passing details of the best candidates through to the Trust to select for interview. When apprentices are recruited, the college continues to support the Trust and the apprentice to successfully progress through the apprenticeship. In addition, they are proactive in solving issues, flexible with off-the-job training schedules and provide highly qualified assessors who have worked in the health service.

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. Exploring new training provision has initiated a collaborative approach with other NHS Trusts and universities. This tactic saves time and effort, will ensure viable numbers of apprentices are available so specialist training can be provided and should ultimately achieve economies of scale for the NHS partnership.

Benefits to the organisation and to apprentices

By engaging with apprenticeships, the Trust has benefited from being able to offer opportunities to qualify and reskill existing staff, improve retention rates and provide clear progression routes to assist in meeting current and future skills shortages. Apprentices are identified by various staff as having increased loyalty, bringing ‘young blood’ and new ideas into the organisation, quickly being able to contribute to the team, and increasing job satisfaction for staff who support them. The levy is seen as providing a much needed training budget for apprentices of all ages whether they are existing staff or new entrants.

“Our apprentices bring real value to the organisation in terms of prior experience, high levels of willingness and enthusiasm and, a fresh pair of eyes which helps us on our journey of continuous service improvement.” Associate Director – People and Organisational Development

Apprentices were keen to point out that their apprenticeship benefited them by developing their knowledge and skills, improving their confidence, providing knowledge about and progression routes to other jobs, and through the support received from managers and staff. An increasing number of young people, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, have come into contact with the Trust through work experience, a traineeship type programme or an apprenticeship. For many, this has dramatically improved their confidence and ability to be in and contribute to a work environment, resulting in huge benefits to both the individual and the Trust.

“To me, an apprenticeship is more hands-on and that is what I like. I enjoy being with the patients and spending time with them.” Young Apprentice Clinical Healthcare Support Assistant

“They were young, but they were committed to the acute ward, they wanted to work with older people, they enjoyed the work and working within a team. It gave them a sense of belonging.” Line Manager

“For the young apprentices they do not always recognise the contributions they are making, so it is important to help them to understand this by getting them to reflect on their experiences and actions.” Line Manager

Apprenticeships have brought new opportunities for training to existing staff, as awareness and recognition has grown that this route is not ‘just for young people’ – but for all ages

“I wanted a challenge and to gain qualifications – doing an apprenticeship is providing me with both and so much more. Not only am I more effective in working with patients and colleagues, the apprenticeship is opening up further opportunities to progress.” Mature Apprentice

and levels. Individuals are learning on-the-job, increasing their skillset and knowledge base leading to improved confidence, ability and understanding of roles. Mature apprentices have cited apprenticeships as being motivating and empowering, resulting in greater job satisfaction and improved patient care. Other benefits noted are the opportunity to apply learnt knowledge, improve IT skills and to share the

apprenticeship journey with colleagues and other staff so they too, can benefit from taking up this opportunity.

Challenges

Whilst the Trust has made significant strides in embracing apprenticeships and recognising the value that apprentices make to the organisation, there are still several challenges to be faced in developing the programme further. Firstly, there needs to be sufficient training provision to meet the anticipated growth of apprenticeships. In addressing this situation, the Learning and Organisational Development Manager is

seeking to work collaboratively with other Trusts in the area to identify training providers who are responsive, flexible in their approach to delivery and who will provide a consistent high quality service. Once training organisations are identified, the Trust will apply its procurement procedures to select providers to deliver either higher/degree apprenticeships and/or large volumes.

Other challenges relate to strategic and operational issues around the levy and public sector target, including how to maximise a return on the levy investment. Work is still being undertaken in resolving 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 recruitment of young people as apprentice Healthcare Assistants is set to continue.

However, managers have encountered some issues amongst apprentices around lack of understanding about how they fit in to the organisation and its objectives. To overcome this challenge apprentices are made aware that

they are providing a valuable service to patients, are part of a team and are contributing to the bigger picture of patient care across the Trust.

“Once they find their feet, they know the ward routine, and they get to work with a really good experienced member of staff, that helps them a lot.” Line Manager

Replicability

The success of the County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust apprenticeship programme can be attributed to the following key factors:

- **Dedicated staff:** Those responsible for the growth and roll out of apprenticeships within the Trust are experienced in the successful development and implementation of employer apprenticeship programmes. They are familiar with current apprenticeship reforms and update senior managers and others on the implications. Managers who engage directly with apprentices recognise the benefit of new and existing talent. They are enthusiastic, committed and supportive in their approach to apprentices, offering an environment where individuals can flourish and increasingly contribute to the environment they are working in.
- **Effective partnership working:** The Trust has cultivated an excellent working relationship with their key training providers. This has resulted in beneficial outcomes for the Trust, which is provided with a reliable, flexible, high quality programme of apprenticeship training, support with apprenticeship recruitment, promotion and swift responses to requests for apprenticeships in new occupational areas.
- **Recruitment of young people:** The decision to recruit young people as apprentices has grown from strength to strength and individuals have quickly demonstrated their commitment to working with and caring for patients. Many have been offered permanent jobs and some are progressing on an apprenticeship career trajectory either within the Trust or with other health organisations.