

Apprentices in primary care – success in practice!

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Hello from the Health Education England team

This booklet has been produced by Health Education England (HEE) working across the North West in consultation with a number of general practice (GP) surgeries.

What is this booklet about?

This booklet outlines the benefits of apprenticeship qualifications in primary care support roles and showcases the impact of apprentices within the work environment. There are a broad range of profiles covering medical administration, business administration, customer service, healthcare and team leading.

How does this booklet benefit me?

It will give you an insight into some of the different apprenticeship qualifications that could enhance your general practice. You will hear stories from other practices, both from an employer and apprentice perspective, and we hope it will help you understand how an apprentice can add real value.

What is an apprenticeship?

An apprenticeship is on the job training leading to a national qualification, available for both new and existing staff. Anyone over the age of 16, who is not in full time education, can apply to be an apprentice. There are different levels of apprenticeships with the most common levels undertaken in GP surgeries being intermediate (level 2) and advanced (level 3) apprenticeships. General practice support staff apprenticeships typically run from 12 to 24 months. All apprenticeships include assessment of practical skills, functional skills (numeracy, literacy and IT) and a technical certificate (theory/knowledge).

Where can I find other information about apprenticeships?

We have useful links to resources that will help you to find the right apprentice for you. For an electronic copy of this booklet, access to other apprenticeship stories and further information on recruiting an apprentice or placing an existing member of staff on an apprenticeship qualification, take a look at our apprenticeship booklet on our website at www.hee.nhs.uk or follow the web link on the back cover of this document.

“ Health Education England were really helpful throughout the whole process and the training provider provided ongoing support and advice.”

Linda Donegan Practice Manager, Weaver Vale Surgery, Winsford, Cheshire.

Apprenticeships in primary care

The work of general practitioners (GPs) is widely recognised to be the foundation on which NHS care is provided. The NHS Five Year Forward View sets out the strategy to meet the future challenges facing health care services. As GP practices begin to embed new models of care there will be a need for a clear commitment to train and develop the existing workforce and also invest in new roles within healthcare services.

Apprenticeships broaden the scope of training and development for existing staff, whilst attracting new people to improve diversity within the workplace and bridging gaps in supply. They provide a future pipeline for clinical and non-clinical roles, counteract an ageing workforce and simplify career progression. Apprenticeship qualifications are available in a wide range of areas and levels including: business administration, healthcare, team leading, customer service, IT and communications.

How to plan, recruit and develop apprentices

Step 1

Assess your workforce development need: identify the skills gaps of your workforce and their current qualification level relating to their role. Think about any vacancies that could be considered as a future apprentice role. Estimate how much funding you have to spend on an apprenticeship.

Step 2

Choose apprenticeship training and assessments: find a training provider who will offer the right apprenticeship qualification and assess your apprentice over the duration of their qualification.

Step 3

Advertise a vacancy: to recruit an apprentice or identify an existing employee, work with a training provider to help with advertising and shortlisting.

Step 4

Provide ongoing support for the apprentice: including, helping new apprentices to adjust to the workplace, nominating a member of the team to be the apprentices mentor, planning workload to provide the necessary opportunities to complete practical tasks in line with training goals. Also build in time for the apprentice to receive regular assessment / workplace reviews by the training provider.



My assessor is absolutely brilliant. She is so understanding and she is always at the end of a phone when she is needed. Nothing feels like too much trouble. That is what makes it work for me, being supported and not being on your own."

Karenza Newton Health Care Assistant, Christina Hartley Medical Practice, Southport.



Recruitment was made easy. The training provider helped a lot by advertising vacancies, shortlisting and setting up second interviews. In fact support has been ongoing with advice and regular meetings with apprentices."
Katie Power Business Manager, Spinney Medical Centre, St Helens, Merseyside

Recruit an apprentice!

Health Education England asked GP practice managers across the North West about their experience of apprentices in order to understand the opportunities, benefits and issues when recruiting them.

A social value approach

Many respondents reflected on how apprenticeships contributed to their commitment to put something back into the community by creating an opportunity for local people. They recognise social mobility as a means to reduce health inequalities and use their leverage.

50% of employers believe apprenticeships add value in the community*

Grow your team whilst keeping staff costs down

Kay Ellermeyer Practice Manager, Alvanley Family Practice in Stockport believes apprenticeships made perfect financial sense for them. They helped in two ways: bringing in a number of apprentices who had energy, drive and new skills, which freed up existing staff to realise hidden talents.

One in five employers hire apprentices to help them through a tough economic climate*

Make hiring simpler and cheaper

Katie Power Business Manager, Spinney Medical Centre in St Helens, Merseyside said recruitment was made easy. The training provider 'helped a lot' by advertising vacancies, shortlisting and setting up interviews. Support from the training provider has been ongoing with regular meetings and advice.

59% of employers report training apprentices is more cost effective than hiring skilled staff*

Develop new recruits to meet your needs and fill the skills gap

Linda Bennett Practice Manager, Heath Lane Medical Centre in Chester was confident that they could 'train, develop and inspire an apprentice', so much so that their first recruit, a trainee receptionist, is now their patient services manager.

80% of companies investing in apprentices report significant increase in employee retention*



*National Apprentice Service (NAS) data: Why choose apprenticeships for your business (2014/15)

Top tips

For employers

Identify a good, local **training provider** – either through recommendations or searching online.

Having interviewed and selected a new apprentice – consider a **one week work trial** (prior to starting the role) so that they can see whether it is for them.

For a new apprentice, you could consider a **sliding scale salary** where their pay is increased on achievement of certain goals.

Consider a **young apprentice** to tackle an ageing workforce.



Provide a **work buddy** to help the apprentice with direction, questions and support.

Encourage **existing staff** to consider an apprenticeship qualification to help with their development and career progression.

For apprentices

Go at your own pace – apprenticeships are adaptable and intended for all sorts of learners. The more comfortable you are with the speed and progression – the better you will understand and remember.

Speak to other people who have recently become an apprentice or are undertaking an apprenticeship qualification.

Speak to your **manager** about career development.

Ask for **feedback** on how you are doing – strengths and areas for development.

Be confident – believing in your ability will allow you to take on more responsibility and show what you have learnt!



Get in to primary care with medical administration apprenticeships

Julia Moseley at the St Nicholas Group Practice in Burnley doesn't need convincing of the value of apprenticeships to her business or the community. She started her career as an apprentice and she is now a partner. Julia describes the practice in Burnley as a 'forward thinking training practice which welcomes the opportunity to train and develop all staff, including 'home grown' apprentices.' All ten apprentices they recruited have been successes. They have undertaken varied roles and been drawn from very different backgrounds and ages. Their work has encompassed reception, data input and specialist secretarial posts. The practice welcomed the opportunity to enhance practice training with apprenticeships finding many benefits. Julia sees the business case for this investment as well as the social value.



Holly Clarke, Medical Receptionist

Level 2 medical administration apprentice

Holly applied for an apprentice reception post having decided her long term ambition to be a nurse wasn't financially viable. She realised from day one in the practice just how effective working whilst learning was for her pointing out, 'I learn by actively doing.' The opportunity to take practical courses alongside her work has also rekindled her future ambition to become a nurse. So whilst gaining more knowledge of medical administration and building her confidence she is now exploring healthcare assistant opportunities at the practice; and a phlebotomy course is high on her 'to do list' which she hopes will help her to develop further.



Jill Threlfall, Parkinson's Disease Administrator

Level 2 medical administration apprentice

The St Nicholas Practice Group developed a Parkinson's disease nurse specialist service pilot in 2014 with a grant from the Freemasons. The pilot was mainstreamed in 2016 so the practice was keen to develop an apprentice medical administration post at level 2 to support the new service. Jill applied for the apprenticeship post initially as a Parkinson's nurse secretary having good administration experience but not in healthcare. She finds on the job training very rewarding and sees the role as 'a long term proposition'. In the meantime she is learning all about the structure of the NHS and undertaking further work experience in a medical environment. And she just received a merit in medical terminology.



We accept that apprentices do take time, but if time and effort is put into their training they can become a valued member of the team."

Julia Moseley

Get on in primary care with a healthcare apprenticeship

Linda Donegan, Practice Manager at Weaver Vale Surgery in Winsford, Cheshire said when they first recruited a new apprentice into a reception role it was with some trepidation. But she adds, 'I needn't have worried, what I got instead was a breath of fresh air, enthusiasm, willingness and a desire to learn.' In fact, they were so pleased with their first apprentice they have now taken on two more. At Weaver Vale, apprenticeships have become an important element of their talent management and retention activity. They offer new recruits a fixed term contract as an apprentice and this helps them assess 'how the person performs under pressure'. Once they have completed their apprenticeship, apprentices are supported in either securing a job role within the surgery or with another employer.

Healthcare apprenticeship level 2

Weaver Vale's healthcare assistant (HCA) started out on reception. She is now undertaking a vital HCA role supporting qualified health professionals delivering person centred, safe care. Having a healthcare apprentice has meant the practice could free up vital time for qualified health professionals, whilst the HCA could quickly get to grips with delivering basic health checks, blood tests, health advice and essential paperwork. On-going support from a learning assessor and an experienced HCA enabled the surgery to create a tailored package to support success.



Sophie Smith, Healthcare Assistant

Sophie cut her teeth at Weaver Vale on reception which was really good preparation for a future healthcare role. She flew through early courses in business administration and customer service but it wasn't ever quite enough. Sophie had always had an interest in clinical areas so after some discussion with her manager she jumped at the opportunity to change her role and begin a level 2 healthcare apprenticeship. Sophie now shadows an experienced and very supportive practice HCA. She has undertaken specific courses covering phlebotomy (taking blood) and infection control and she runs her own clinic every Friday. Her role as a HCA means, 'every day is different and I am constantly learning'. She says her apprenticeship study helps her 'focus and engage with things beyond daily duties'. In terms of advice to prospective apprentices Sophie says, 'Do it! I just wish I had started mine sooner.'

I took a pay cut to start something I really wanted to do for the rest of my life. It was worth it." Sophie

Get on in primary care with a healthcare apprenticeship

Debbie Elliott, Practice Manager at the Christina Hartley Medical Practice in Southport said when they first considered supporting a member of their reception team to train as a healthcare assistant (HCA) they hadn't realised just how crucial the decision would be. Southport is a fairly typical seaside town with 23% of the practice patients over 65 years. So with a new contract to deliver proactive care planning for frail patients there couldn't have been a better time to invest in a HCA. It also made perfect sense to support someone who was 'tried and trusted', who displayed all the right values, who could hit the ground running, while still making a valuable contribution to reception when needed.

Healthcare apprenticeship level 3

The appointment of an apprentice healthcare assistant (HCA) meant that the medical practice could support a more systematic focus on health promotion, establish HCA led clinics and play a vital role in supporting staff career development and retention. It also freed up practice nurses to concentrate on patients with chronic disease management needs. The level 3 healthcare apprenticeship programme was flexible so it meant that study could be balanced with work and family commitments.

“The practice nurse ,Elaine Jolly ,has been incredibly supportive since I started training. She talks or walks me through everything and anything I am not sure about. I've found shadowing her invaluable and very motivating.”

Karenza

Karenza Newton, Healthcare Assistant

Karenza is a busy mum and a very committed and compassionate apprentice HCA who absolutely loves her patients. As her HCA role has developed she says, 'work just gets more worthwhile,' and 'there is always something different.' Before moving to the practice she'd worked in different roles but there was 'no career plan'. Karenza worked in a school but she didn't find a niche. Then she moved into community care where she had what she describes as a 'kind of epiphany'. She started to 'see people differently' and had a 'gut instinct that she wanted to make a difference' to people's lives. She then applied to become a receptionist at the medical practice but within 18 months she felt she had outgrown the role. That is when the practice manager Debbie stepped in helping Karenza to consider a healthcare apprenticeship. This was a turning point for Karenza. She said, 'without this support I would have just given up'. Instead the practice has a committed team player who is always hungry to learn more.

“I started with a job on reception but now I have a vocation.”

Karenza

Get on in primary care with medical administration apprenticeships

Alvanley is a training practice with a long standing commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive workplace with a workforce that reflects the patients it serves and the community in which it is based. Until very recently they hadn't considered how they could 'grow their own talent'. This changed when they realised they could use an apprenticeship to create an opportunity to support a new recruit with a life limiting condition. He transformed the whole team dynamic with his 'can do' attitude and skill. And he opened the door for more apprenticeships. Kay Ellermeyer, Business Manager outlined a fairly typical picture of a growing practice facing new demands with an ageing workforce saying, 'apprenticeships saved our skin', contributing to enhanced service delivery and better patient care.

Medical administration apprenticeships level 2 and 3

Alvanley Family Practice has three apprentices, two are completing medical administration apprenticeships at level 2 and 3. Designed for people who work in administrative roles in medical or healthcare environments they cover medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, medical legal administration and data protection. The third apprentice, an existing employee, undertook a level 2 business administration option with finance (AAT) and she is about to progress to level 3. This works well for people involved in organising, supporting or supervising people and resources.



Rezwana Raidah, Receptionist

Rezwana said, 'I always knew I wanted to work in the police or health but I didn't know what as.' An apprenticeship provided the answer. Two things helped her decide to take the first step: a well-planned, supportive work trial and the opportunity to include specific modules related to medicine. 'By the end of the week', she said, 'I loved it and I knew healthcare was for me.'

Rezwana didn't like school but the apprenticeship provided a 'hands on' learning environment where she found confidence because she learnt 'so much about life' as well as the world of work. Crucially, she also developed a plan to train to be a nurse through enthusiastic discussions with the practice. When Rezwana finishes her level 2 apprenticeship she says she will be using all the transferrable skills. And in terms of advice to other people considering an apprenticeship she is very clear, 'Do it! There is nothing better than looking back and seeing just how far you have come in a short space of time.'

"I have just passed my AMSPAR exams as part of my medical administration apprenticeship – there are not many of my friends that can say that." Rezwana

Go further in primary care with a team leading apprenticeship

Linda Stewart, Practice Manager at Walton Medical Centre in Liverpool saw the value of an apprenticeship programme to support the integration of 'succession planning and talent management processes'. The apprentice framework and an experienced assessor helped her realise that an apprenticeship would work for older, more experienced staff. The apprenticeship supported the need for flexible study patterns and work based assessments which allowed for the management of work commitments and reduced any potential 'knock on' for colleagues workload. The course had to work well with established in-house training programmes too. A clear personal commitment to study was also deemed a pre-requisite for success.

Team leading apprenticeship level 2

The team leading apprenticeship has been developed to support people working in a supervisory/team leader role where key responsibilities are likely to include supporting, managing and developing a team, managing projects, planning and monitoring workloads and resources, delivering operational plans, resolving problems and building relationships internally and externally. And as the Walton practice discovered it has worked well to up-skill the workforce to replace those who leave or retire. Course benefits were almost immediate, clearly articulated through a more proactive managerial approach.

“

I was able to complete my studies at a suitable time to fit in with my work and personal life. There was always someone available to contact if I needed further support or guidance.”

Karen



Karen McGarry, Deputy Practice Manager

When Karen heard a deputy practice manager post was coming up she decided she needed to consider a course that would 'give her further knowledge' and boost her confidence so that she felt able to put herself forward. Her manager suggested a level 2 apprenticeship in team leading - having heard about the success of the programme at other practices. After further research, Karen enrolled and completed modules covering employee rights and responsibilities, resolving customer complaints and developing working relationships. With new found confidence Karen applied for the promotion and made a natural progression into a deputy practice manager role. She is now looking to further her career in the surgery and will be applying for the practice manager's post next year when her boss retires. Karen said, 'I would recommend this scheme to anyone who had ambition to further their career.'

Go further in primary care with business administration apprenticeships

Heath Lane Medical Centre in Chester has been successfully recruiting apprentices for over six years. Linda Bennett, Practice Business Manager describes this as a 'really fantastic experience'. She explained they favour a generic training route for the first six months whilst apprentices find their feet and then they tailor training modules 'as they grow'. All apprentices spend their first six months with the patient services team to gain a broad experience before specialising.

Business administration apprenticeships level 2 and 3

Heath Lane supports new recruits and existing staff looking to advance their careers to complete both business administration and medical administration apprenticeships. This equips learners to help patients as well as providing vital support for doctors and other healthcare professionals. A business administration apprenticeship provides the skills to ensure staff can thrive and that they are able to contribute to an effective and smooth running practice whilst becoming skilled administrators.

“

My apprenticeship gave me the opportunity I needed to work within a medical administrative environment gaining valuable work experience, whilst also achieving both a business and medical administration apprenticeship at level 2 and 3.”

Katherine



Katherine McClay, Patient Services Manager

Katherine's apprenticeship journey started at the age of 22 with the reception team after an online application and a hunch she wanted to work in health. In her first year, she began an intermediate level medical administration apprenticeship. However, this was closely followed by a business administration apprenticeship at level 2 and 3 as her responsibility grew. The apprenticeship involved studying theory one day a week with a training provider and shadowing a member of the administration team - gradually taking on more responsibility with guidance and assistance from staff. A training provider mentor provided workplace assessments and kept everything on track.

In year two all Katherine's assessments were completed in practice. Katherine was lucky enough to be offered a permanent post as an administrative assistant working across all departments within the medical centre and her responsibilities grew and grew. After three years she was promoted to a data quality manager role and finally, five years on, she is now the patient services manager looking after new apprentices and still eager to learn more.

The Health Education England team would like to thank the following organisations for taking part in the production of these apprentice case studies:

Alvanley Family Practice, Woodley, Stockport

Christina Hartley Medical Practice, Southport

Heath Lane Medical Centre, Boughton Heath, Chester

St Nicholas Group Practice, Burnley

Spinney Medical Centre, St Helens

Walton Medical Centre, Liverpool

Weaver Vale Surgery, Winsford, Cheshire

We are looking to develop more case studies in the future and we would welcome contributions from other employers and apprentices. If you would like to discuss how you can share an apprenticeship story, please email:

henw.transformation@nhs.net

For more information and on-going updates go to **<https://hee.nhs.uk/hee-your-area/north-west/our-work/attracting-developing-our-workforce/workforce-transformation>**

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