



**Aimhigher...**  
east of england

# Apprenticeships – a vital tool for workforce development

## The national push for Apprenticeships

The Government aims to achieve ‘*World Class Apprenticeships*’ within the next decade. They will become a mainstream post-16 option for one in five young people as well as a progression route for substantial numbers of adults.

There’s a growing recognition in the health sector that the Apprenticeship Programme offers a flexible workforce development solution to support new ways of delivering services and improving patient care.

With a new national apprenticeship service planned, much more public funding coming on stream, and already a specialist information guide for healthcare employers about the Apprenticeship Programme, there’s never been a better time to take action and start developing your own local programme.

Apprenticeships are being driven by Government, and link in with many other agendas. The 2006 *Leitch Review* drive towards a better skilled workforce is being supported by many initiatives such as the Joint Investment Framework, Skills Pledge, a huge expansion in Train to Gain and a range of new education routes which include Diplomas and Apprenticeships.

At the root is a need to tackle our ageing workforce by attracting new entrants, through diplomas for young people and via apprenticeships at several levels. Crucially, apprenticeships are also a viable workforce development tool for those over 25 years old as well as young people, so can be used to address the entire workforce.

Employers are now becoming aware of the advantages of upskilling the workforce, and there’s a growing body of evidence to demonstrate the productivity and quality gains for health employers. Skills for Health, the sector skills council for the NHS, independent and voluntary healthcare sectors, believes there are excellent reasons for supporting the Apprenticeship Programme. One of the most important aspects is their flexibility. Apprenticeships can be delivered in accordance with employer need, allowing employers to:

- Upskill the existing workforce – for existing staff under the age of 25 and through the Adult Apprenticeship Programme available to staff who are aged 25 and over.
- Grow their own workforce by developing a cohort of learners of young people recruited from the local community.
- Develop a set of well trained healthcare support staff with transferable skills that support career progression all the way to higher education.
- Assist activities to meet the Skills Pledge to support all its employees to develop their basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2.



## Recognising the benefits

More employers are recognising the benefits of offering their own Apprenticeship Programme, not least because of the challenge to recruit and develop the workforce in the face of stiff competition from other sectors. And if health employers are facing the challenge, it's a safe bet that employers in other sectors have cottoned on to the challenge too.

'World Class Skills' is the Government's follow up report to the *Leitch Review*, and it sets out the objective of making the UK one of the world's leading skilled nations by 2020. That's a laudable objective – in real terms, it would mean increased productivity of over £1,800 per worker, leading to an extra £80bn into the economy.

**But getting there is the challenge facing us all.**

## Making it happen in the East of England

The East of England Sector Skills Agreement for Health 2007 describes how the workforce challenge is probably greater for Health and other Public Service sectors, because of the rates at which both demographics and the economy are changing in the region.

Skills for Health, Aimhigher Healthcare Strand and NHS East of England region recognised this and took steps to tackle the apprenticeship challenge with a range of partner organisations.

By working together, partners found they could support employers more effectively. They developed a range of 'joined up' financial and development support for employers which includes taster surgeries, learning sets, shared materials and progression accords.

The concept of a 'one stop shop' support to employers has proved attractive to them and we are now planning to take the concept into a formal association of partner organisations.





## Funding for skills investment is part of the solution

The East of England is benefiting from a £21.2 million three-year investment in healthcare skills, due to an agreement launched at the end of 2007. The deal tackles regional skills gaps and shortages and extends 'Train to Gain' to the NHS.

The rolling three-year deal is a joint investment by the East of England Strategic Health Authority and the Regional Learning and Skills Council to address skills gaps and help improve patient care by extending the skills of NHS workers across the region. On top, the new drive towards apprenticeships will add yet more substantial funding.

With such generous funding pouring into the sector, and waves of initiatives requiring placements for learners there's a danger that employers may get swamped under the avalanche of developments.

It's vital therefore that employers get to grips with working with multiple partners, agencies and government bodies. With such a fast pace of change, it would be easy for employers to become overwhelmed by the conditions that come with accessing public sector funding.

## Who is looking out for the employer?

The East of England held an Employer Engagement Summit in early 2008. Julia Nix, Regional Director of the East of England Skills and Competitiveness Partnership summed up the response as follows:

“ The messages are loud and clear. There are too many organisations knocking on employers' doors. Our priority now is to set out how providers and employers can work together more effectively to close the skills gap. ”

Julia Nix, Regional Director, East of England Skills and Competitiveness Partnership.

Partner organisations in the East of England see it as vital that employers don't buckle under the weight of good intentions, ideas and programmes that are happening across the health sector. Important initiatives that are doing fantastic work to bring new entrants into the health sector and develop the existing workforce could falter if the process is not supported effectively.



# A 'one stop shop' for healthcare employers

Employers told us they wanted a more 'joined up' approach to partnership working and see the current apprenticeship development and support programme for employers as an exemplar. Skills for Health is leading work in the East of England region to assess how this 'joined up' approach can be extended to a range of initiatives to help employers access information, networks, resources and contacts from one place. Agreement has been reached to form an umbrella partnership to promote shared good practice and develop strong partnerships with employers. Initiatives cannot succeed without the goodwill, closer involvement and buy in from employers of all types and sizes but it needs to be made easy.

## The partnership will provide five main areas by pooling partners' resources to support:

- Widening recruitment to the Health Sector.
- Achieving skills escalation and widening participation.
- Developing new roles/teams and new ways of working.
- Creating a more productive workforce.
- Generic subjects such as research, LMI and Workforce Planning etc.



This new 'one stop shop' will be there for signposting and supporting the needs of employers. It will effectively be a virtual collaboration between partner organisations to work jointly in support of employers who wish to adopt new and creative ways of developing their workforces in response to changing demands. The vision is to bring together key partners at a regional and county level as an association to provide support to employers in a synchronised way.

Julia Watling, Training and Development Manager, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust, explains the benefits of developing an Apprenticeship Programme through a partnership approach:

“ We don't want to deal with 10 different bodies – we just couldn't do it. So this model works for us by bringing together the full range of partners. This apprenticeship project will benefit our Trust by giving us the opportunity to grow our own, bring a younger generation into the Trust and build the workforce of the future ”

Julia Watling, Training and Development Manager, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust.

If you would like to find out more about the Apprenticeship Programme, and the benefits it could bring your organisation, take a look at our Apprenticeship Guide. It explains the benefits of running your own Apprenticeship Programme, sources of funding, and working and funding models successfully implemented across the health sector. Visit [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk) to download your copy or contact Wendy Wilkinson to find out more about the East of England Apprenticeship Support Programme email; [wilkinson.wendy@btinternet.com](mailto:wilkinson.wendy@btinternet.com)

To discuss the 'one stop shop' skills solution for healthcare employers in the East of England region, contact [jennifer.fenelon@skillsforhealth.org.uk](mailto:jennifer.fenelon@skillsforhealth.org.uk)