Employing Apprentices across NHS South Central

What is an Apprenticeship?
An Apprenticeship is a framework of nationally recognised qualifications that combine work-based training and formal education. An Apprenticeship consists of:
- a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ),
- a Technical Certificate, covering underpinning knowledge to undertake a role, and
- Key Skills, such as literacy and numeracy.

Apprenticeships are delivered at levels two and three. It is anticipated that a level two Apprenticeship may take up to one year to complete, and a level three, up to two years. Over 80 Apprenticeship framework are relevant to the NHS, including health and social care, pharmacy support, dental nursing, administration, IT and engineering, etc. Work is being undertaken nationally to attach UCAS points to Apprenticeships to support progression into Higher Education. For further information see: www.apprenticeships.org.uk/employers

Apprenticeship Opportunities
During times of financial challenge, where local and national drivers include increasing quality and productivity, Apprenticeships can be used as a method of addressing skills gaps and developing a workforce to meet the needs of Employers in delivering the services our patients expect and deserve.

Apprenticeships are used to attract both high-quality new recruits into the NHS, as well as improving the skills and productivity of existing employees. There are several economic and social reasons for recruiting Apprentices, which include:
- Developing the skills of local people;
- Supporting recruitment of a workforce which is reflective of the local population;
- Attracting young people into the NHS;
- Developing current staff and growing the workforce of the future;
- Helping Trusts and PCTs to keep pace with the latest technology and working practices; and
- Increasing staff morale, productivity and supporting retention.

Apprenticeships are open to all individuals above the age of 16 including school leavers, those who have been working for years and want to improve their skills; and people seeking a new challenge and wanting to start a new career.

Recruiting Apprentices
Managed by the National Apprenticeship Service, ‘Apprenticeship vacancies’ is an online recruitment tool for Apprenticeships in England, see: http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/. The system enables apprenticeship vacancies to be viewed by thousands of candidates.

Candidates can search for vacancies using selected criteria such as geography, occupation, job role, employer etc. The Apprenticeship Training Provider will advertise and manage the vacancy. Links can be made to the NHS Jobs Website, where candidates will submit their application. Short listing and recruitment will be managed by the NHS Employer, following normal processes.

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Research conducted by Populus, on behalf of the LSC highlight that employers believe training Apprentices is more cost effective than hiring skilled staff, leading to lower overall training and recruitment costs (LSC, 2009). 76% of employers state that Apprentices provide higher overall productivity, 80% feel that Apprenticeships reduce staff turnover and 88% believe that Apprenticeships lead to more motivated and satisfied staff (LSC, 2008).

Costs and Funding
The costs of Apprenticeship Frameworks vary dependant upon the age of an Apprentice and the type of Framework. The National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) fully fund Apprenticeships for people aged 16 - 18 years and co-fund those for people aged 19 - 24. At the time of publication, limited funding is available for Apprentices aged over 25 years. NESC has allocated up to £3,000 per level 2 and up to £4,000 per level 3 Apprenticeship, regardless of the age of the individual or type of Framework.

Employment Options
Various employment options are available for Apprentices, as follows:

- Apprentices can be employed as trainees on a fixed term basis, requiring no guarantee of interview or employment at the end of the Apprenticeship.
- They can be employed on Agenda for Change bands 1 – 4 with the status of ‘trainee’, as set out in Annex U.
- Apprentices can be employed on bands 1 – 4 and receive a full wage.

The Diagram below illustrates options available to employers when recruiting Apprentices.

There is no set rate of pay for apprentices, however all employed apprentices must receive a wage of no less than £95 per week.

Employers are not obliged to guarantee the Apprentice a permanent job at the end of the Apprenticeship. It is important to manage the Apprentice’s expectations and make it clear from the start whether their Apprenticeship could develop into permanent employment.

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