

Case study

The importance of the *degree* in Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeships (SLDA)

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Sector: Healthcare

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Participating hospitals are increasing in number in the 2020-21 academic year.

Background



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Ranked amongst the top 5 business schools in the UK with the gold standard of 'triple-crown' accreditation and considered to be in the elite 1% of business schools worldwide, Cass Business School has designed and developed a Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship - the [Executive Masters in Medical Leadership \(EMML\)](#) - that offers advanced training to doctors. Soon to be accredited by the standard-setting body in medical leadership, the Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management (FMLM), the apprenticeship programme grew out of the business school's own research into clinical leadership in hospitals undertaken by Dr Amanda Goodall, Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Management and EMML Course Director. Her research shows that good clinical and medical leadership is strongly associated with patient outcomes and employee job satisfaction and retention. Demand for doctors to move into leadership has risen throughout the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and participating hospitals are increasing in number in the 2020-21 academic year. An article for the Financial Times, [How the coronavirus pandemic has tested UK doctors' leadership skills](#), summarises how doctors on the EMML have been directly using their leadership and management training during the pandemic. Cass Business School's shared ambition alongside the employer organisations is that by completing the SLDA, apprentices (who are medical doctors) will gain the essential leadership and business skills necessary to transform the way healthcare is organised and delivered.

The Challenge

Cass Business School's research shows that hospitals perform better when led by clinical doctors as opposed to non-medically trained managers. But being an exemplary clinician is not alone sufficient; they also need leadership development and management learning. Only with the formation of a new professional body, the Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management, when combined with the availability of the Apprenticeship levy, have clinicians been able to benefit more widely from business school training and an executive master's degree to better manage staff and processes. Covid-19 has tested the UK health system like never before and likely to be the greatest example of change management that the NHS has experienced since its formation given that barriers to change have been removed, departments and roles have been rapidly remodelled and new ways of working have been adopted out of urgent necessity. For Cass Business School, the teaching and learning on the SLDA allow apprentices to promote and implement good, and mitigate bad, clinically led decision-making including when services are switched back to a new 'normal state' in potentially resource limited Coronavirus environments.

The value of the experience

The Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship has through the off-the-job learning delivered by Cass Business School introduced the apprentices to new leadership styles and techniques. Techniques such as individual and group coaching and action learning proved helpful for many at the start of the pandemic and provided a safe space for apprentices to be challenged, to reflect and work through important issues. Practice around improved communication skills, problem solving, implementing change and reflection on behaviours such as demonstrating resilience and leadership style helped apprentices "hit the floor running" during Covid-19. Based on their research, Cass Business School has identified that being a competent leader positively affects employee morale and individual productivity, and these reflections have informed the pedagogical practice in the degree apprenticeship.

In particular, the executive master's degree is helping apprentices form new perspectives on the leadership skills needed in clinical healthcare settings. The curriculum is designed to facilitate the development of open and honest communication, the practice of active listening, leading by example, and it explores why non-verbal communication matters in practitioner roles such as intensive care, emergency medicine and mental healthcare.

To cope with the unique factors associated with Coronavirus, apprentices have immersed their teams in the theory of emotional intelligence where they consciously practise techniques to encourage empathy and self-awareness. This has assisted hospitals where the strain of Covid-19 has been compounded by the emotional distress of caring for high

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volumes of critically ill patients coupled with extraordinary working conditions such as hot and restrictive personal protective equipment.

The modules on the degree apprenticeship include: Personal Leadership Development; Regulation, Policy & Strategy in Health; Healthcare Analytics; Expert Leadership; Leading Innovation in Healthcare; Managerial Accounting & Business Planning; Managing People & Change; Leadership Impact Project; and Marketing and Machine Learning for Healthcare. All students also receive personal coaching.

Lessons Learned

Many apprentices (as high as 50% on the programme) have moved swiftly into more senior leadership roles or jobs with greater responsibility, including while on the apprenticeship. The master's qualification is considered critically important because in clinical roles it matters greatly to individuals' promotion and hiring opportunities. Doctors undertake a great deal of medical education and continuing education and certification is viewed as extremely important (Cass have surveyed their own students about this). Apprentices working in the wider health service, including in clinical commissioning groups, have used their knowledge of transformational change theory to directly help them develop teams and structures, ensure continuation of emergency care and determine which services can be safely paused during the acute phase of the pandemic. Others are looking beyond this phase and using the teaching and learning from the Executive Master's in Medical Leadership to help inform substantial improvements in their area of medicine, and increase, for example, outpatient capacity as services emerge from the crisis.

The coronavirus has offered Cass Business School the chance to evaluate how frontline apprentices on the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship are using their management learning from the knowledge, skills and behaviours defined by the apprenticeship standard. Not only is there evidence of workplace benefits as a result of the programme, such as the greater emergence of interdisciplinary speciality collaboration, but there are examples of personal benefits too; specifically enabling a better understanding of a learner's own strengths and weaknesses - in the context of their mental health and well-being - which provide new insights to peer encouragement and support.

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Quotes

“The coaching and action learning provided a safe space for me to be challenged, to reflect and work through important issues...Improved communication skills, problem solving, resilience, implementing change, and leadership style also helped me hit the floor running.” – **Dr Adrian Cree, Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist, Priory Group**

“[I am] ...able to share experiences with other members of my [apprenticeship] cohort with whom I have a rare professional honesty”. – **Dr Hsien Chew, Head of Medical Services, Joint Ventures at HCA Healthcare UK**

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This case study is commissioned by:

