

Case study



UNIVERSITY OF
CHICHESTER



west
sussex
county
council

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

Provider:
University of Chichester

Date:
July 2020

Theme: Public Service Improvements, Benefits and Gains

Sectors: Local Government

Employer: West Sussex County Council

Apprentice: Julie Rendle-Eames

Background

The University of Chichester is delivering the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship accredited by CMI, which includes an MBA, and sets out 'to examine the practice of leadership management informed by an analysis of wider management theory'. It is designed to draw on day-to-day work as the key source of learning, integrating both on-the-job and off-the-job learning.

Aimed at those in strategic leadership roles, it offers opportunities for those without, necessarily, an undergraduate degree or equivalent but who have substantial experience in management. One such apprentice is Julie Rendle-Eames, Head of Customer Experience at West Sussex County Council since 2016.

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The Value of the Experience

Motivated by a desire to secure her rightful place and recognition at a senior level within the organisation, Julie is clear that she was “looking for the benefit of the master’s qualification” as an outcome of her learner journey. Undertaken at a time when her service area is under increased scrutiny as part of council wide performance review the apprenticeship programme, as designed, has - in Julie’s view - provided her with considerable choices in how to apply the learning in ways that are meaningful.

In learning about strategy, HR, finance, marketing and operations and applying new learning in work-based projects, Julie now practically applies the skills needed in bringing about organisational change alongside continuous improvement. At a time of relative austerity West Sussex County Council, like other local authorities, needs to find a different way to deliver its services. A key focus for Julie’s role is delivering the right outcomes for customers and oversees a new approach of ‘*Doing the Basics Brilliantly*’ focusing on making it easier for service users to get the help they need, when needed. The development of her own leadership and reflective personal development during the apprenticeship has resulted in a personal shift in leadership style from control and command to achieving a more balanced and inclusive approach. The SLDA has equipped her with the necessary strategies, tools and theoretical understanding to now behave as a leader in her head of service role rather than a micro-manager of people and resources together with a greater appreciation of other people’s styles, management methods and ways of working.

Learning through small, clearly defined project work, Julie has explored in her MBA inter-connected themes such as strategy, leadership, continuous improvement, culture and diversity. Discussing the theoretical and practical implications of various topics in a group form has helped develop confidence in using them in the workplace and for Julie, has developed her ability to engage with scholarly material and, via action learning, allowed the practical application of such material at work. By taking new approaches Julie and her team have made improvements within their Highways Service to reduce failure demand and cost and have removed high levels of demand impacting on expensive front-line services. By her own admission, Julie mentors more, manages change and conflict better and shares her learning across the workplace where possible. This has been a win-win for West Sussex County Council’s customer experience and Julie’s service area is now successfully described as high-performing.

Quotes

“It was not my destiny to do a master’s degree.”

“Removing the degree will be a detriment. Those who say (the degree) is not important will typically have had the university experience. For those of us who haven’t, we really value it.”

“The academic and business worlds can appear polar opposites, but my first experience of higher education has shown me how freeing it is to learn at this level; with the master’s degree you critically reflect on the things you read and in how you write... it is a different way of being...”

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"I now have a deeper understanding of what the 3 C's of 'Power with People' mean: it has changed the way I lead, and I am now more capable of leading."

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This case study is commissioned by:

