

Case study

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

Provider:
University of East Anglia (UEA)

Date:
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Theme: Working with an Employer - NHS

Sector: Healthcare

Employer: Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Background

Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals comprises two hospitals, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and Cromer Hospital, and is a 1,200-bed teaching hospital with state-of-the-art facilities where 8,500 staff treat over 1 million people across a wide range of general and specialist services. The Trust has been involved with apprenticeships since 2010 and has successfully offered a broad range of opportunities in roles across all skill levels and in clinical and non-clinical subjects both as new posts and as progression opportunities for its existing workforce.

The Trust has 35 senior managers on the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship programme with UEA. The first cohort commenced in February 2018 and includes clinical consultants, senior nurses, operational managers, finance managers, research managers and scientists and is reflective of the workforce's entire spectrum of roles. A further cohort of 26 (of which 9 are consultants together with other senior staff from across a broad spectrum of specialities) is due to start with UEA in September 2020.

The Challenge

The mandatory degree qualification element in the SLDA has been removed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) following its application of the mandatory qualifications rule as part of a review of the Standard under its 'revisions and adjustments' process. Under the mandatory qualifications rule, a qualification can only be included if it is a requirement of a professional body, regulator or used in hard sifting for job interviews. Employers like Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals and their apprentices have been clear, however. That the degree is a crucial part of the standard and without it would not attract the talent needed, thus affecting the very purpose of the apprenticeship. Indeed, the Trust whole heartedly agrees: a degree apprenticeship provides a degree with its status, transferability and wider learning objectives as well as the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be

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competent in the role. The assertion that funding a master's degree, especially an MBA, is not an appropriate use of employers' levy is at severe odds with the Trust's own use of and measured benefits of the SLDA. The Trust is among the biggest users, namely the NHS. Given the Government's Manifesto commitments to the NHS and given the emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Trust needs to be heavily persuaded that preventing it from investing its levy payments in training their senior managers, is appropriate, reflects good policy or good value for money, especially in 2020 given the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic.

As far as the Trust is concerned, it can be assumed, many public sector employees will no longer have the opportunity (given income and savings) to undertake this particular training/apprenticeship programme incorporating a master's degree. Public sector employers also tend not to have the resources to fund their employees to undertake such high-level programmes. Removal of the qualification prevents an organisation such as the Trust and the wider NHS from spending its apprenticeship levy on a training programme where the international benchmark for management is an MA, MSc or MBA.

The Value of the Experience

As a large local employer, the SLDA has been transformational for both the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals Trust's workforce and the organisation in terms of culture and capacity. It has directly impacted on patient care and has helped managers to lead on change, develop services and open doors to high impact projects including creating value to the customer (patient), integrating health services in localities, designing and innovating new diagnostic pathways, establishing effective continuity of maternity care and rationalising clinical space to the benefit of waiting times and the meeting of clinical targets.

The Trust reflects that in the current NHS climate, which depends heavily on efficiency and productivity, it is vital that senior clinical leaders, for example, understand the strategic importance of organisational decisions. It is insufficient to restrict knowledge to purely clinical aspects that benefits only the patient's care. It is ever increasingly essential that senior clinicians focus on a bigger picture so that leadership decisions and directions benefit the whole organisation. In its view, staff undertaking an MBA at UEA delivered as an apprenticeship is an important first step in wider learning and in the sharing of best practice from differing professions and others, including successful entrepreneurs and senior directors from both private and public sector services.

Ideas to Action

The Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship has, in its delivery of the organisational behaviour module as part of the MBA, resulted in a decision by the Trust to support a material change in the way junior doctors are supported in their leadership journeys both locally and regionally. When fully operational, the Trust in partnership with the medical school and Norwich Business School at UEA, will be in the first cohorts of medical schools in the country to fully integrate leadership training into the undergraduate curriculum.

Quotes

"Restrict the ability of employers to spend their levy on the occupations their organisations need, and Government could reduce employer investment in workforce development. This is the very opposite of the policy intent of the apprenticeship reforms and levy. Restrict the ability of the public sector to spend on higher-level programmes, including in leadership and management roles, and the potential of

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apprenticeships in England is fundamentally undermined.” – **Adrian Anderson, Chief Executive, University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC)**

“The NHS is under increasing pressure to deliver more services with limited funding, and with an accelerating demand for those services the transformational skills that the Senior Leader Master’s Degree Programme gives our senior managers enables them to drive a change which supports better patient care. For us the withdrawal of the master’s degree from the Standard would be a major disappointment.” – **Career Development Manager, Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital, Learning and Development Department**

“Having being a past clinical director in obstetrics it has allowed me to reflect on why it would have been useful to have done this (apprenticeship) before and how effective I might have been...my own maternity strategy (written 6 years ago) as clinical director looks very amateur when compared to how the MBA course suggests the approach should be.” – **Consultant Obstetrician, Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital**

“I feel as though I am leaving the apprenticeship with a toolkit from the master’s degree that will equip me to deal with any scenario that my job can send my way. Many people have been promoted whilst on the course, so the system is recognising what this programme is producing.” – **Head of Radiotherapy, Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital**

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“As a full-time working, single mum, with no family support, there is no way that this would have been possible for me without the apprenticeship scheme. The fact that the scheme is clear about the balance of study and work, allows for me to ensure that my family are cared for and yet I can still continue to grow my career....if you take away this opportunity, then those who have both the money and the time will still do MBA’s. Single parents – like myself – who earn enough to get by but provide the sole income for a multi-child family could never achieve this.” – **Principal Pharmacist, Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital**

“From a personal perspective, the MBA so far (as part of the Senior Leader Degree Apprenticeship) has been a confidence booster. Being 4 modules in (economics, strategy, operations and marketing strategy) I can see how each module already has me adapting at work and in everyday life...” – **Deputy Operational Manager, Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital**

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This case study is commissioned by:

