APPRENTICES, TRAINEES AND NURSING STUDENTS

How RCN learning representatives can ensure a positive start to a young person’s career in nursing

Wear the badge on the outside.
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Young learners in your workplace

On a busy ward, surgery or community-based workplace you might see several young new starters working in a health care support worker role. As well as nursing students, who go to university to do a nursing degree and also undertake a work placement, you may find yourself working with trainees, apprentices and cadets and feel a little confused about their roles and responsibilities, and what support they might need.

The government is encouraging private and public sector organisations to take on young people in roles that provide on-the-job learning. As a result, health care organisations are introducing new schemes, such as apprenticeships, that provide on-the-job practical skills training and offer a non-traditional route into a nursing career. Government funding for these programmes means this approach makes good business sense for employers looking to provide an attractive and cost-effective way of growing talent.

This leaflet has been designed to give RCN learning representatives:

- an overview of the new young learner roles
- guidance on what good practice looks like in relation to supporting young learners
- an outline of what challenges might arise.

We’ll also take a look at how you and your fellow union representatives can work in partnership with employers to ensure that every young person who joins your organisation has a great start to their career, receiving the learning and experience they need to become confident, competent and to grow in their role and beyond.
WHO’S WHO?

Job titles, names and roles

With government support now encouraging employers to recruit and train more young people, there are several ways of starting out a career in nursing. The main learning opportunities are:

- traineeships (see page 8)
- apprenticeships (see page 12)
- cadets (see page 18)
- nursing students (see page 19).

Rather confusingly these job titles may vary, depending on the employing organisation, and may involve young people undertaking support worker duties alongside those employed specifically in that role.

- Apprentices and cadets will usually be called health care support workers, health care assistants or clinical support workers, and it may not be immediately obvious that they are on a programme of study as they will also be working in these roles.
- Ideally, trainees should be easily identified in their job title and it should be obvious that they are supernumary and not employed in a role but are undertaking work experience.
- Nursing students are usually identified by that title but they may also choose to take on a support worker role in order to earn extra money to fund their studies. It is important that both the nursing student and their manager make it clear when this is the case as the role boundaries are different.

Some organisations use different uniforms, badges or arm bands to help identify these different roles. For a young person to get the best experience and learn well, it is important that those working alongside them are clear about their current knowledge, experience and competence. Visual cues such as badges and uniforms can really help to confirm their ‘learner’ status. When staff are confused on this issue, they struggle to support young people and may assign inappropriate tasks and duties which can lead to a young person losing confidence or feeling out of their depth and ultimately put the patient at risk.

For this reason, it is important that all staff understand the different development routes available for young people and know which of these your organisation offers.

The role of the learning representative

Work in partnership with your workforce development/learning and development team and your union colleagues to engage staff and help them to understand what roles young people are undertaking and how they can identify and support them.
TRAINEESHIPS

A traineeship is an education/training programme that includes work experience and prepares young people for their future careers by helping them become work ready. Traineeships are designed to provide skills and experience for young people who want to get an apprenticeship or job but don’t yet have appropriate skills or experience. There is no legal requirement to pay a wage for this role.

Who is eligible/appropriate?

- Traineeships are available for young people aged 16 to 19, and for young people with Learning Difficulty Assessments up to academic age 25. The core target group for traineeships is young people who are not currently in a job, have little work experience and are qualified below Level 3. Traineeships should be voluntarily undertaken by the young person.

- Traineeships are not intended for the most disengaged young people, who require very intensive support, or those who already have the skills and experience needed to start an apprenticeship or find work, or those already in a job.

- There can be fierce competition for apprenticeship places which can mean that those young people with lower qualifications and confidence are being excluded. A high quality traineeship can help these young people get onto an apprenticeship scheme or into paid work.

Duration, content and qualifications

- A traineeship should provide between 100 and 240 hours of learning/work experience and take no longer than six months. Short, structured and well-supported programmes are much better than lengthy programmes, both for the young person and the employer; too long a traineeship can stifle progression into a work role or an apprenticeship and can become a routine job rather than a genuine learning experience.

- The programme should be properly planned to meet the aspirations of the trainee and should include relevant skills to enable progression onto an apprenticeship or into employment.

- The employer and learning provider (such as a college) should work together to ensure the learning element is high quality and that all programmes include:
  - employment rights and responsibilities which are signposted to all recognised unions, enabling them to identify quality employment opportunities
  - English and maths support for those who have not achieved a Level 2 qualification
  - good health and safety training, as young people have little workplace experience and are therefore less likely to identify risk or raise concerns.

- There is no set qualification or level for a traineeship; the emphasis is on developing a programme that prepares an individual for employment or access into an apprenticeship. While this flexibility has its advantages, it is important to lobby employers and providers to ensure programmes offer useful and relevant learning and, wherever possible, include a qualification.

You can view the government’s traineeship framework in full, which includes details of funding, at www.gov.uk
Role and responsibilities

- The primary aim of a traineeship is to provide learning and experience of a workplace and so the trainee should not be undertaking an existing role independently. This is different to an apprenticeship, which involves both learning and working.
- People under 18 years of age must not work for more than eight hours a day and should have a rest period of 30 minutes every four hours. In addition, they should have 12 hours consecutive daily rest and 48-hours consecutive rest in every seven days.

Pay, financial support and funding

- There is no requirement to pay a trainee, the focus of the traineeship should be on learning and experience and a trainee should never displace an existing worker.
- As unions, we should ensure that if work being undertaken by a trainee is of value to an employer, then the trainee should receive the minimum wage and ideally be compensated in line with the role they are undertaking.
- We believe that, at the very least, trainees should be offered expenses to cover the cost of their travel and subsistence, and that trainees should never be asked to pay for uniforms, security passes or equipment.
- In England there is a Bursary Fund to help those aged 16 to 19 with education-related costs (an Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme is in operation in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), see www.gov.uk for full details. In addition, training providers and local authorities are able to access a vulnerable student bursary for young people who need extra support.
- The learning element of the traineeship is funded by the government and this will be drawn down by the college. An employer may also have learning provider status and may therefore deliver the learning themselves and draw down the funding. To do this the employer will need to meet specific criteria, including achieving an Ofsted Grade 2 (Good) grading.

Progression for trainees

- Trainees who successfully complete their programme should be given a guaranteed interview for an apprenticeship or a permanent role, if one exists.
- Where there are no opportunities within an organisation, trainees should be offered useful feedback about their progress, careers advice and a good reference that is relevant to the roles or learning programmes they aspire to.
Apprenticeships provide training and qualifications for young people while working in a role; the apprentice undertakes a role within an organisation and in return the employer provides protected learning time. This differs to a traineeship, where the programme should be primarily focused on the learning and experience of a workplace. An apprentice earns as they learn and the employer is required to pay a wage for both time at work and when learning.

Who is eligible/appropriate?
It may seem that apprenticeships are aimed at young people (aged 16 to 24), but they can be accessed at any age. There is, however, more government funding support for young people. Entry requirements differ, depending on the apprenticeship level and associated job role, and competition for places can be quite fierce.

Duration, content and qualifications
There are three levels of apprenticeship:

- **intermediate** – Level 2 is the equivalent of five good GCSE passes
- **advanced** – Level 3 is the equivalent of two A-level passes
- **higher** – Higher apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications such as an NVQ Level 4 and, in some cases, a knowledge-based qualification such as a Foundation degree.

Skills for Health and Skills for Care both offer apprenticeship frameworks that are currently in use in nursing. For more information, visit [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk) and [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

An apprentice may work full-time in a support role, but during their apprenticeship they will need to be provided with **280 hours of guided learning**, 30 per cent of which must be off the job at college or protected study time.

An apprentice is learning as well as working and in order to meet the expectations of their work-based programme, will need to become confident and competent in a variety of tasks. In other words, an apprentice should not carry out the same duties day in, day out. Your employer and learning provider will need to develop a well-structured programme of work and study, with experienced staff to guide and support the apprentice. In addition, each apprentice will need a mentor; this individual should not be their line manager or tutor at college and should be skilled at creating a safe environment where things can be openly discussed and learning is facilitated.

Role and responsibilities
Apprentices will be undertaking a support worker role as they study and some may even be existing support workers wishing to progress their career and gain a qualification. This makes them more difficult to identify and can mean that they are not effectively supported to learn and develop in their role.

Young people who have no experience in the workplace could find a healthcare setting challenging at first, and may lack confidence and an understanding of risk to themselves and patients. They should be well supervised and mentored.

Organisations that have already developed an apprenticeship scheme agree that young apprentices, new to the workplace, require a different kind of mentorship to others as these young people can often find it difficult to articulate their views and concerns. This can lead to either challenging behaviour or not speaking up at all, but a good mentor should help ensure that apprentices are able to express themselves confidently and professionally.
Progression for apprentices

Apprentices should be given the best possible opportunity to gain permanent employment or to continue onto a pre-registration nursing degree if they wish or are able to do so.

• Employers should offer a guaranteed interview scheme for apprentices if appropriate vacancies arise, and offer support with applications. Many organisations are ring-fencing support roles as apprenticeship training opportunities, but apprenticeships should not be used as a cheap way to fill vacancies and replace existing staff.

• Applications for pre-registration nursing and midwifery programmes are of a very high standard and those taking an apprenticeship route can find themselves struggling to compete. We have found that employers can work with their partner university and their apprenticeship learning provider to give apprentices the best chance of being accepted, and to ensure that an apprentice can demonstrate that their experience and learning meet the criteria for entry onto a degree course.

Funding, employment practice and learning provision

Funding, employment practice and learning provision are probably areas that are the most confusing when trying to understand how to introduce high quality apprenticeships.

Government support for funding the recruitment and training of apprentices is available from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), however this is weighted towards young people:

• 16 to 18 year olds are eligible for full funding up to advanced level
• 19 to 23 year olds are eligible for 50 per cent funding
• For those aged 24 years and older, funding is limited.

See [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) for further information.

There are two main routes through which an apprentice can be employed, each of which is linked to a specific linked learning provision approach.

• **Employed by the health care provider** – the organisation employs the apprentice directly either permanently or on a fixed-term contract, using a further education college to provide the learning and assessment element of the programme (see diagram 1).

Diagram 1 – Apprentice employed direct by a health care provider:

- HEALTH CARE PROVIDER
- LEARNING PROVIDER
- APPRENTICE

• **Employed by an apprenticeship training agency (ATA)** – the ATA places the apprentice with a host health care provider who pays the ATA a fee for the apprentice’s services; this fee is based on the wage agreed and the ATA management fee. The ATA employs the apprentice, and the ATA and employer both link to a learning provider (see diagram 2).

Diagram 2 – Apprentice employed by an ATA:

- HEALTH CARE PROVIDER
- APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING AGENCY (ATA)
- LEARNING PROVIDER
- APPRENTICE
Sometimes the ATA will act as both employer and learning provider, and on occasions the health care provider undertakes all three roles; employer, ATA and learning provider.

Both employment practices have their advantages. While we would recommend that large employers always consider employing an apprentice directly, we understand that this is not always practical for small organisations that may not have the infrastructure to support this approach (such as a GP practice, social enterprise, small independent sector care home or hospice).

Where an organisation does not directly employ the apprentice, the primary area of concern relates to risk – for the apprentice and the organisation itself. If using an ATA, employers will need to be mindful of the issues that surround having someone who is not employed by you, but is carrying out duties for you, and is in direct contact with patients.

Employers should think through, and set out, the ways in which issues can be raised and dealt with and who is responsible in the event of an incident. Insurance and liability should be covered by the employer and this can become confused in the case of ATA placements.

In some sectors group training associations (GTAs) operate in a similar manner to ATAs by developing and delivering apprenticeship training for specific industries.

Pay

In October 2014, the Government announced the apprentice rate for those aged 16 to 18, and those aged 19 or over in their first year, would be £2.73 per hour; all other apprentices are entitled to the national minimum wage for their age. Just before publication, the Government announced plans to increase the apprentice rate from October 2015. We believe the present apprentice rate is well below living wage and that it should rarely be used as the bare minimum recompense for apprentices.

As with traineeships, we believe that apprenticeships should get paid commensurate to the role they are undertaking and most employers who have successfully introduced high quality apprenticeships agree that paying a good wage attracts good and highly committed candidates and helps with attrition/retention rates.

Many NHS employers use Agenda for Change ‘Annex U’, which sets out that those in training should receive 75 per cent of the normal pay rate given to qualified staff in role. Others have introduced an increasing apprentice wage scale to support apprentices as they progress and take on more skilled duties.

The role of the learning representative in supporting apprenticeships

Learning representatives have a vital role in ensuring the introduction of high quality apprenticeships. As employers embark on introducing nursing apprenticeships, you can offer information, advice and guidance to support their programme and help to ensure that young apprentices are treated fairly and given the best possible start in health care.

• Share the unionlearn Apprenticeship Charter as a good benchmark for a quality apprenticeship (see www.unionlearn.org.uk).
• Ensure your union colleagues are aware of the different employment practice and rates of pay, and that they negotiate fair terms and conditions and raise any concerns or risks at staff side/your negotiating forum.
• In the NHS, your local education training board (LETB) should be able to offer support (see www.hee.nhs.uk). In addition, Health Education North Central and East London (HENCEL) has developed a great toolkit for employers which covers all the different aspects that should be considered (see www.hee.nhs.uk).
• Engaging staff and raising awareness of apprenticeships is an incredibly important way to ensure that young apprentices are given the best support from their colleagues.
• Work in partnership to ensure apprentices have the support and mentorship they need. You may consider becoming a mentor, or help to identify potential mentors.
Cadets
Some organisations run cadet schemes as an entry into nursing, however in the main these have been replaced by apprenticeships. Similar to apprenticeships, cadet schemes provide an earn as you learn route to gaining a qualification such as an NVQ Level 2 or 3, with the aim of progressing on to a pre-registration nursing degree. Entry requirements, content and delivery of the course will be locally agreed and delivered with a partner further education college, much in the same way as an apprenticeship.

Nursing students
Nursing degree programmes comprise 50 per cent theory and 50 per cent practice, which is undertaken on practice placements. Placements need to provide an acceptable learning environment and are audited by the university to ensure these are suitable for nursing students. Students are meant to be supernumerary and should not be used to replace roles or bank staff. Ward managers should ensure that the ward is adequately staffed to allow learning for nursing students. The new NMC Code of Conduct has a clause stating that all nurses should facilitate student learning. For further information please visit www.nmc-uk.org

The RCN has a wealth of information and resources to help employers, staff and students deliver high quality work placements.

- Student information officers are a network of RCN students who work closely with the RCN to support and share information with their fellow students. For more information, view the RCN student community section of the RCN’s website at www.rcn.org.uk/sio
- The RCN toolkit Guidance for mentors of nursing students and midwives has been developed to support high quality placements and the effective mentoring of students. It is available for download at www.rcn.org.uk/publications

The role of the learning representative in supporting nursing students
Learning representatives can support nursing students to have a positive experience in the workplace that shapes their future career in nursing.

- Work with student information officers (or indeed help to recruit some) to support nursing students by giving high quality information, advice and guidance as they work and study.
- Mentoring nursing students is a duty all registered nurses are expected to undertake. Support your colleagues by signposting them to learning and resources that can support them to be an effective mentor.
- Work with your union colleagues to identify any concerns and issues with student placements, student mentorship and their support in the workplace.
The role of the learning representative in supporting young people in the workplace: a summary

- Get to know all the different routes into health care and nursing and make sure you know what is happening, or planned in your organisation.
- Work in partnership with your employer and your union colleagues to create high quality opportunities that provide fair pay, terms and conditions and good learning, both on and off the job.
- Work with your employer to engage with staff to enable them to identify and understand the different roles, what they can expect, and how they can support them.
- Champion good mentorship for all young people newly entering the workplace and consider becoming a mentor yourself.

Resources for trainees, apprentices and cadets

The RCN has a number of resources that have been specifically developed for those starting out on a career in health care.

**First steps for health care assistants** is an online learning resource developed by the RCN to supplement induction training and support health care support workers (HCSWs) to enhance their knowledge on a range of key topics. It uses a range of learning tools including animations, slide shows and audio clips along with comprehensive and clear text, and HCSWs can dip in and out of sections at their own pace. First steps can be accessed from PCs, mobiles and tablet devices, making it a versatile and accessible resource. It is freely available from the RCN website at [www.rcn.org.uk/firststeps](http://www.rcn.org.uk/firststeps).

**The principles of nursing practice** are used by the RCN to describe what the public can expect from nursing practice in any setting. Published in 2010, the Principles were developed by the RCN in partnership with the Department of Health (England), the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and patients and service user organisations, and are intended to be used by nursing teams for the purposes of quality improvement, continuing professional development, and for sharing with patients and carers. In terms of supporting apprentices, many organisations use the Principles as part of their apprentice induction programme or their ongoing apprentice development programme, taking a principle per learning session to discuss. See [www.rcn.org.uk/principles](http://www.rcn.org.uk/principles).

**The RCN’s Dignity in health care** resources can be used as a training resource for staff working in a health care environment and explore the principle of dignity in terms of place, people and process. See [www.rcn.org.uk/dignity](http://www.rcn.org.uk/dignity) for more information, where you will also find a useful online learning tool which can be accessed by members and non-members.
The health care assistant zone on the RCN website contain a considerable number of resources which are also relevant to students, apprentices and trainees, including a great 10-minute video you can access which explains the key principles around accountability and delegation. Visit www.rcn.org.uk/hcswn

The RCN’s Nursing Department harnesses specialist expertise in all aspects of nursing care and produces high quality resources, learning opportunities and guidance. Young people working in a particular area of care can find a wealth of resources relating to their practice at www.rcn.org.uk/practice

The RCN is committed to supporting our health care assistants, assistant practitioners and nursing students. There is an RCN Health Practitioners’ Committee and an RCN Students’ Committee who have elected representatives from each region and country. There are two health practitioner members and two student members on RCN Council.
As you strive to make a difference in your role as a learning rep, there’ll inevitably be times when you’ll feel tested. But we’ll be with you every step of the way, offering the support and development you need to overcome challenges and make a real and lasting impact in the workplace.

Wear the badge on the outside.
Feel the pride on the inside.

PROUD
to overcome challenges

www.rcn.org.uk