

Nursing associate employer case study

Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust

Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals (BSUH) NHS Trust is an acute teaching hospital working across two main sites. It provides district general hospital services to local populations in and around the Brighton and Hove, Mid Sussex and the western part of East Sussex and more specialised and tertiary services for patients across Sussex and the south east of England. The trust employs 7,000 staff and is the biggest employer across the region.

Started training nursing associates in:	February 2018
Number of registered nursing associates:	3 to qualify in Jan 2020
Number of trainee nursing associates:	35

Cheryl Giles, Practice Development Matron, explains how the trust has embraced the nursing associate role as part of their strategy to develop healthcare assistants and build a sustainable workforce.

January 2020

How did you hear about the role and why did you want to introduce it?

“ I joined the trust in October 2018 as the Practice Development Matron responsible for bands 2 to 4 development. By this time there were already two cohorts of trainee nursing associates (TNAs) on programme. The trust is part of the Sussex and Surrey Nursing Associate Consortium Steering Group, which joined the national TNA programme on wave 3.

My role involves developing career progression pathways for bands 2 and 3 and the education they need to support them. I promote the nursing associate role across the trust, look at what they can do in different areas and manage our rigorous recruitment process. I also manage a team that supports TNAs with their learning in clinical practice and advises newly qualified nursing associates on potential development and roles at the end of their apprenticeship.

Can you tell me about your vision to develop health care assistants (HCAs)?

It became evident that if we wanted to recruit TNAs twice a year from our existing staff, we would need a pipeline of people to apply for the role. So, we started to develop career pathways for healthcare assistants (HCAs), starting from band 2.

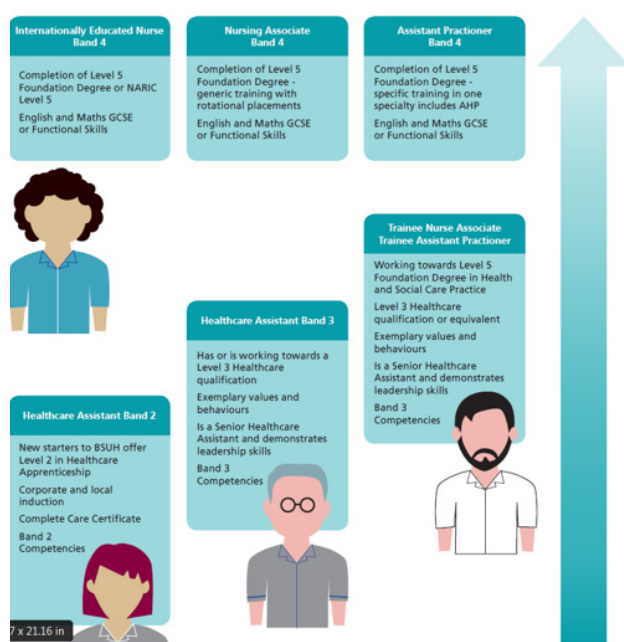
Previously, HCAs had had little access to academic development. The expansion of apprenticeships allowed us to offer more opportunities for HCAs to develop. Now we offer Level 2 and Level 3 Health and Social Care Apprenticeships (previously known as NVQs). To make the HCA progression pathway a success it was important that senior nurses, ward leaders, staff nurses and the HCAs themselves understood how HCAs could progress in the organisation.

How did you decide how many TNAs you needed and where they could be best deployed?

Our first three nursing associates will qualify at the end of January 2020. Thirty-five are currently in training and we expect that figure to grow considerably over the next few years.

We have introduced TNAs across the board, from medicine and surgery to ITU. The decision around how many trainee places we offered was based on our workforce plan, how many TNAs we could fund and the available HCAs looking to develop.

With the current registered nursing workforce crisis only expected to worsen, the trust looked at how we could change our nursing establishment on our wards. We took a business case to the board based on funding a band 3 salary plus backfill for each post. To date we have only recruited internally but we are now looking to recruit externally as well, to increase our numbers.



Career development pathway

What are the most important lessons you've learnt since running the TNA programme?

We are learning from our mistakes and refining our processes all the time. We've learnt a lot about promoting the role internally. It's been important to go out to each ward to understand how the trainee nursing associate role will work and what support and supervision they will need. This also gives ward leaders and educators the chance to ask questions. Without the face-to-face discussion I don't think the culture change would have happened at the current pace.



Recent BSUH TNA cohort on their first day

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'itchy feet' conversations: a one-to-one chat we offer to people if they want to leave. Often, they really want to develop, so we talk them through the career pathway and the opportunities open to them. This all feeds into our HCA retention strategy.

What benefits has the nursing associate role brought to your organisation?

We're starting to see this improve our HCA retention. Leaving rates are beginning to drop and people with whom we have the itchy feet conversations usually don't leave. We're currently growing our data set so we can evidence this more fully.

“ *We're starting to see this improve our HCA retention.* ”

Due to the work-based learning TNAs do, we expect to see them transition quickly into the registered role and hit the ground running. Through the placements they have the opportunity to see the patient's journey through different parts of the health and care service, which helps them understand how interdependent everyone's roles are. They get the full 'cradle to grave' experience.

We've also seen a shift in how HCAs are perceived. Previously, they were seen as a transient workforce. Now staff see that HCAs are here to stay, they value them and want to train and develop them. When they stay longer, they become better HCAs and we're not constantly chasing our tail with recruitment. So, this is a benefit for both the trust and the patient.

“ *Through the placements they have the opportunity to see the patient's journey through different parts of the health and care service.* ”

What advice would you give to similar organisations on introducing the role?

I would advise them to grab it with both hands and run with it. Without this we don't have a solution to our workforce crisis, which will only get worse in the coming years. This will not solve everything, but it will help.

“ *I would advise them to grab it with both hands and run with it.*

Often the TNAs are amazing practitioners who are passionate and interested in nursing but might not have had the opportunity to go to university. I love what I do because it gives HCAs who have the ability, interest and enthusiasm, the opportunity to become a nursing associate and potentially go on to become a registered nurse.