

Case study: the mammography associate apprentice journey

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Background:

The introduction of the apprenticeship levy by the government in 2017¹ presented the opportunity for a trailblazer group to develop an apprenticeship standard for mammography associates and offer employers funding for high quality, standardised training.

Apprenticeship standards, unlike apprenticeship frameworks, are not qualification driven. Instead they develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) required to do a particular job.²

Following approval of the Level 4 mammography associate apprenticeship standard and end point assessment (EPA) plan a number of mammography training centres and apprenticeship main providers are now delivering programmes across England.

This case study follows the journey of an apprentice on programme with the apprenticeship offered by Health Education England and Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust.

Summary of mammography associate apprentice timeline:



Engagement /Academic Days and Clinical Placements:

- The engagement day is attended by the apprentice and their mentor and the academic days are attended by the apprentice.



- The apprentice attends the training provider for four days one-to-one clinical training with a member of the dedicated mammography training team at the start of the programme. After completing 300 mammograms the apprentice returns to the training provider for a clinical assessment and further clinical one-to-one training



Ongoing:

- Throughout the duration of the programme the apprentices' mentor completes monthly reports, documenting the progress of the apprentice. The monthly report also provides the apprentice with the opportunity to comment on their progress and highlight any concerns
- Apprenticeship training providers are required to carry out regular progress reviews (every 8 weeks is good practice). These are used to record the apprentices' progress with the apprenticeship standard (including off and on-the-job learning) and set targets to work towards before the next review
- After completing each 100 mammograms (100, 200, 300, 400 and 500) a clinical assessment of the apprentices last 10 mammograms is completed by their mentor
- Regular revision sessions are scheduled to consolidate the apprentices' academic learning and prepare for the EPA. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic revision sessions have taken place over Zoom and the Big Blue Button (BBB) on Moodle (the online learning platform).

Gateway Requirements:

- Mammography associate apprentices must be on programme for 372 days (adjusted for part-time workers)
- To progress to the EPA the apprentice must achieve all of the gateway requirements:
 - Level 2 English and mathematics - for those with an education, health and care plan or a legacy statement, the apprenticeship's English and mathematics requirement is Entry Level 3. For those whose primary language is British Sign Language, a British Sign Language qualification is an alternative to English qualifications.
 - Completion of a minimum of 500 mammograms unassisted, meeting the NHS Breast Screening Programme standards.

End Point Assessment (EPA):

- The apprentice is assigned an independent end point assessor (IEA) by the end point assessment organisation (EPAO)
- Following successful completion of the MCQ exam the apprentice progresses to the clinical observation and discussion
- The IEA awards a mark for the clinical observation and discussion, reviewed by an independent quality assurance assessor (IQA), and a final grade is awarded
- If the apprentice achieves a distinction as their final grade the EPAO automatically award the Level 4 mammography associate apprenticeship certificate
- If the apprentice achieves a pass (or fail) as their final grade the EPAO does not award the apprenticeship certificate for 6 weeks, this allows time for an appeal to be made

Examination paper	Clinical practice observation and discussion	End-point assessment grade
Distinction	Distinction	Distinction
Pass	Distinction	Pass
Distinction	Pass	Pass
Pass	Pass	Pass
Distinction	Fail	Fail
Pass	Fail	Fail
Fail	Fail	Fail

Challenges:

- Apprenticeship 'main provider' status
 - Not all NHS Trusts are main providers of apprenticeships which has led to established NHSBSP mammography training centres delivering the apprenticeship programmes in partnership/under a main provider contract
- Employers understanding of apprenticeships:
 - How to access the apprenticeship levy
 - 20% off-the-job learning commitment
- Recruitment of IEAs
 - Due to the workforce crisis in breast imaging, departments are unable to release staff to carry out EPAs on behalf of the EPAO

Testimonials:

"I understand the importance of providing a supportive experience for women undergoing screening or symptomatic follow-up mammography. As an adult learner, for me the Mammography Associate apprenticeship programme was an ideal way to get qualified while being employed by my Trust. I was able to do my practical training at the Nightingale Centre before the pandemic restrictions. The team there were very supportive, friendly and professional, adapting rapidly and setting up learning sessions on Zoom so we could complete our qualification. Mammography is going to be my job for life and I'd highly recommend the apprenticeship and the opportunities that accreditation will bring."

Jodie Hampshire, Mammography Associate

"We're so thrilled that our apprentice has both completed her qualification and that she will be able to use her newfound knowledge and skills to help support the women that come to us through the screening programme. She is a valued member of our team and we are very proud of her achievements."

Jane Brooks, Radiographer and Line Manager of a Mammography Associate Apprentice

Conclusion:

- The mammography associate apprenticeship provides high quality, standardised training and funding via the apprenticeship levy
- Progress reviews enable the development of the apprentice to be continually monitored and offer the provider, employer and apprentice an opportunity to set targets, feedback and highlight any issues
- The independent EPA ensures that all apprentices are trained to achieve the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) required

References:

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- Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education (2021). What is a quality apprenticeship. Retrieved from <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship/>
- Pearson Apprenticeship End-point Assessment for Mammography Associate Level 4 (2019). Retrieved from <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/new-apprenticeships/healthcare/mammography-associate/end-point-assessment.html>