

Apprenticeship pay

NHS Staff Council joint statement

Background

The NHS Staff Council 2018 framework agreement contained a commitment to negotiate a new provision detailing pay for apprentices to be added to the NHS terms and conditions of service.

A sub-group of the NHS Staff Council was established to fulfil this commitment and has spent over a year in negotiations exploring approaches to pay for the range of apprenticeships, from entry level to post graduate.

Outcome

The sub-group found a number of areas of common ground including:

- a shared aspiration for high quality apprenticeships in the NHS
- a desire to expand the use of apprenticeships as a route into substantive careers in the NHS
- concerns about overall levels of funding and constraints, particularly about how this funding can be used within the current apprenticeship levy system.

Unfortunately, however, it has not been possible to reach agreement on a national framework of pay and conditions for apprentices to be included in the terms and conditions of service. This failure to agree is primarily due to employer concerns about the costs of employing apprentices at the minimum rates acceptable to trade unions, particularly when taking account of back-fill costs.

During the fact-finding phase of its work, the sub-group identified some areas of concern shared by both trade union and employer representatives in relation to current arrangements for apprenticeships offered by some NHS employers, particularly with regard to pay rates and job descriptions. In the absence of a specific provision, both sides agree that:

- Apprentice roles should have job descriptions and person specifications that accurately reflect the duties, responsibilities and skills required for the job they will undertake during the apprenticeship.
- Preserving the pay levels of internal applicants for apprenticeship roles, which supports career and skills development and ensures there are no barriers to participation for the existing workforce.

The sub-group noted that ad hoc development of apprenticeship pay arrangements could potentially create equal pay risks if differences in pay levels cannot be validated through robust job evaluation or other objective justification.

Next steps

NHS Staff Council representatives from both sides will now use engagement with the NHS People Plan to make the case for the levy to be reformed and for funding levels within the NHS to support most effective use of apprenticeships. Substantial progress in this area could facilitate a resumption of the conversation about an apprentice pay provision for the NHS terms and conditions of service.

The NHS Staff Council will also provide a full account of the sub-group negotiations for the Pay Review Body to consider.

Both sides recognise the need to support local partnership negotiations on apprentice pay arrangements and have agreed to re-circulate the existing NHS Staff Council apprenticeships guidance which covers how to use annex 21 of the terms and conditions handbook for apprenticeships.

Local parties are also reminded of the joint referral process for advice from the joint NHS Staff Council secretaries where they are unable to agree interpretation of the handbook.