Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
The right mentoring support for young apprentices

The organisation

Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (LTHT) is one of the largest acute trusts in the country. Spread across seven sites, the trust treats approximately 1.5 million patients per year and employs more than 15,000 staff.

This case study focuses on the trust’s business administration apprenticeship programme. 60.3 per cent of people on the course are aged 16-24.

Background

In May 2015, LTHT started a business administration apprenticeship programme in partnership with learndirect. This programme was evaluated after three months, and apprentices and managers identified two areas in which mentoring support was needed:

- Peer mentors - young people needed more support than other staff groups and could benefit from a peer mentor.
- Learning mentors – there was a need for a learning mentor to offer pastoral support for new apprentices, and to help managers and young people through the apprenticeship programme.

“...has helped me every single day, she’s really supportive, and I wouldn’t be where I am now without her.”

Helen Gibson, 20, business administration assistant
Steps to success

On successful completion of LTHT’s business administration apprenticeship, young people are offered an Agenda for Change band 2 position within the trust. To ensure that both the apprentice and their manager feel they are ready to progress to this position, it is important that the young person is supported and mentored throughout their apprenticeship. At LTHT any concerns or learning needs are addressed as and when they arise, rather than waiting until the end of the apprenticeship.

Initially apprentices were only offered support by their line manager, who was usually in a role which was band 6 or above. The team at LTHT found that because this person had different duties and responsibilities to the young person, they were often not available to work alongside them. At evaluation apprentices suggested they would benefit more from being mentored by a colleague in a band 2 role, who was doing the same job. The apprentice would be able to shadow and observe their mentor in their work environment, as well as to be observed performing daily tasks such as filing electronic records.

In addition to supporting young people in their roles, identifying band 2 mentors enabled the trust to:

- engage with this staff group
- develop their coaching and management skills, and
- enable band 2 staff to take advantage of career development opportunities.

The apprentices also have access to a learning mentor, which is a more senior position within the trust. The learning mentor offers intensive support at induction and pastoral support for both the apprentice and their manager, throughout the apprenticeship. The apprentice is reviewed by the learning mentor every 12 weeks at a minimum, and more regularly if appropriate. They regularly communicate with the line manager and acts as their point of contact for any concerns about the apprentice. If a manager or
apprentice asks to see the learning mentor, this is always done within 48 hours of contact being made, to ensure that any problems or concerns are addressed promptly.

Barriers

For the apprenticeship programme to be a success, LTHT has found that both the young person and their manager must feel supported.

Before the learning mentor role was implemented, managers were unsure about who to contact if they had any concerns about the apprentice’s development or how to support them. The apprentice had a similar experience. The learning mentor is able to bridge this gap and actively communicates with both the apprentice and their manager.

The learning mentor role is an integral part of the apprenticeship programme. Learning mentors can ensure that any issues or concerns are raised appropriately and promptly. Alongside their manager, they can support the apprentice to ensure that they continue to learn within their role.

Outcomes

LTHT reports that managers are now approaching the learning mentor to ask to have an apprentice in their department, as they are seeing the benefits that apprentices bring to their teams.

The organisational learning team, which is responsible for coordinating the apprenticeship programmes, now has an extra opportunity to engage with existing band 2 staff and offer development opportunities.

Any problems or concerns about supporting the young person are no longer left until the end of the apprenticeship to address, which
means that both apprentices and their managers feel better supported.

33 apprentices are due to complete their training in 2016, all of which will then be allocated band 2 positions within the trust. Another 18 apprentices have been recruited and will be starting their training with the trust in early 2016.

Top tips

- Consider having two levels of mentors to address the different needs of your apprentices
- Learning mentors should communicate regularly with young people and theirs managers about how they are developing and offer support to both parties
- A band 2 peer mentor can work alongside the apprentice to support them
- Review how the apprentice is getting on at least every 12 weeks
Contact us

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