

# Apprenticeships in health



The  
experience  
of UNISON  
members

# Apprenticeships in Health

## Introduction

UNISON is proud of its apprentice members who work across a number of sectors making valuable contributions to workplaces daily. This short guide explores the experiences of apprentices working in Health, highlighting the diverse nature of roles available in the sector.

UNISON's [apprenticeship charter](#) details the rights all apprentices should have, along with the responsibilities of employers. These include providing a safe and healthy working environment and a job offer upon completion.

UNISON is working hard to push for a consistent approach on pay for apprentices, and will continue to emphasise the importance of well funded apprenticeships including for those within the health sector.

Apprenticeships should be available not only to new recruits, but existing members of staff too. Opportunities for career development and progression through the use of apprenticeships should be encouraged, as there are benefits not only to staff but organisations too.

UNISON branches should use this guide as a useful tool in having open discussions with existing staff about the apprenticeship route. In addition, it is hoped the experiences shared in this guide can be used to encourage development opportunities. Branches may wish to engage Union learning reps as part of this work.

For more information on UNISON's work on apprentices and useful resources, please visit [unison.org.uk/apprenticeships](https://unison.org.uk/apprenticeships)



## **John Kasensa, Nursing degree apprentice**

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust

### **How long have you been working at your Trust?**

For five years now. I was a Clinical Support Worker for four years, and then I did the Assistant Practitioner qualification, and have been working in that role now for a year. I've been a nursing degree apprentice since February 2018

### **Are you enjoying your apprenticeship? Did you have any concerns?**

I am enjoying it. Our tutors are very supportive and always there for us if we need to speak to them, which is very helpful. When this opportunity came up, I thought, wow, that's an amazing career. I really enjoy working with and helping other people, and I think I feel that way because I always reflect on my own story.

### **What would you say to anyone considering doing an apprenticeship?**

I always tell my colleagues go for it. There are people in the Trust who have worked here for many years and may feel that it's too late to do something new. I tell people they will never get another opportunity like this one, so that's why I'm encouraging everyone to take the opportunity.

### **Why did you decide to join UNISON?**

My friend told me that UNISON would support me if I had any problems. After I became a member, I then learned more about the political side. I became the Branch International Officer and Health and Safety rep, so I have had training through UNISON and have attended meetings, conferences, international seminars and even a trip to Cuba.

## **Liam Emanuel, Ward Service Officer apprentice, 19**

Sandwell and West Birmingham hospitals NHS Trust

### **How long have you been working at your Trust?**

I've been doing my apprenticeship for almost five months now.

### **What made you consider an apprenticeship?**

I did not want to go to university at all because I was put off by the cost. I thought an apprenticeship would be better for me in terms of my learning style and let me develop interpersonal skills. During an IT course I was doing in college, I applied for this apprenticeship.

### **What does your role involve?**

Hospital ward service officers clean and sometimes serve meals, depending on where they are based. I'm based in a diabetes and physiotherapy department at the moment and clean the offices and treatment rooms. I'm not trained to clean medical equipment so don't do that.

### **Are you enjoying your apprenticeship?**

I'm enjoying it and thinking about what I want to do afterwards. I'm using it to build my interpersonal skills and I'm hoping to be a student paramedic once the applications open. It's good to gain experience in a workplace, and different to college and university. I've found that experience is just as important and valuable, as having a qualification.

### **Why did you decide to join UNISON?**

A lot of my colleagues mentioned it because they're part of the union as well, and I felt that if there ever was a problem at work I knew that I'd have someone to go to for advice.



## **Sarah Gregory, Nursing degree apprentice, 30**

Southern Health NHS Foundation trust

### **How long have you been working at your Trust?**

I've been in the trust for 10 years, and started my apprenticeship in October 2018. I've done my NVQ2, NVQ3 and my foundation degree on the job previously. It's all been funded by my work and they are really good. I've always wanted to be a nurse, it's why I joined the NHS but because I'm not academic, I couldn't have gone straight to university. I had to learn on the job and I've learnt so much.

### **Are you enjoying your apprenticeship?**

Yes, I'm doing it with the Open University. I get one study day a week and it's hard because I have to be really motivated, but I love it. It's three years for me because I was able to have my foundation degree considered, so I skipped the first year of the apprenticeship.

### **Would you recommend the apprenticeship route to others?**

I'd say go for it. It's really good and you get to experience lots. It's eye opening and my management have encouraged me. I have a different uniform for my student days and another for my associate practitioner role. You can explain to patients and at first it can be a little confusing, but they understand.

### **Why did you decide to join UNISON?**

I joined UNISON when I joined the trust because my mum told me to. Working in healthcare, I think it's good to have that protection and someone to have your back.

## **Christopher Jack Mills, Health and Social Care Support Worker Apprentice, 21**

University Hospitals Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust

### **How long have you been an apprentice, and were you an existing member of staff?**

I was recruited as an apprentice for this new apprenticeship, and I started in September 2018. I had just moved into the area, and stumbled across it. I wanted a career, and thought the NHS would be one of the best for me, because I've always wanted to help people in a public role.

### **Did you have any concerns about doing an apprenticeship?**

My only worry was whether I would actually be able to do the job. I'm completely new to the field, but I am really enjoying it. I do like my job and after this, I want to do my apprenticeship nurse training that the university near me runs.

### **Would you recommend the apprenticeship route to others?**

Yes, I think it's really good to do an apprenticeship because you get so much experience. Especially with my apprenticeship, I get to move around every 6-8 weeks a bit like placements. I've worked at the hospital on two different wards, and also out of hours. I've also spent a week doing home visiting so I've had many different experiences.

### **Why did you decide to join UNISON?**

When I first started, one of the sisters on the ward asked me if I'd joined the union, and I didn't know there was one. She told me all about UNISON and so I went home and signed up. I thought if something does go wrong, I'd like to have some protection.



## **William Hardy, Regional business management apprentice**

Health Education England

### **Why did you apply for your apprenticeship?**

I started as an apprentice a month ago and applied for it because I really liked the look of it from the onset. It had the business role I was looking for and the process to apply for the role was simple too.

### **What does your involve?**

It's very varied in what I do. Business management apprentices can place orders, arrange travel including booking hotels and also other administrative and management aspects. We regularly apply for stationary and other unique things people may need ordered.

### **Are you enjoying your apprenticeship?**

I'm really enjoying it. I never went to university and always wanted to do an apprenticeship but I didn't feel university suited me and that I would do as well there with my learning style and how I approach things.

Anyone who doesn't feel university is right for them, or is unsure, I would recommend they look into apprenticeships. Quite a few people see an apprentice as for trades, but there are a lot more available, with how I've been able to get into business. I feel supported and the team is really lovely, with everyone being very helpful.

### **Why did you decide to join UNISON?**

I knew about UNISON in advance and I also have some family members who are already members.

## **Simone Tett, Commissioning assistant apprentice, 43**

Nottingham University Hospitals NHS trust

### **How long have you been doing your apprenticeship?**

I Started in December 2017, and I have an 18 month contract expiring in June. After my apprenticeship, I'm hoping to go into higher education. I'm now doing a level 3 apprenticeship, but prior to this, I did a level 2 apprenticeship with a different organisation. I've been studying and I don't want that to go to waste. I'd like to continue developing and see my potential.

### **Are you enjoying your role?**

I work with an amazing team who are very supportive. The apprenticeship itself is an AAT accounting qualification and I have had a number of exams that have been high pressured. I'm learning the technical element with it as well and so I do enjoy going out and meeting lots of other apprentices.

### **Did you have any concerns when starting your apprenticeship?**

I'm a single parent mum and for me pay was always a concern and whether I'd be in hardship as it's down to the discretion of the employer. There are other positive things, like my learning providers and my current coach is really good. It's nice having the element where you're progressing and learning and someone is correcting your work and helping you improve. I think without this apprenticeship I wouldn't have gotten into the NHS within that team or role. It was a foot in the door for me.

### **Why did you decide to join UNISON?**

I joined as I believe UNISON is there to support and to promote employees. I know they work in the interests of members. Things can only change when there's someone to help direct and voice members' views.



