

Workforce and Education Reform Programme



Apprenticeships

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Title of Project:	Workforce and Education Reform Programme Short title: Apprenticeships
Date:	01/05/22 - 30/04/23
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<p>Executive summary</p> <p>Through Health Education England (HEE) funding, the Royal College of Podiatry (RCPod) commissioned a one day a week external consultant to deliver: podiatry apprenticeships as part of the workforce reform project.</p> <p>Building on the work started by the RCPod Apprenticeship Group, the project considered what support is needed to embed apprenticeships as a route into the profession. It also considers how to make it an enabler to develop and retain the existing workforce alongside a career framework.</p> <p>Apprenticeships are defined by the UK government¹ as paid jobs where the employee learns and gains valuable experiences. Apprentices have the same rights as other employees and are entitled to be paid at least the apprentice rate of the national minimum wage. A successful apprentice may receive a nationally recognised qualification on the completion of an end point assessment.</p> <p>In podiatry, there are five main levels of apprenticeship that are either emerging or established in England supporting the full career:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support workforce – Healthcare support worker (Level 3) Apprenticeship* • Support workforce – Assistant Practitioner (Level 5) Apprenticeship* • Registration level – Podiatrist (Level 6/7) BSc (Hons)/MSc Pre-registration Apprenticeship • Enhanced Practice – Podiatry (level 6) Apprenticeship modules* • Advanced Clinical Practice (ACP) (Level 7) Apprenticeship <p>*In development</p>	

Engagement with the podiatry profession through webinars, conference sessions and interviews indicate that members are ready to utilise apprenticeships: ‘everyone is ready but [we] don’t know anything about them’. There is a perception that apprenticeships are a lot of work to implement, and so careful consideration and collaboration was needed to build the meaningful and appropriate resources members require.

The report highlights the progress made with apprenticeships and makes recommendations for ongoing work to continue sustainable growth and to address some of the workforce challenges the profession faces.

Introduction and rationale for the study

In recent years, podiatry has faced significant recruitment and retention challenges. Notably, recent data has confirmed a decline in NHS joiner rates for podiatry with no corresponding decline in leaver rates enough to counteract the declining joiner rates.²

As of 1 March 2023, there were only 11,977 podiatrists on the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) register. In April 2019, there were 12,833 registered with the HCPC indicating a loss of 856 podiatrists from the registered workforce in four years.³

However, the NHS national podiatry workforce is 2,849.7 WTE (September 2022), with a head count of 3,392, the average WTE is 0.84 and 60% of podiatrists now work within the private sector.⁴

The NHS People Plan⁵ is clear about shortages in the NHS podiatric workforce where an increased supply is seen as needed. In addition, the NHS Long Term Plan⁶ highlights many areas relevant for podiatry practice, including prevention, ageing well, diabetes and respiratory conditions.

In 2021, the publication of The Saks Report⁷ made recommendations to address some of the challenges facing podiatry. Apprenticeships have the potential to support the implementation of at least five of these recommendations:

- **Recommendations about the scope of practice of podiatry**

5. Podiatry's scope of practice needs to be revisited and extended beyond simply the foot and/or ankle to highlight its more holistic and positive role in service and other contexts.

- **Recommendations about the organisational and support structure of podiatry**
9. The podiatry career structure needs enhancing with more supported opportunities to develop in advanced practice/specialisms like podiatric surgery and further use of mentoring.
 10. There is a need to foster better links between podiatrists working in the NHS and the independent sector, particularly in dealing with moderate – high risk patients.
- **Recommendations about increasing the sustainable supply of podiatrists**
14. Priority attention should be given to the diminishing supply of podiatrists, especially in an increasingly ageing profession.
 17. More use needs to be made of flexible educational approaches like apprenticeships with appropriate monitoring and quality.

During early stakeholder engagement, all private practitioners, individually and as part of stakeholder group discussion, expressed concern with meeting the rising demand due to recruitment challenges within the private sector.

In addition, the NHS workforce is currently experiencing a workforce shortage. In England, podiatrists have one of the highest vacancy rates among AHPs at 13%.⁸ The decline in podiatrists taking up roles in the NHS setting is further impacted by a rising and ageing population that is presenting with increasing acuity and living longer with long term conditions.

The recruitment challenges are not unique to England and whilst podiatry apprenticeships are not currently available in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, members have been consulted during the project to seek views on how apprenticeships can support the challenges they are facing.

The project aims were set in order to support the implementation of apprenticeships across all academic levels and sectors, increasing knowledge and uptake of apprenticeships and ensuring the process is a positive experience for employers and apprentices.

- Lead the development of guidance for the profession to aid engagement and the uptake in apprenticeships in podiatry at all academic levels with a focus on advancing practice
- Ensure that the RCPod has a suite of links to relevant information and guidance that already exists across the sector and shares it with members
- Lead the development of case studies and relevant information to aid members in independent practice about offering apprenticeships
- Prepare a 360-degree report on the state of apprenticeships in podiatry highlighting the opportunities for further development and potential risks.

Methodology

Starting on 1 May 2022, an initial project environment analysis was completed and a work plan broken down in to project quarters was drawn up.

Quarter 1: May - July 2022

Focused on understanding and identifying the problem through researching national workstreams and recommendations identified through HEE and the RCPod. This involved understanding the initial uptake in apprenticeships and what this looked like across the regions and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

Mapping existing streams that link to apprenticeships to avoid the duplication of work and dovetail projects. This also enabled the building of a stakeholder map to ensure all interested parties were included in the project.

Interviews with current apprentices and education providers allowed for the early identification of risks to project success and the future uptake of apprenticeships.

There was intention to reinstate the RCPod Apprenticeship Group. Unfortunately, due to commitments from members, and their involvement in other workstreams, this was not possible. However, the recommendations from the working group were considered in the project and all members of the group were involved in stakeholder engagement at some point.

Quarter 2: August - October 2022

Focused on refining the stakeholder groups and project priorities through targeted engagement with the independent sector, colleagues working in podiatric surgery, and apprenticeship opportunities for support workers.

Approved through the RCPod's Independent Practice Group, a collaborative Integrated Care Board (ICB) Apprenticeship Model was developed and market tested with North East London ICB and North East London AHP Apprenticeship Steering Group. The aim of the model was to support system level implementation of apprenticeships supporting smaller, independent employers with:

- Shared working with local employers – NHS Trusts to access levy, share training, placements, recruitment and resources
- Support procurement and build relationships with the local HEI
- Podiatry apprenticeship job description – reflecting growing competencies as apprenticeship progresses
- System wide work to develop a business case for AHP apprenticeships across providers
- System wide work to agree on the pay and conditions.

Quarter 3: November – January 2023 and Quarter 4: February – April 2023

The second half of the project considered the resources needed to facilitate members with apprenticeship implementation. Through collaboration with the RCPod employment relations team and with legal support, employment contracts were developed to support members in private practice.

Further member engagement took place through two webinars aimed at updating members and stakeholders on the project findings to date, gain feedback on the suggestions and recommendations and to provide an overview of apprenticeships. The feedback has been considered in the report recommendations and it influences content in the RCPod apprenticeship webpage.

Case studies and interviews were collected to showcase a variety of apprenticeships in different sectors to address some of the queries and myths around apprenticeships and showcase good practice.

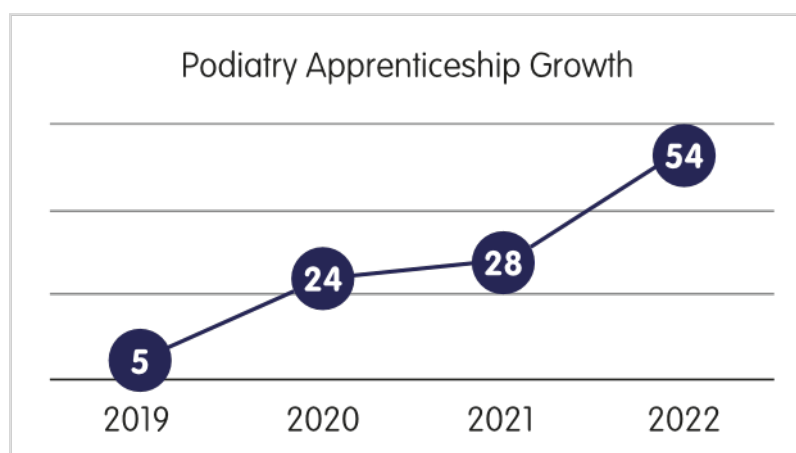
Results

The project priorities were to ensure that the podiatry workforce and the RCPod members had access to a suite of meaningful resources to support the uptake of apprenticeships.

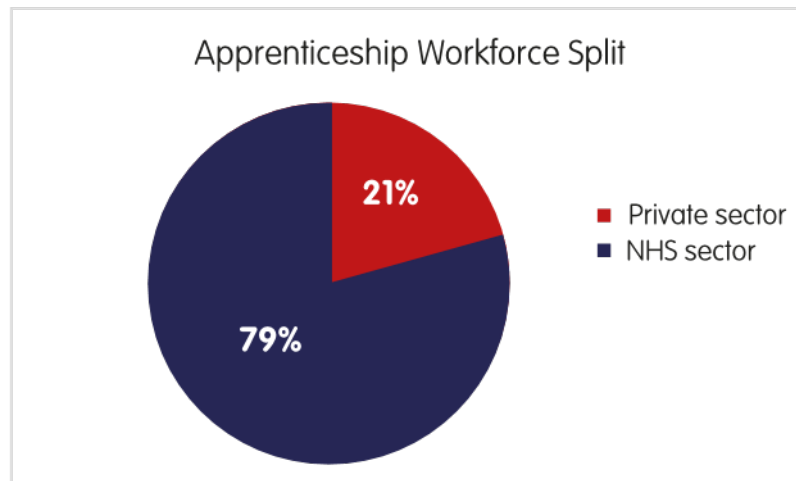
By understanding apprenticeship barriers, providing solutions and improving the experience for both employers and apprentices, it is hoped that there will be a continued rise in apprentices across both the independent and NHS workforce.

Wide stakeholder engagement enabled the project to understand the current landscape and despite limited knowledge and understanding about how to get started, there was genuine interest from independent and NHS employers.

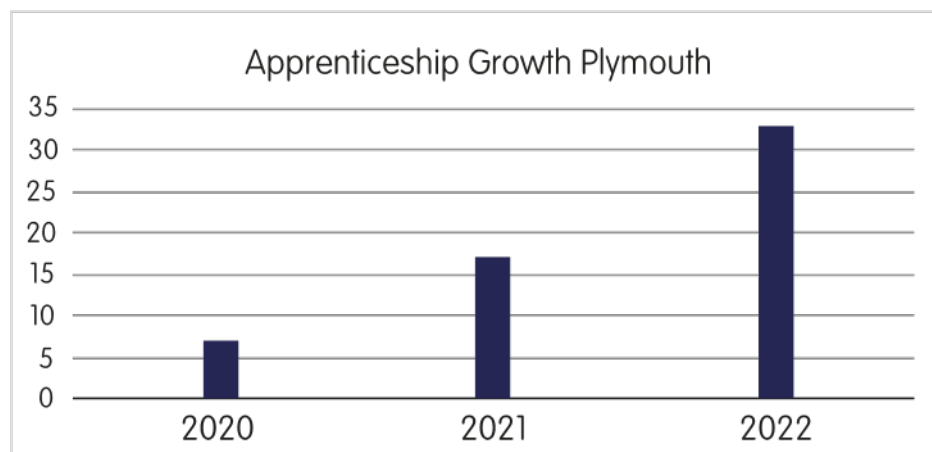
Despite some of the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, level 6 podiatry degree apprenticeships have grown significantly since the first cohort in 2019.



However, the majority still remain within NHS settings with only 21% of apprentices working in private practice.

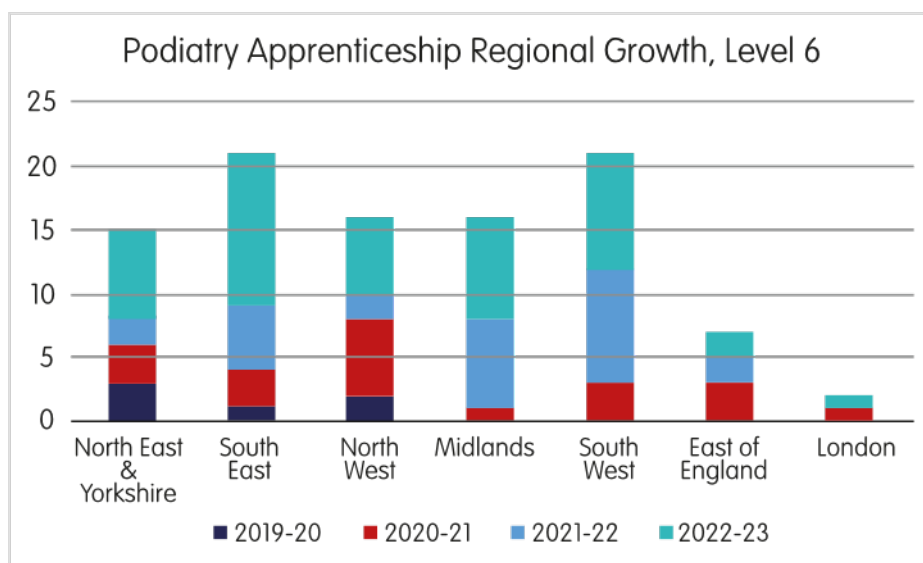


As the HEE national provider, Plymouth has seen rapid growth since its first cohort in 2020. Feedback from employers and apprentices is very positive and the fully remote learning works for employers nationally and does not have limitations on cohort size.



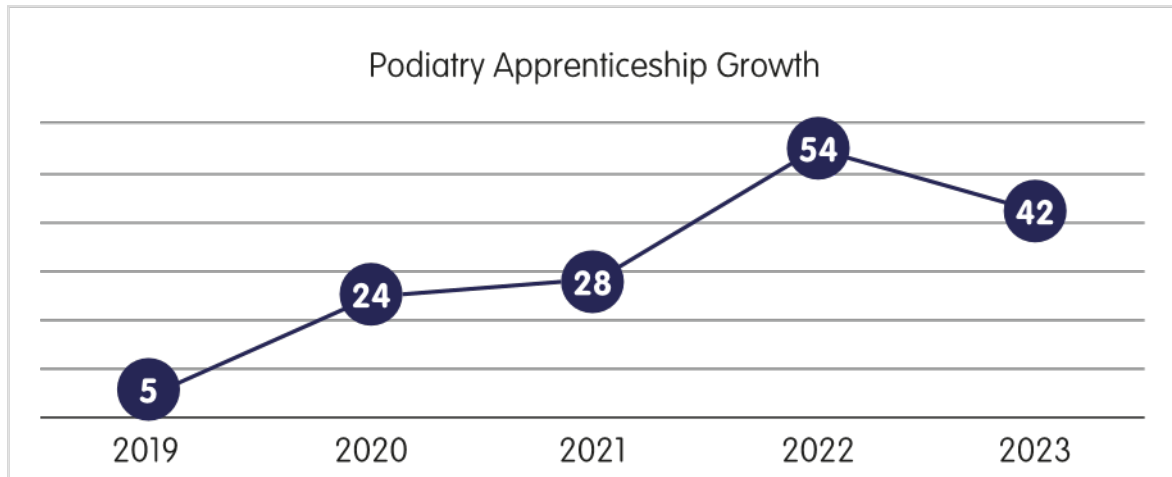
In addition, Plymouth has a supportive team in place that can work with employers in independent practice to help with government funding for course fees. As a result, Plymouth has the largest cohort of private practice apprentices with 82% of current apprentices.

Regionally, the apprenticeship picture varies and data is published by HEE's Talent for Care team. This data is often behind academic start dates and at the time of reporting the cohort distribution across England is demonstrated in the following graph. London followed by the East of England have the lowest uptake.



East of England Podiatry Managers report that there is a willingness to recruit apprentices. However regional challenges, such as no local provider and a large rural demographic, have contributed to lower than anticipated uptake. Equally, London employers have prioritised recruitment to higher banded posts due to the complexity of workloads. However, more London-based employers are now considering apprenticeships as the workforce challenges increase and the local HEI has reported a significant increase in expressions of interest in the September 2023 cohort.

As of March 2023, scoping the early indicative number for 2023 cohorts at the five providers show that there is still interest in the apprenticeship route with 42 expressions of interest to date. However, only one provider had registered interest from private practice employers.



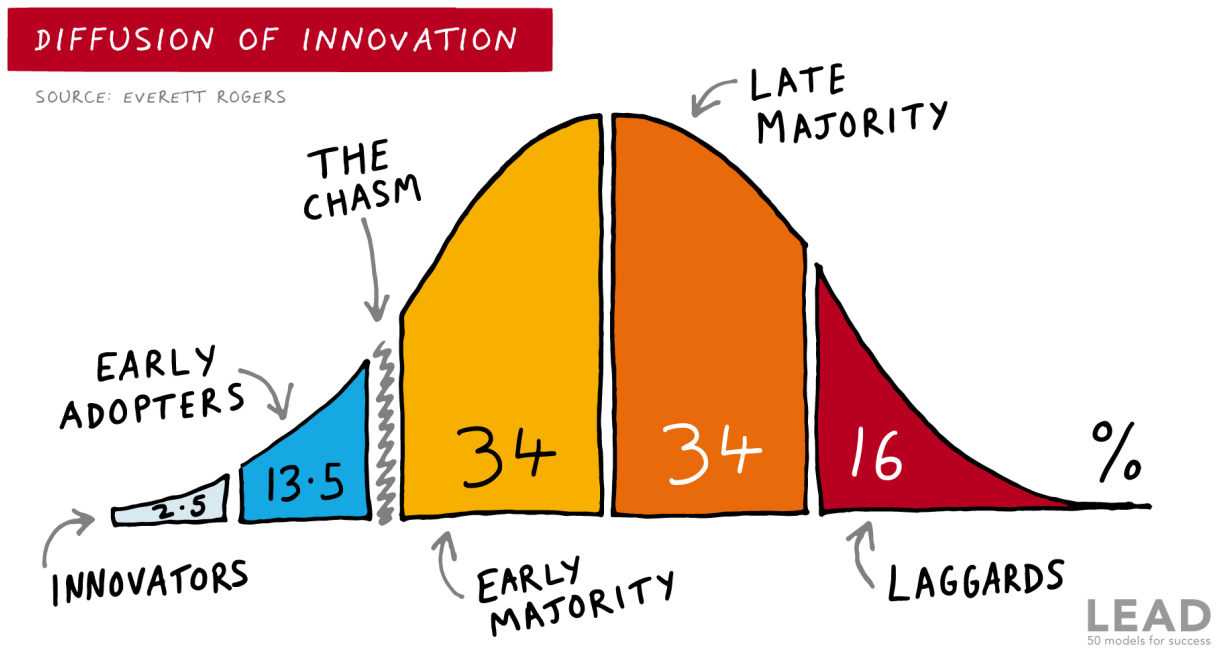
Using the Everett Rogers innovation model⁹ helped us to understand the diffusion of the innovation. Diffusion of innovation theory explains how a new idea, product, or service spreads throughout a population. The innovation is concentrated to a few early users and spreads across time as knowledge and use of the innovation builds. In this case, how to maintain the growth and adoption of apprenticeships.

When the innovative practice spreads beyond the narrow group of innovators and early adopters, a variety of components can facilitate its widespread adoption, including clinical practice guidelines, patient information, decision support, new incentives, and supportive policies. Majority adoption is the phase with the greatest potential impact on public health and health care industry performance.¹⁰

In order for apprenticeships to continue in the current growth trend, it is vital that employers are supported with the relevant guidance, documents and policies to convert interest into employment of level 6 podiatry apprentices.

Based on the initial uptake of apprenticeships, the trend suggests that we are moving from the innovators and early adopters. However, to continue growth, we have to overcome the chasm.

Moving in to an early majority could see the addition of 235 apprentices if we consider that 111 apprentices are made up of the innovators and early adopters.



The following table summarises the questions and feedback raised during stakeholder engagement.

Employer perspective on barriers to apprenticeship uptake and growth.

All sectors	Private practice	NHS
How to get started, lack of knowledge on the process and implementation. Myth busting – what is an apprenticeship?	Standalone practitioner – some HEI do not support apprenticeships within standalone practices and require two HCPC staff members.	Commissioning intentions, NHS podiatry being activity driven rather than outcome - focused.
How to recruit, where to recruit, how does this work with the HEI, where can apprentices train?	Income – concerns over loss of income and what to charge.	Manager/team burnout makes workforce planning a low priority.
What types of employment contracts are needed? What are the rules, guidance and governance around apprenticeship employment?	Clinical space, equipment needed – additional clinic room, IT equipment.	High vacancy levels in clinical teams' impact on the service capacity to support apprentices in the workplace.
Salary information – how is the apprenticeship funded? What does the levy cover? How much should an apprentice be paid?	How to support the apprentice in the workplace – skills gap for supervising, mentoring and providing educational mentorship support.	
Job descriptions and job plans - what can the apprentice do?		
Workforce development, how to skill-mix existing vacancies or develop a business case for apprenticeships.		

Advancing apprenticeships – level 7

The Master of Podiatric Surgery Advanced Clinical Practitioner programme (MSc) at Huddersfield has been available as an apprenticeship route since September 2020.

The programme currently has four apprentices on the programme; one in the final year and three in their first year.

Current interest as of March 2023 for the September 2023 cohort is six apprenticeships.

- Two apprentices in training posts and awaiting applications from the apprentice
- Two trusts out to advert
- Two trusts who are currently engaged with Huddersfield expressing interest.

Feedback from surgical colleagues currently advertising funded surgical trainee posts indicate they are funding the MSc element but not through the apprenticeship levy. Surgical teams are looking at internal training budgets or service budget underspend to fund the MSc. Other trainees have self-funded the MSc as part of their ongoing development or asked their existing employer to fund the apprenticeship as a standalone advanced clinical practice apprenticeship as a first contact practitioner whilst splitting their surgical training across two part-time training posts.

The apprenticeship option is not fully utilised due to a variety of reasons and the Faculty of Podiatric Surgery asked for a step-by-step guide to implementing apprenticeships to address these questions:

- Who can access the levy
- What the levy funds
- How to access the levy in their organisations
- How to tackle the lack of awareness of the apprenticeship within their organisation.

Project Recommendations and Future Considerations

ICB collaboration with the podiatry workforce – employing apprentices in private practice collaborating with NHS Providers to share workforce and skill mix

Collaboration at ICB level has the potential to grow the workforce across the foot health profession at all levels and support the patient being seen by the right team with the right level of expertise at the right time.

A culture change is needed to support the following recommendations from the Saks report¹¹ :

- There is a need to foster better links between podiatrists working in the NHS and the independent sector, particularly in dealing with moderate - to high-risk patients.
- More use needs to be made of flexible educational approaches like apprenticeships with appropriate monitoring and quality control, alongside conventional opportunities.

Support for a single practitioner to take on apprentices

There is a risk that apprenticeship growth in the independent sector could be limited due to single practitioners being unable to take on apprentices. The current recommendation from Plymouth, a key provider in private practice, are for two HCPC registered podiatrists to work in the practice to support the apprentice in the event of sickness.

Whilst this protects the apprentice learning, it does not support smaller practices and practices of this size need to collaborate.

Employer support from education providers

The development of a dedicated webpage and resources will provide a level of practical support and guidance for those already interested in apprenticeships and ready to start implementing apprenticeships in their area. Alongside the webpage it is recommended that the RCPod works alongside education providers to become more proactive with employer engagement through the promotion of apprenticeships at all levels. Maintaining a presence at conferences with workforce development and apprenticeships on the agenda could facilitate this.

Consideration of an apprenticeship ambassador to maintain growth and momentum, providing the ongoing leadership needed to continue to grow the workforce through this route.

Apprentice support

Feedback from employers and apprentices highlighted that mixed cohorts of apprentices and undergraduates may not always be suitable for apprentices due to on-the-job commitments and last-minute changes in programming. The RCPod should work closely with HEI and consider cohort membership when validating course delivery.

A piece of work needs to be considered to follow up on apprentices now qualified to understand what knowledge, skills and behaviours they found useful and any additional training that may be needed as they transition in to the workplace. Members asked how the apprenticeship programme compared with the traditional undergraduate route. A review has the potential to answer these questions and support future growth.

Career Framework

As apprenticeships are now available from academic level 3 up to academic level 7 with advanced clinical practice and podiatric surgery, there is an opportunity to introduce the apprentice module as an enabler to career development within the career framework. At this point, further case studies,

examples and pathways can be added to the webpage resources and opportunities can be promoted.

Regional support

As HEE merges with NHS England, it is recommended that the new organisation and the RCPod continue to engage with regional podiatry forums and support their set up where not already in place. The most rapidly growing apprenticeship workforce seen is where workforce workstreams have been set up.

In March 2022, the East of England region held their first workforce listening event. Apprenticeships featured highly as a workforce priority. A meeting took place between the London region HEE lead and the Apprenticeship Relationship Manager for London to plan an event.

Understanding the workforce challenges regionally and nationally, the RCPod should support regional podiatry networks. There should be a focus on collaboration to support profession growth, with the service user in the middle.

Devolved nations

It is recommended that the RCPod continues to support and participate in conversations and encourage developments within devolved administrations related to apprenticeship developments across the UK.

During the project, feedback has been received from employers and potential apprentices across all sectors in all the devolved nations who are keen to develop apprenticeships to support workforce growth and development.

In March 2022, the AHP Federation of Northern Ireland (AHPFNI) presented their AHP Manifesto¹² to the Health Secretary, Robin Swann, at a launch event in Stormont. The manifesto called on

political representatives to support the introduction of apprenticeships and preregistration Masters Programmes for AHPs in Northern Ireland.

In February 2023, the Scottish Government published the Allied Health Professions Education and Workforce Policy Review Recommendations¹³. The review considered the actions necessary to deliver a national education and workforce plan for AHPs, giving full consideration of all aspects of workforce measurement, planning and education needs for the future.

The following education solution was recommended to start as soon as practicably possible:

Collaboratively develop sustainable (step on/step off) "earn and learn" routes for the AHP professions in Scotland, aligned to the NHS Career Framework which increases the number of AHPs, improves access and increases diversity of the health and social care workforce in Scotland.

Health Education and Improvement Wales¹⁴ has recently carried out a four-week consultation – 23.01.2023 to 20.02.2023, on a review of the Therapy Support Workers Apprenticeship Pathway. The proposal in this reviewed pathway is to include a number of Level 3 qualifications together with the Level 4 Therapy Assistant Practitioner qualification, which is already available as an apprenticeship. Included in the review is the Level 3 Diploma in Podiatry Support for Podiatry Assistants.



Contributors

Education Providers:

- University of Plymouth
- University of Huddersfield
- University of East London
- University of Brighton
- University of Salford.

Talent for Care Team Relationship Managers across all regions.

NHS Podiatry Employers Regional Networks across East of England, London and South East.

HEE South East Podiatry Programme Delivery Group.

HEE Regional AHP Leads.

NEL AHP Apprenticeship Steering Group.

NEL Integrated Care Board, Apprenticeship & Job Brokerage Lead.

Capital AHP – One O'clock Club and Workforce Leads Forum.

The RCPod Independent Practice Group.

Private Practice Members:

- Zest AHP Ltd
- Podology
- Exeter Clinic
- The foot Hut
- Fit Feet Podiatry.

NHS Providers:

- East London Foundation Trust Podiatry Team
- Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust



- Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust
- Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
- Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

Royal College of Podiatry members.

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