



Some of the 18-month nursing degree apprentices undergoing their training in Northumbria University's Clinical Skills Centre.

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UK's first ever nursing degree apprentices graduate and join the frontline

The first students to graduate from the UK's first ever Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship scheme have joined the frontline at Newcastle Hospitals in the midst of the global pandemic.

Instead of the usual induction to nursing, the eight apprentices are now putting their skills to good use on the frontline of Newcastle's Freeman Hospital and the Royal Victoria Infirmary.

The government Registered Nurse Degree Apprenticeship scheme was announced in 2016, enabling people to train to become a graduate registered nurse through an apprenticeship route for the very first time.

The cohort was the first to join a Nursing and Midwifery Council-approved partnership between Northumbria University and the Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in September 2018 which saw them complete their course in just 18 months due to their previous clinical experience.

They have now joined different wards throughout Newcastle Hospitals, including Critical Care, Cardiothoracic and Endoscopy wards, with many of them being redeployed to help in the COVID-19 response.

Dr Debbie Porteous, Head of the Department of Nursing, Midwifery and Health at Northumbria University said there had been fantastic collaboration with the Trust throughout, saying: “The structure of this specialist nursing degree apprenticeship programme moved away from traditional separate blocks of theory and clinical practice to a more blended approach. All the students had exceptional levels of drive and motivation, with a thirst to learn and achieve as best as they could.

“In addition, their mentors in clinical practice told us that the students were able to hit the ground running due to their previous clinical experience, and that has resulted in them getting much more from their placements.

“We have been genuinely delighted by the success of this programme – the first 18-month degree apprenticeship to run in the UK – and we look forward to similar success in our ongoing partnership with other Trusts and cohorts.

“We wish the graduates every success as they move into their new careers. The circumstances right now may be challenging, but we know they are focused, caring and determined and will be a credit to the nursing profession.”

Wendy Parry, Critical Care Nurse at Newcastle Hospitals, was among those to qualify. She said: “I’ve always dreamt of being a Nurse and it’s been a long time coming for me, after stepping away from my Nurse Training six years ago to start a family,” she said.

“It’s quite nerve-racking to start at such an unprecedented time, but I am so proud to be able to do my bit in the fight against Coronavirus. The degree apprenticeship scheme is a great opportunity to use your background experience and skills to improve and develop your nursing career further.”

Mauyra Cushlow, Executive Chief Nurse at Newcastle Hospitals said: “Our nursing graduate apprentices will be directly involved in hands on clinical with patients from day one and they should be highly commended for entering the profession at this challenging time.

“They will be fully supported in their roles by our nursing teams and their peers and we are incredibly proud of them.

She added: “As well as empowering and supporting our talented Healthcare Assistants to develop and qualify as registered nurses, this 18-month apprenticeship gives us the perfect opportunity to grow our own workforce.”

“I wish every success to the apprentices and I’m sure they will make a huge impact in their roles during this challenging time.”

The University is undertaking a longitudinal research study that has followed the students throughout their course and is still ongoing as they begin their new careers.

Northumbria is currently working in partnership with other NHS Trusts to deliver further nursing degree apprenticeship schemes.

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