

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

12 December 2016

Update on Apprenticeships

Summary: To update the Board on the progress made in general and against the 2015-2016 Government public service apprenticeships quota.

Resource implications:

Salaries – For 2016/17, it is anticipated that the majority of apprenticeships will be substantive posts/staff and any increase in establishment required will be the subject of a business case.

Training – For 2016/17, the levy system is not yet in place and so the Agency has to fund related training direct. From April 2017, the Agency will be required to pay into the levy system (£250,000 per annum) and draw down funding for each apprenticeship.

Fixed term Apprenticeship Coordinator role.

Time out of work for each apprentice related to formal training and time spent by their line manager supervising/completing related reviews.

EU Referendum implications:

No – beyond the ongoing need to ensure a talented and capable workforce and to take account of and respond to any implications as they become known.

Timings:

Work is ongoing and the Civil Service 2.3% of headcount target is annual.

Action required by Board:

The Board are asked to note progress to date.

Links: Corporate Plan, Business Plan, People Strategy

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Which of the five themes in the Corporate Plan 2013/2018 does the paper support?

Theme 5: Achieving excellence – a well-run, efficient and effective organisation. People Strategy

If relevant, which Business Plan strategic activity does it support?

Organisational Excellence

CET Sponsor: Vanessa Birchall-Scott, Director of Human Resources

Update on Apprenticeships

Overview:

The Government apprenticeship initiative was re-launched at the end of 2015 with broadened scope in terms of criteria and targets implemented for Government Departments. The Agency had already appointed its first apprentice to the HR division in early 2015, which was intended to be a test case allowing us to explore the model and its wider fit in line with the Agency's skills requirements and identified short and longer term gaps. The introduction of the Government target at the beginning of 2016 then escalated this initiative in terms of scale and timing.

In response to the Governments' overall aim of delivering 3 million apprenticeships in the UK by 2020, the Agency, as with all other Government departments, has been set a challenging target of introducing a minimum of 2.3% of its 2015 headcount in apprenticeship roles by 31 March 2017 and for each year thereafter. The Agency target for this first year then is to employ 28 apprentices by the end of March 2017, either by implementing new roles or by converting existing roles/vacancies.

To support this initiative a Government apprenticeship levy of 0.5% of the annual pay bill will be introduced from April 2017 and will be organised via Pay As You Earn (PAYE). For the Agency this equates to approximately £250,000 per annum and for this the Agency can receive back up to £8,000 in financial support for each apprenticeship, depending on the training undertaken and age of the apprentice. However, depending on the level of qualification being undertaken, some roles will exceed this amount and the Agency will be required to fund this excess.

For 2016/17, payment for training has to be made direct to the training providers as the levy system is not yet in place.

This paper is an update on the activities that have taken place so far, as well as activities planned for the near future.

Work undertaken so far:

In response to this Government requirement and overall aim of delivering 3 million apprenticeships in the UK during this parliament, Sanjita Kalakheti was appointed as the Apprenticeship Coordinator in July 2016. This appointment is currently a fixed term appointment till March 2018 to enable us to deliver this year's challenging quota as well as identify skills shortage areas within the business that could be supported by the apprenticeship scheme in the following years.

In order to allow us to properly scope apprenticeship opportunities and training providers and be mindful of related costs, we have decided to fill the majority of the required 28 posts by converting existing posts into apprenticeships to meet the 2016/17 quota. As such we have advertised 2 schemes internally - a team leader apprenticeship and a management apprenticeship - both aimed at upskilling our existing workforce to be better prepared for their next role within the agency.

Both advertised schemes have been met with enthusiasm and we have received expressions of interest from over 45 applicants, of whom 27 will be selected further to assessment and discussion by the CET. Cohorts will begin in January and March, ensuring we meet our quota for 2015/16.

In addition to this our second apprentice has been appointed to Human Resources and will commence in the next couple of weeks (the first apprentice having successfully completed her training and now in a fixed term role within HR covering for a colleague on secondment).

Next steps:

We have already begun to identify areas within the business that could support apprenticeship programmes in 2016/17:

- IMD will be progressing the recruitment of two IT Systems and Networking apprentices on a fixed term contract. The business case for this has been approved and based upon projected savings in their consultancy staff budget. The recruitment will commence shortly.
- The Finance department have identified at least one vacancy at AO grade which could be converted into an apprenticeship.
- Operations have identified at least two roles for which they could potentially recruit an apprentice if/when they become vacant; Maintenance Operative and Maintenance Project Engineer. These apprentices will benefit from receiving training from experienced members of staff within the Operations team and be part of the teams' succession planning.
- The Biological Services division have also identified at least one Animal Technician role at AO grade which could be converted into an apprenticeship post.

In addition to this the work currently being undertaken on careers pathways will enable us to continue to identify and develop apprenticeship opportunities internally, as this helps us to identify gaps in career paths and related skills.

Future opportunities and challenges for the agency:

The Agency is keen to ensure we do not risk *ticking the box but missing the point*, as when utilised properly apprenticeships can offer significant advantages to employers, with recent statistics showing apprentices to generally be more loyal and committed employees. As noted previously this was always an initiative that we intended to develop further.

As such the apprenticeship programme offers us the opportunity to create a diverse and engaged workforce that is fit to meet our future business challenges. In order to gain the maximum benefit from the apprenticeship scheme we need to play an active role in influencing and designing future apprenticeship standards in the areas our business struggles to recruit and/or will need more skills in the future.

New standards can be created when 10 or more organisations form a "Trailblazer Employer Group". For example TOPRA are currently in the process of creating two new apprenticeship standards for the regulatory profession; Regulatory Scientist and Regulatory Technician and we are keen to be involved in the Trailblazer Employer Group for this standard.

Similarly, there is also scope for NIBSC to work together with one or more universities in their network to create masters level apprenticeship programmes and with the strong scientific, research and medical links we have there are further opportunities to explore in this area.

However for all the opportunities there are for us the basic fact and key challenge the Agency will face is potential reluctance to replace existing skilled roles with apprenticeship roles. Whilst many can see the long term benefits, the short terms challenges are ones of resource - resource required to effectively manage an apprentice and manage business as usual with an initially under-skilled member of the team.

The Agency will not be able to continue to convert internal posts at the rate it has this year and as such needs to consider the potential impact and resource related issues this initiative will place on delivery of its business priorities and objectives and how best to support future apprenticeship programmes. Regular updates on progress and recommendations in respect of aspects of the apprenticeship initiative will continue to be presented to CET.