

The Mammography Associate Practitioner Apprenticeship

About the Apprenticeship

The Mammography Associate apprenticeship is a 12-month (fulltime) programme. On completion, mammography associates will undertake routine two-view mammography.

Mammography Associates work within a multi-disciplinary team in a hospital or community setting (e.g. mobile and static breast screening units), undertaking mammography of individuals.

Individuals in this role will be technically skilled in operating specialised mammography equipment and be responsible for producing mammography images of consistently high quality to meet rigorous NHS Breast Screening Programme (NHSBSP) standards.

The apprenticeship will provide candidates with an understanding of the principles of person-centred care, breast anatomy, quality assurance and the application of ionising radiation regulations.

How the Mammography Associate apprenticeship is helping to address shortages in the breast imaging workforce

The apprenticeship is a cost-effective way to train staff who are immediately 'job ready' to support the running of an efficient breast screening service and symptomatic breast units.

The NBIA has launched a [new animation](#) to highlight how the Mammography Associate apprenticeship programme is helping to

boost staffing levels in the NHS Breast Screening Programme (NHSBSP).

A pilot study by the NHSBSP in 2019 found that mammography Associates could work effectively with remote supervision by a radiographer if the screening site was hard-wired to the base site or if it had phone access to a qualified radiographer.

"We've had a great experience with our mammography associates. They are a real complement to our radiography workforce and an asset to the department. After two years' experience, and if the individual feels confident, two associate practitioners can work on the screening vans independently with radiographer support available from the static site. This takes the pressure off our radiographers and gives them the flexibility to focus on other clinical work."

Shahina Ahmed, Lead Mammographer at the Parapet Breast Unit, a dedicated diagnostic and outpatient facility based at the King Edward VII Hospital site in Windsor

“The apprenticeship provides standardised training and assessment so breast units and screening services can be confident that Mammography Associates completing the apprenticeship have the competencies needed to add real value to their service. As the training is funded through the apprenticeship levy, employing mammography associates is a really cost-effective way to train staff who are immediately ‘job ready’ to support the running of an efficient breast imaging service.”

Lyndsay Kinnear, National Breast Imaging Academy (NBIA) Radiographic Lead and Chair of the NBIA Radiography Working Group.

Mammography Associate Practitioner Case Study



Shireen Barker, Mammography Associate (MA) at St George’s Hospital, qualified as an MA via the Level 4 Apprenticeship in 2022. Shireen describes her route to becoming an MA.

What did you do before you became a Mammography Associate?

Before I started my Associate Practitioner training, I had a varied career background that centred around client facing roles and customer service. My roles included working as cabin crew for an international airline and as a Donor Care Supervisor for the National Blood Service before I decided to take a career break after having children. I’d always been interested in women’s healthcare, volunteering on the maternity unit after my children were born, so when a friend had undertaken the MA apprenticeship and really enjoyed it, I decided to look for similar opportunities.

How did you find the apprenticeship training?

I found the MA training really interesting – I loved learning new skills. The academic training was well-structured and I felt well-supported.

The majority of my training was spent working alongside senior colleagues at St George’s learning on-the-job and after a few months, I was able to undertake mammograms independently, under radiographer supervision. Working part time, I qualified as an MA after 18 months (because I worked part time).

What value do you think the role adds to the department?

I feel a really valued member of the breast care multidisciplinary team. Our work and focus on mammograms enables the radiographers to undertake more complex tasks.



I’m so glad I made the decision to become an MA. It’s a really interesting rewarding role, where I feel I am making a real difference to my colleagues in the department and our clients, and would recommend anyone interesting in pursuing a career in breast screening to consider becoming an Mammography Associate.

The pathway below shows the steps to implement the Mammography Associate Apprenticeship in your organisation.

**Please note this is an example pathway and is provided for guidance only, these steps may occur in a different order or not be relevant to your organisation.*

Step 1

Assess your workforce development need

Identify the skills mix of your workforce and their current qualification level relating to their role. Think about any vacancies that could be considered as a future apprentice role. Estimate how much salary funding you have to spend on apprenticeship roles while they train; alongside considering salary costs once they complete the apprenticeship.

Find out more about the Mammography Associate Apprenticeship [HERE](#)

Step 2

Build your business case

Apprenticeship levy will pay for the tuition costs of the apprenticeship, but you need to consider how you will fund your apprentice's salary as they train. For example, you could:

Recruit to a vacancy, pay the apprentice annex 21 and utilise the remaining salary costs for backfill.

or

develop a board business case for rolling training posts.

Step 3

Select an education provider

See page 4 of for details of training providers can deliver the Mammography Associate apprenticeship.

Step 4

Entry criteria

Potential apprentices must meet the entry criteria for the apprenticeship, See page 4 for more details.

Also speak to your training provider about any specific entry criteria for their course.

Step 5

Identify and recruit learners

Advertise your apprenticeship vacancy, you could recruit from internal applicants, or you might want to consider targeting school or college leavers.

Step 6

Access Apprenticeship Levy

Apprenticeship Levy funds of the cost of the apprentice training. Speak to your organisation's apprenticeship lead, who will be able to give you advice about apprenticeship levy.

If your organisation doesn't pay apprenticeship levy you can access either a levy transfer or a reservation. If you can't identify your lead, you can contact your regional NHS England relationship manager who can also support you. You can contact them [HERE](#)

Step 7

Start!

The learner starts their apprenticeship!

Step 8

Supporting your apprentice

Provide ongoing support for the apprentice: including, helping the new apprentices to adjust to the workplace, nominating a member of the team to be the apprentice's mentor, planning workload to provide the necessary opportunities to complete practical tasks in line with training goals. Also build in time for the apprentice to receive regular assessment / workplace reviews by the training provider.

Course Details

Typical course duration

12 - 18 months (full time / part time)

The apprentices will achieve the following qualifications:

- Level 4 Mammography Associate
- Functional Skills in Maths and English Level 2 (if candidates do not hold GCSE grades A-C or equivalent).

Typical entry requirements

- Be 18 years or older
- Be employed in Breast Screening Units or symptomatic units
- Be legally allowed to work in the UK
- Have lived in the UK for the last three years
- Level 2 in English and Maths*

**some training providers will expect learners to have level 2 English and Maths on entry to the programme others will expect them to study and achieve it by the end of the apprenticeship. Please speak to your course provider about their specific requirements.*

Training Providers

The apprenticeship is currently delivered by three training providers across England

South Thames College group in partnership with St George's National Breast Education Centre London

Find out more about the course [here](#)

Health Education England in partnership with Nightingale Centre, Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Find out more about the course [here](#)

Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with Jarvis In Health (Jarvis Breast Screening Centre)

Find out more about the course [here](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

How will the role contribute to my service?

Mammography associates work within multi-disciplinary teams. The apprentices will be trained to use specialised mammography equipment and produce mammography images of consistently high quality to meet rigorous national breast screen programme (NHSBSP) standards. On completion of the 12 to 18-month apprenticeship, the Mammography Associate practitioners will be qualified to do routine 2-view mammography.

Mammography Associates can now work with remote supervision by a radiographer if the screening site is hard wired to the base site or has phone access to a qualified radiographer. The NBIA has launched a [new animation](#) to highlight the benefits that this new workforce model offers to the NHSBSP, providing vital additional resources to increase the early detection and treatment of breast cancer.

What is the length of time on the course?

The typical course duration is 12 to 18 months.

How do I access funding?

There are three ways to access funding to pay for apprenticeship training. This funding does not cover salary costs, you will have to fund the apprentice's salary.

- 1. Apprenticeship Levy** Employers with a pay bill over £3 million each year, pay the apprenticeship levy. Levy paying employers can spend their apprenticeship levy funding on apprenticeship training.
- 2. Reserve government co-investment** If your organisation doesn't pay the apprenticeship levy you can reserve funding, where the government pays 95% of the training costs, and the employer pays the remaining 5%.
- 3. Levy Transfers** Levy paying employers can transfer some of their annual levy to other employers. These transfers cover 100% of the training costs of the apprenticeship (you still need to cover salary).

Can part time staff undertake the apprenticeship?

Yes, part time staff can undertake the apprenticeship. If an apprentice works less than fulltime, the apprenticeship duration will be extended accordingly.

What is a DAS account?

A DAS account is a "digital apprenticeship service" account. You use your DAS account to pay for apprenticeship training and assessment costs and manage apprenticeship learners. If your organisation pays levy, they will have already set up an account and you should speak to your apprenticeship lead. If you haven't set up a digital account, you can find out how to [HERE](#).

Can I use apprenticeship funding to pay for my apprentices' salary?

Apprenticeship levy, reservations and transfers do not cover salary costs. Your organisation will need to fund the apprentice's salary.

What qualification will the learners receive on completion?

On completion of the Mammography Associate apprenticeship candidates will receive a Level 4 Certificate from the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

What does 'off the job training' mean?

Off the job training is the minimum amount of time that should be spent on occupational off-the-job training during an apprenticeship. Off-the-job training is a statutory requirement for an apprenticeship. It is training, which is received by the apprentice, during the apprentice's normal working hours for the purpose of achieving the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the approved apprenticeship referenced in the apprenticeship agreement.

Does the apprentice need a mentor in the workplace?

Each apprentice should have a mentor in the workplace. Mentorship is important and if planned right from the outset, you can minimise the impact this has on team resources. Mentoring or supervising apprentices also provides a development opportunity for existing staff. Time given to support apprentices in the initial stages will reap rewards later and help apprentices get up to speed more quickly.

Where can I find out more?

Find out more about Mammography Associates and how they can support your workforce at the National Breast Imaging Academy -

<https://nationalbreastimagingacademy.org/radiography/mammography-associate-apprenticeship/>