



# Getting Creative

## A new look at Modern Apprentices in NHSScotland

In August, the Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing, Alex Neil, announced that there would be an increase in the number of Modern Apprentices (MAs) employed in NHSScotland. But what can an MA learn to do in NHSScotland – and what can the service learn from them? In this case study, **Gemma Cornell**, MA in Creative & Digital Media at NES, and her manager **Sarah Wright** reflect on what the MA programme has meant for both of them.



### Gemma, MA in Creative & Digital Media

#### What did you do before you became an MA?

I have always enjoyed Art. I did Higher Art at school, and then completed a Foundation Course in Art & Design at college. But this is a profession where experience counts for a lot, and, after college, I felt it was important for me to start work. When I saw the offer for the MA in Creative & Digital Design I was really surprised, and really pleased: surprised, because I thought the NHS only did things like care, and pleased because there was an opportunity to learn and work at the same time – and I didn't need a degree to apply.

#### Tell us about your apprenticeship

My apprenticeship was one year long. I spent one day a week at college, and the other four with the Communications team in NES. The four days were split between graphic design and filming. For example, we would film events for NHSScotland and for Young Scot, who was the training provider. I also designed posters, publications and interactive materials for different departments in NES.

#### What was the best thing about being an MA?

There are so many things! One of the best things has been having Sarah as my manager, because she has been so supportive. She has taught me so much about the job, and has supported me at every step along the way. I feel that being an apprentice means that you are really looked after, and because you are learning everyone is always willing to help. If I'd gone to university, I would have learned things but I wouldn't have had nearly as much experience of what the job is really like.

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Is there anything you'd change?

I can't think of anything about the apprenticeship itself. But one thing I think is important is that not many people know about the type of opportunity I've had. I don't think there's a lot of awareness that there are MAs in creative areas like mine – and really no awareness that work like this goes on in the NHS. Before I did the MA I never really thought about the importance of communications in the NHS. But, without the materials we produce, people wouldn't find out about a lot of health issues, and about the support that's there for them.

And what's next for you?

My apprenticeship finished in September, and I now have a fixed-term post in the NES team until March which I'm really happy about. This will allow me to see some projects I've been working on – such as a new Dementia Guide – through to the end. If a full-time position as a junior designer in the team came up I would definitely go for it. This is where I started and I've been part of the team from the beginning. NES has given me a really supportive start to my career in design, and even if no post becomes available, I have a great skillset to take to my next role.





## **Sarah, Senior Design Officer in the NES Communications Team**

### How did you get involved in the MA Programme?

Communications is very important for NES, and we are often stretched. So when I was approached by our HR Department and asked if we would like to host an MA, I was really interested. I realised that having someone who could work and learn at the same time could be a real benefit to the department: we could help this person learn about what we really needed, learn to use the software we have, and in return we would have someone who would be working and contributing as part of the team.

### You were on the recruitment panel for the MAs. What skills were you looking for?

We wanted someone who was creative. We set up a task which asked applicants to put together a mood board, to select images which fit a particular mood. Their interpretation of the images they picked was what we were looking for. This is something that doesn't necessarily come through a formal qualification route – it picks up skills which may have been developed elsewhere.

It was also important to remember that young people applying for apprenticeships aren't going to have the experience you would expect from people going for a full-time post. Giving a task like the mood board let them speak about things they knew about, rather than asking a list of usual questions.

We had more than 70 applications for two MA posts, and I was really impressed by the level of understanding candidates had, given that none had had formal training in this area. They also brought a lot of enthusiasm and energy.

### What was your role during Gemma's MA programme?

It actually started before Gemma arrived. I worked with Young Scot, the learning provider, to find out how the MA would work and what the timetable would be. I also spent time planning what work I could give Gemma.

One important thing was to split the work between things which needed to be closely supervised and things which she could do on her own. This was key for both of us. She got some self-directed learning and projects, so she could start straight away and it meant that I had space to do my own work.

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What have you learned from managing an apprentice?

It's been a learning curve for me as a manager. In contrast with managing an experienced designer, this was much more about me imparting my knowledge to someone. I was always thinking about how I could show or teach Gemma things which will be useful to her. It's been a really positive experience, and I've developed new skills in terms of training.

I also think the organisation has gained a lot. As time went on she was able to contribute more and more, and from the mid-point of her apprenticeship she became a real contributor to the work of the department. She still got support but she made – and is still making – a real contribution to the work of the team and the organisation.

If we were to do it again, it would be easier because I've done it once before and all the support is there now. We would absolutely do it again. In fact, the Comms team wanted another MA for next year but we weren't able to secure one. However, we are hopeful for the future.

What advice would you give to other managers?

Absolutely do it! It provides a really valuable opportunity to a young person. The combination of experience and formal learning puts them in a really strong position. For the department, it really does add to your capacity, and it helps you as a line manager develop skills in people development.

Click on the **Qualifications Explained** tab of the **VQ Finder** ([www.vqfinder.nes.scot.nhs.uk/qualifications-explained.aspx](http://www.vqfinder.nes.scot.nhs.uk/qualifications-explained.aspx)) for:



- A range of **MA Case Studies** (including full versions of the ones featured here)
- **Working to Learn and Learning to Work:** An introduction to Modern Apprenticeships for NHSScotland
- **Moving Forward with Modern Apprenticeships:** A step-by-step guide to setting up MA Programmes in NHSScotland
- Information about the **NHSScotland MA Network**, bringing together managers, mentors and apprentices from across NHSScotland.