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## Paramedic Degree Apprenticeships and The University of Cumbria Approach

The role of a paramedic within the ambulance service continues to diversify, with paramedics using a widening scope of practice to care for patients. Because of the knowledge, skills and experiences paramedics develop, the NHS has been utilising them in many roles outside of the ambulance service, most notably in primary care. In 2018 it was estimated that there were currently 1000 paramedic vacancies within the UK. Clearly there needs to be more paramedics educated each year and the paramedic degree apprenticeship is one of two options to address this workforce imbalance.

### What is a paramedic apprenticeship?

In 2017 the UK Government introduced the apprenticeship levy which mandated that all employers with an annual pay bill of greater than £3 million, needed to pay 0.5% of that bill to the Government. To get this money back ambulance services would need to offer apprenticeship programmes for their staff. For each apprentice employed, funding can be drawn down from the levy to pay for that apprentice's salary and training. In 2018 the Government approved the paramedic apprenticeship standard, allowing ambulance services and education providers to venture into this previously unknown territory for paramedic education. An 'apprentice paramedic' is a paid role within ambulance services that often only internal members of staff can apply for. Successful applicants are paid to undertake a BSc (Hons) degree to become a paramedic.

The apprenticeship involves 'on the job' training where apprentices' spend time working within their current non-paramedic clinical role and being supervised by a practice educator when they work as an apprentice paramedic. 'Off the job' training makes up a minimum of 20% of the learners normal working hours, and this is where they are paid by their employer to engage in activities such as lectures, seminars, and simulations with the education provider. Apprentices are supported in regular tripartite reviews between their employer and the education provider throughout the programme, ensuring each learners' specific development needs are accommodated. Learners develop knowledge, skills and behaviors that are embedded within the paramedic apprenticeship standards. Education providers will have 'mapped' these standards against external reference points from the Health and Care Professions Council, the Quality Assurance Agency, and the College of Paramedics curriculum guidance to create the programme of study. This enables the apprentice to apply to register as a paramedic with the HCPC upon successful completion of the apprenticeship.

As the apprenticeship route often requires applicants to have previous experience working in an operational role within an ambulance service, prospective learners need to make an early decision as to whether an apprenticeship route is right for them, so they can obtain that experience. Both the apprenticeship and the traditional undergraduate degree pathways are supported by the HCPC and the College of Paramedics, so often it is personal preference as to which route to take.

### The University of Cumbria Paramedic Degree Apprenticeship

Currently, the University of Cumbria has contracts with 7 out of 11 English ambulance services, to deliver a paramedic degree apprenticeship. These programmes sit within the Centre of Excellence in Paramedic Practice at the University, alongside our undergraduate, continual professional development, postgraduate, military and innovation provision. The apprenticeship programme is a 2-year BSc (Hons) Paramedic Science degree where applicants must have prior learning and experience that equates to 120 credits at level 4 when they enter the programme, so they can start immediately at level 5. The apprenticeships are embedded within the geographical borders of ambulance services', making the programme more accessible to learners. A blended approach to education is used, with the University making full use of online platforms such as Microsoft Teams,

Blackboard and PebblePad. This means learners benefit from a flexible approach to their education, and the time spent travelling to ambulance service education centres and the financial burden associated with this is reduced. Exact delivery models vary, but there are 41 contact days across each year of study. To broaden the experiences of our apprentices', 10 days of supernumerary placement is provided across the apprenticeship where learners will undertake placement in a different area of their ambulance service. This could include working in a control room or with a specialist paramedic.

A list of ambulance services that are registered as paramedic apprenticeship providers can be found below. Prospective applicants would be encouraged to visit the website of the following employers for further information:

- East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- Isle of Wight NHS Trust
- London Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust
- South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust
- South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust
- West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust
- Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust

If you are interested in career opportunities at the University of Cumbria in the Centre of Excellence in Paramedic Practice, please feel free to get in touch with me via email:

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