



Rachael Croft

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## About Rachael

My name is Rachael Croft and I'm a Trainee Nurse Associate (TNA) in my final module at Bolton University studying on the Foundation Degree (FdSc) Nursing Associate Apprenticeship. My employer is Bolton GP Federation, so I am on placement in primary care. I work across two practices across the Halliwell PCN in Bolton.

## How did you hear about apprenticeships?

I was familiar with the Trainee Nurse Associate program being in healthcare previously. I was a healthcare assistant in secondary care before joining Bolton GP Federation.

## Why did you want to become an apprentice?

On applying to Bolton GP Federation for a primary healthcare role, they offered me the TNA position and very kindly funded the apprenticeship for me. It was a great opportunity for me to progress my career, to be fully funded, to learn about the role 'hands-on', and to earn whilst completing my training. As an older learner, receiving full funding enabled me to move forward in healthcare without the additional stress and burden of debt.

## Did you receive support with your apprenticeship? If so, who supported and how?

I was supported by many people at Bolton GP Federation. My Practice Assessor, Kath Arrowsmith (Chief Nurse), has been a constant support throughout my apprenticeship. Shortly after joining the federation, Lyndsay Bailey (Practice Education Facilitator) became my Practice Supervisor.

## Did you need any qualifications to be able to complete your apprenticeship?

I needed GCSE Maths and English and a Healthcare certificate/qualification. The university were flexible, so I managed to meet the entry requirements. They looked at previous studies combined to gather ACAS points.

## How long did it take you to complete your apprenticeship?

I started my apprenticeship in April 2022 and it runs for 2 years. I'm due to complete the course mid April this year.



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## What did you like about working as an apprentice?

Personally, I learn better 'on the job', by doing. I work for four days per week and have one study day at university. Having direct experience from day one means that I have a realistic idea of the Nursing Associate role in practice which has helped to build my confidence and prepare me after graduation. Additionally, the academic studies support our learning in practice in real time. This means that I've put theory into practice straight away. Being in practice works for me, rather than studying for a longer block then going onto placement every few months for example.

## Would you recommend an apprenticeship to others?

Yes, for me an apprenticeship is the best way of learning. Having a balance of work-based and academic learning suits me personally. Having an income and direct experience in the workplace has been essential. The TNA course is really challenging, it can be extremely hard juggling work and then keeping on top of studies in your own time, but I've achieved things I didn't believe possible before starting the course.

## What advice would you give to anyone considering an apprenticeship?

I'd certainly consider and research apprenticeships. Speak to others who have direct experience already. Explore local opportunities, look at local healthcare providers, as apprenticeships are a valued, professional route into healthcare that shouldn't be dismissed. Contact local universities yourself, speak to their career's teams, look at the courses they offer. They may be able to point you in the direction of partner organisations who would support you as an apprentice.

**Congratulations Rachael  
for getting a Distinction.**