

# Apprenticeships in audiology: an option to earn while you learn

**BY BEVERLEY PHILIP AND DARREN UNDERHILL**

Changing careers later in life can be daunting. Beverley and Darren reflect on their experience completing an apprenticeship in audiology, and provide advice for prospective apprentices.



**Beverley Philip,**  
Associate Practitioner, NHS Fife, UK.

## Could you share a bit about your previous career and what inspired you to start an apprenticeship?

I was a health records supervisor for 10 years in the NHS before starting my apprenticeship. In my role, I was used to dealing with the public face-to-face, many with health conditions or disabilities that needed extra assistance. Empathy and compassion were essential to perform my role well. I always knew I would not take my career any further into management, as I loved the patient-facing aspect of my role, which I would no longer have if I went up the career ladder in my department.

**“I wanted to move away from my current role into a job that aligned more with my personal values and desire to make a meaningful difference”**

I wasn't actively looking for a new job but, when I was approached about an apprenticeship, I felt I had all the right skills and it would be a job I would enjoy – presenting a bit of a challenge whilst also being rewarding.

## What made you choose an apprenticeship in hearing aid dispensing and what benefits have you noticed so far?

My interest came from personal experience with our son, who was diagnosed with a hearing loss through the newborn screening process. The support from the audiology team was excellent from day one. His diagnosis was a shock, and although he had other health issues, this was the one that hit me the hardest. Experiencing the patient journey gave me an insight into the world of audiology and the benefits hearing aids bring. I was approached by the team at one of our appointments about a trial of an apprenticeship and asked if I would be interested in applying. Six months later, I was ready to start my new adventure. My favourite appointments are the patients who have been convinced to attend by a significant other. Once testing results have been explained and they agree to a hearing aid trial, the change you see when the aids are switched on and they realise what they have been missing, is so rewarding and gives a great sense of achievement that you have helped the patient.

## How was the transition from your old career to your apprenticeship? Are there any skills from your previous job that have been particularly helpful?

I was lucky to have worked in the same NHS board for 15 years before starting my apprenticeship and knew some of my new colleagues through my previous roles. I feel this made things easier as I already knew I would be supported in my transition. As I

came from a mainly clerical background, I feel that I already had good communication skills, which would benefit me with patients. Time management had also been an important part of my previous role, which helped me keep on track with my studies and submission deadlines, especially as the workload could vary greatly and I needed to prioritise.

## How did you juggle the demands of your apprenticeship with your studies and personal life?

Working full-time and studying with a young family was tricky at times. Being proactive and planning ahead as much as possible helped. I found doing little and often worked best for me rather than trying to do bigger chunks of studying / essay writing. It meant I could also plan time with friends and family without the worry and guilt that I had a lot to catch up on. The hardest part of my apprenticeship was the academic learning; I learn better by actually doing the task, and found reading journals and reference books tough. I was lucky to have the support of my colleagues in helping me understand the things I was struggling with.

## What's been the most surprising part of your apprenticeship journey?

I was very surprised by the age range of other students on the same journey. I had worried that I would be the oldest person on the course at 37, but ages varied from 20 to 50 in our cohort.

## What advice would you give to someone thinking about starting a similar apprenticeship?

Go for it! Yes, it can be difficult at times fitting in academic work around training and daily life, and there will be times when things are tough, as some modules have more learning than others but, at the end of all your hard work, you have a very rewarding career.



**Darren Underhill,**  
Hearing Aid Dispenser, Specsavers, UK.

### Could you share a bit about your previous career and what inspired you to start an apprenticeship?

I joined Specsavers after spending 30 years working in the grocery sector, where I worked my way up within the same supermarket chain. Over the years, I gained experience in several managerial roles and, in my most recent position as a store manager, I was responsible for leading a team of over 300 colleagues.

Two significant moments in my life led me to pursue an apprenticeship with Specsavers. Firstly, my father became unwell with an ear infection and subsequently suffered substantial hearing loss. I saw first-hand the toll that this took on his mental health as he struggled with communication and gradually became isolated from conversations. It took about a year and a half for him to adjust, and seeing him go through this journey left a lasting impression on me.

Alongside this, I wanted to move away from my current role into a job that aligned more with my personal values and desire to

make a meaningful difference. Particularly after watching my father experience his hearing loss, I decided I wanted to diversify into a career that made a real difference and impact on people's lives. This ultimately led me to Specsavers.

### What made you choose an apprenticeship in hearing aid dispensing?

Having spent my entire career in one industry, I wasn't quite sure where to start. It was my sister who recommended Specsavers to me after having worked with them previously. She encouraged me to investigate the opportunities they offered, highlighting the variety of career paths available.

### How was the transition from your old career to your apprenticeship? Are there any skills from your previous job that have been particularly helpful?

In my previous role, I thoroughly enjoyed being a manager. I wanted to transfer the skills and knowledge that I had gained – particularly in customer service and colleague support – into my new position at Specsavers.

What's been especially rewarding is the opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of our patients who come into our stores. After just one appointment with us, their world can be transformed, and it's fantastic knowing that you have played a part in helping that patient reconnect with others.

### How did you juggle the demands of your apprenticeship with your studies and personal life?

Right from the start, I have been supported by Specsavers with my development and made to feel at home. During my apprenticeship, lessons were both in-person working in practice and online. Despite my

nerves as a mature student, I really enjoyed the lessons and observing clinics.

### What's been the most surprising part of your apprenticeship journey?

I was surprised to learn that you can train as a hearing aid dispenser at any stage of life – even without having a medical background.

### What advice would you give to someone thinking about starting a similar apprenticeship?

My advice would be not to limit yourself because of your age. If you want to try something new, then go for it – there's no age limit to success.

Reflecting on both the journeys, audiology apprenticeships truly offer a unique chance to earn while you learn – regardless of your age or previous career path. With the right support, transferable skills and commitment, individuals can make a meaningful difference in patients' lives while building a rewarding new career. For anyone considering a change, these examples serve as a powerful reminder that it's never too late to take the first step.

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