**Press release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday 30 January 2017**

**New physiotherapy and occupational therapy degree apprenticeship launched in England**

A hospital trust from Lincolnshire has been given ministerial approval to lead on the development of the first ever apprenticeship degree for the roles of physiotherapist and occupational therapist (OT).

The degree apprenticeship hopes to boost numbers of allied health professionals (which include physiotherapist and occupational therapist roles) in a bid to tackle both local and national staffing shortages. It will provide an alternative route for those wishing to become a registered healthcare professional but who want to combine their studies with on the job training.

The Trailblazer group, led by United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust (ULHT) and the Lincolnshire Talent Academy, will develop a nationally recognised standard for these roles. The group will include representatives from NHS Employers, multiple NHS trusts from across the country and employer representatives from small and medium sized private organisations, in addition to the College of Occupational Therapists and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy.

Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills Robert Halfon said: “Apprenticeships offer young people a ladder of opportunity to gain the vital skills they and businesses need to succeed. By putting more control in the hands of employers, we are ensuring apprenticeships are high quality and address skills shortages facing industry.

“Congratulations to the Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy Trailblazer group for gaining approval to develop their apprenticeship standard, and for playing an active role in developing the workforce of the future.”

The new degree apprenticeship will allow an apprentice to meet the standards required for professional registration and will be developed in partnership with the College of Occupational Therapists, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Last year £4.5 million was granted to universities and colleges across England to introduce new degree apprenticeships for students starting in September 2017.

Claire Flavell, Strategic Lead for the Lincolnshire Talent Academy at ULHT said: “This is fantastic news for the allied health professions and we’re delighted that the ULHT proposal to lead the national development has been successful. As a rural region, Lincolnshire is always looking at new and innovative ways to upskill its staff and grow its own talent, and this new apprenticeship degree is just one of the ways we can open up careers in healthcare to more people.

“We’ve had a number of expressions of interests from NHS trusts across the country looking to work with us on the programme which is very encouraging. A number of universities have also expressed their interest in supporting this development.”

Anita Cooper, Clinical Lead - Therapies and Rehabilitation Medicine for ULHT said: “With a national shortage of allied health professionals we hope that this new degree apprenticeship will help to see an increased number of registered physiotherapists and occupational therapists being trained at ULHT as well as across England.

“As well as attracting young people into the professions these apprenticeship programmes will give opportunities for staff working as support workers who have proven they can give high quality care to patients, and have the ability to meet the academic demands of the degree, but may not hold the traditional academic qualifications required to meet the entry requirements for university.”

Dr Jo Watson, Assistant Director of Education and Research at the College of Occupational Therapists said: “The College of Occupational Therapists is delighted to learn that the bid to develop the degree level apprenticeship standard for occupational therapy has received ministerial approval and would like to take this opportunity to wish the Occupational Therapists Trailblazer group every success in taking this exciting initiative forward.

“We remain committed to providing professional advice and practical support to ensure that the standards and assessment plans developed meet the requirements of the professional and regulatory bodies, and provide a strong alternative route to entering the profession that will to appeal to, and meet the needs of, a range of aspiring occupational therapists.”

**ENDS**

**For further information contact the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust communications team: 01522 573986**

**Notes to editors**

ULHT, along with partners in Lincolnshire, has been running a pre-registration degree programme for physiotherapists and OTs with Sheffield Hallam University for the last 11 years. Both organisations presented the success of this partnership at an OT apprenticeship event held by the College of Occupational Therapists in London in October, providing the basis for the Trailblazer proposal.

Following this event over 70 organisations expressed their interest in being part of the roll out of this work. This led to ULHT submitting their application to develop the apprenticeship standard for both physiotherapist and occupational therapist roles in November, which was approved by the Department of Education this month.