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RIA IS ALL FIRED UP AT EMAS

Sir Alan Sugar may need to conduct a nationwide search for his next apprentice, but the East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EMAS) has looked to home-grown talent to help improve its services across the region.

Ria Sinclair, aged 17 and from Nottingham, is the first apprentice to be appointed since EMAS signed up to the Joint Investment Framework (JIF) for Health in the East Midlands. The JIF aims to deliver skills, learning and qualifications to improve patient care and the delivery of NHS services across the region.

The JIF was agreed nationally between Strategic Health Authorities, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Skills for Health in July 2007. It will see up to £100 million of extra funds being injected annually into the health service in England to tackle skills gaps and shortages over a period of three years.

Ria, who has been appointed on a year-long Administrator Apprenticeship as part of the organisational learning team, is also working towards an NVQ Level 2 in Business Administration. She said: "I am delighted to be joining EMAS and really pleased to have the opportunity to develop my skills while being able to enter the world of work."

Peter Burnett, the Skills for Health lead at EMAS and Ria's line manager, said: "Recruiting staff at apprenticeship level provides EMAS with a cost effective approach to workforce planning. It allows us to recruit and develop staff in line with the Trust's working practices and future goals.

"More importantly it also gives us the opportunity to up-skill our workforce and provide them with recognised, accredited qualifications that will enable them to progress throughout their career."

Even though Ria has only just joined the team, the benefits are already clear to see. Jemimah Sedgwick, the team's administrator said "It has been very useful having Ria here to support the role I perform. Not only has it freed up some of my workload which has enabled me to access development opportunities for myself, it has also been very motivating having the chance to develop Ria's skills and knowledge and having the opportunity to share my expertise."

EMAS recently became the first ambulance trust to sign up to the Skills Pledge by promising to help all of its employees to develop their basic skills, including literacy and numeracy, and work towards relevant qualifications to at least Level 2 (equivalent to five good GCSEs).

Karen Woodward, director of regional skills, LSC East Midlands said: "The LSC is delighted to see that EMAS, one of our first NHS employers to sign the Skills Pledge since the launch of the Joint Investment Framework in April, have also been the first to recruit an apprentice.

"Apprenticeships provide real benefits to both the employer and the employee. The individual with a unique opportunity to learn and earn in the workplace whilst gaining a nationally recognised qualification and the employer securing a competent employee trained and developed to meet business needs."

Ends

For further information, please contact Liz Cartwright at Cartwright Communications on 07769 713919

For further information about the JIF in the East Midlands, please contact **Julie Bellm on 07825 725 197 or at julie.bellm@eastmidlands.nhs.uk**

Notes for Editors:

The East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EMAS) provides unscheduled care and patient transport for 4.6 million people in an area covering approximately 6,425 square miles.

EMAS employ over 3,000 staff at more than 70 locations and operate a fleet of 850 vehicles. Our overall annual budget is £125 million.

EMAS accident and emergency crews will respond to over 500,000 emergency calls every year – this is the equivalent of receiving a 999 call every minute of every day.

EMAS patient transport staff and volunteer ambulance car drivers provide care and transport on over 5,000 journeys to and from routine appointments each day.

In October 2007, the Healthcare Commission rated EMAS as 'Good' for its services to patients and 'Fair' for its use of resources including value for money.

The JIF was agreed between Strategic Health Authorities, the Learning and Skills Council and Skills for Health in July 2007. The Joint Investment Framework will see up to £100m of extra funds being injected annually into the health service in England to tackle skills gaps and shortages over a period of three years, which equates to an extra £5 million pounds of funding in the East Midlands per year.

One of the aims of the agreement was to see the roll out of the national apprentice scheme across the NHS. This is in line with the Leitch Report; published in 2006 with a focus on tackling the UK's skills shortages, which states "Apprenticeships are a crucial method of delivering work-focused intermediate skills. After a steep decline since the 1970s, more than 250,000 people are now participating in Apprenticeships." The target now is to increase this to over 500,000 apprentices by 2020.

The Skills Pledge is a voluntary public commitment open to all employers of all sizes in the private, public and voluntary sectors. It is aimed at increasing the skills of their workforce for the benefit of the business.