



Making the NHS the Best Place to Work

Support for engagement to improve
our people's experience at work



Contents

- 3 Foreword by Prerana Issar, Chief People Officer for the NHS and Dr Navina Evans, Chief Executive, East London NHS Foundation Trust
- 5 Building the NHS as the best place to work
- 7 Successful approaches to engagement – reducing variability
- 9 Listening to and working with our people to understand and improve their experience at work
- 13 Sharing feedback on making the NHS the best place to work and helping to shape a new Core Offer





Foreword

Prerana Issar, Chief People Officer for the NHS & Dr Navina Evans, Chief Executive East London NHS Foundation Trust

We believe we should strengthen the NHS Constitution's commitment to treating our staff – our people – fairly and equally to create a working environment that is supportive, inclusive and offers personal and professional growth. In doing so, we will make the NHS the best place to work.

In June 2019, we published the Interim NHS People Plan, developed collaboratively with national leaders and partners. The plan sets a vision for how those working in the NHS will be supported to deliver care and identifies the actions we will take to help them. Before the publication of the (full) People Plan, we want to engage directly with everyone working across the NHS, so we can shape and influence the development of a new **Core Offer** for our people.

It is our intention that this new Core Offer will drive:

- action to support the changes our people tell us will make a positive difference to their working lives and experiences
- recruitment and retention to the varied and rewarding roles within health and care, supporting existing talent and attracting new
- the best possible care for our patients and service users as a result of improving the working lives and experiences of our NHS people.

Many of you have already told us that the new Core Offer should reflect the thoughts and perspectives of all our people, be tangible, meaningful and genuinely impactful. This is a bold and ambitious goal, and we need your help and support to reach out to all our people, especially to those who do not typically share their views



The purpose of this resource is to support NHS organisations and systems to engage with their people on making the NHS the best place to work. The resource provides insights into how effective and meaningful conversations are already galvanising great results for colleagues in health and care services. It aims to support discussions around how the best place to work concept can be implemented, and how the experience of our people could be improved.

We recognise that there are many of you already doing fantastic engagement work; we encourage you to continue with this and share with us your stories. Equally, we would like offer support to those who would value help and advice on how to engage with your people in a more meaningful way.

There is currently too much unhelpful variation in the quality of our people's experience of work - as reflected in the results of the annual NHS Staff Survey and other similar feedback mechanisms. We need to work together to improve this so that all of our people can expect a positive working experience throughout their NHS career.

You are best placed to decide how to engage and it is important to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to share their views and ideas, particularly those who do not often come forward. Details of how to provide feedback are included at the end of this resource.

We hope that you find this resource useful and can use it to build on the engagement work you already have underway. Please continue to share your plans, activity and learning with us via Twitter by using #OurNHSPeople as we work together to make the NHS the best place to work.

Prerana Issar, Chief People Officer for the NHS
Dr Navina Evans, Chief Executive, East London NHS Foundation Trust



Building the NHS as the best place to work

The **Interim NHS People Plan** sets out an ambition to make the NHS ‘the best place to work’. This is based on the recognition that: “To serve our patients and citizens in the best way possible we must improve the experience of our people.”

It refers to the aim to develop a new **Core Offer** for our people who work in NHS funded care based on the following themes:

Belonging - Creating a healthy, inclusive and compassionate culture, including a focus on:

- valuing and respecting all
- promoting equality and inclusion and widening participation
- tackling bullying and harassment, violence and abuse.

Developing - Enabling great development and fulfilling careers, including a focus on:

- education and training (including mandatory training) and career and professional development
- recognition of qualifications and training between and within NHS employers
- line management and supervision.



Empowering - Ensuring everyone feels they have voice, control and influence, including a focus on:

- whistleblowing and freedom to speak up
- physical and mental health, wellbeing and reducing sickness absence
- workload, work-life balance, clear and timely rotas, flexible working, and managing unpaid caring responsibilities
- work environment.

These themes are based on the essential elements of good people management practice and positive staff experience. They have been developed using research evidence and analysis of the NHS Staff Survey results, discussions with the **Social Partnership Forum** and other engagement activities. It is critical that the new Core Offer for staff reflects these insights and other detailed feedback received to date.

But meaningful engagement and suggestions for continuous improvement are ongoing processes – so keep sharing what you and our NHS people want to see in the Core Offer and how we can all work together to make the NHS the best place to work. The pressures on NHS staff are immense but already action is being taken to tackle key issues such as staffing shortages, promote positive workplace cultures, support diversity and inclusion and enhance health and

wellbeing. Much more needs to be done, and this is and will remain an ongoing focus as the NHS People Plan is developed, but it is only through collaboration that the right and most impactful solutions will be developed.

The evidence is familiar and clear - positive staff experience means better care for patients and service users. Our NHS people are best placed to say what they need to provide excellent care.



Successful approaches to engagement – reducing variability

Many organisations in the NHS already have highly successful approaches to understanding the experience of their people. The staff engagement scores for the highest performing organisations in the NHS Staff Survey are comparable with the best in the UK. However, the variability of experience is a concern and the gap between highest and lowest scoring organisations is substantial.

Staff with disabilities are less likely to be appointed from shortlisting, more likely to experience bullying and harassment and less likely to find themselves in senior and leadership positions across the NHS. Equally, NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard data shows that employees from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds are less likely to be appointed from shortlisting, more likely than white colleagues to go through a formal disciplinary process, more likely to experience bullying and harassment and less likely to find themselves in senior and leadership positions across the NHS.

While many people describe hugely positive employment experiences, many people do not. This degree of variability must change, and our ambition is for all our people to have a positive experience.

Key characteristics of successful NHS organisations and systems

NHS staff survey data demonstrates higher staff engagement scores in those organisations that have a comprehensive and focused approach to engagement, such as the organisations working with [Listening into Action](#), [NHS Quest](#) or individual approaches such as the [Leeds Way](#). Further examples and case studies of great engagement work within the NHS can be found on the [Social Partnership Forum website](#) and Primary Care focussed engagement work can be reviewed on the [NHS England website](#).

In the NHS, characteristics of organisations with above average levels of engagement have been identified as:

- open, inclusive and positive cultures
- effective overall people management with a focus on appraisal and wellbeing
- a systematic approach to seeking out and acting on staff experiences which typically includes improved dialogue with staff representatives, regular face-to-face contact between senior leaders and staff, with opportunities for staff to share views, develop ideas and make changes in the workplace
- staff engagement that has been conducted in partnership with local Trade Union representatives

- using data from the NHS Staff Survey and the Staff Friends and Family Test, as well as developing and using data from other local staff surveys
- staff helping to shape local values that influence recruitment, behaviour and retention
- staff involvement in quality improvement so that all staff have the chance to help make improvements to provide better care
- formal systems to show staff they are valued and express appreciation of staff contribution.

Across the NHS, many organisations and systems have implemented these practices with the goal of providing a good quality experience of work for their people.

Learning from outside the NHS

The NHS also learns lessons from the staff experience and engagement practices of other sectors. Social enterprises operating in health and social care often have good levels of staff engagement. Leading retailers such as John Lewis, Sainsburys and Marks and Spencer have a range of ways of seeking feedback from their staff and act on staff input. UK manufacturers such as Jaguar Land Rover, BAE systems and Toyota involve staff systematically in quality improvement. Professional services firms such as Deloitte also have high levels of staff engagement. Examples of staff engagement from outside the NHS can be found on the [Engage for Success website](#).



Listening to and working with our people to understand and improve their experience at work

There is already a wealth of experience from ongoing engagement within the NHS that can be drawn upon. Organisations and systems may have locally appropriate approaches that can be applied. Existing channels for feedback should be the starting point and wherever possible build on existing opportunities for getting people's views. Whether you already have effective processes in place, or need some help to get things started, this resource is intended to inspire and encourage you to engage with your people in the most meaningful way possible.



Ideas that have been successfully implemented in organisations to get high levels of feedback include the following:

- Organising large-scale events, sometimes known as ‘big conversations’, where people can be asked for their views and develop their ideas in discussion with colleagues. This approach has been widely used, especially in large hospitals. There are considerable practical challenges in organising such events especially around ensuring release and cover. Some organisations have addressed these through staggered or rolling events or undertaken conversations with a representative sample.
- In such discussions it is important that all people feel able to participate and this can be best done by providing trained facilitation. As well as traditional group work and feedback, a variety of innovative discussion techniques have been used in such events including ‘world café’, ‘rapid fire’ and ‘fishbowl’ methods. Your organisation may already have experience of such techniques.
- Events should have both verbal and written ways to collect ideas and more recently good use has been made of feedback by text using Sli.do and Twitter walls.
- Creating a successful event requires time and needs active support from senior leaders. There are many examples of successful events such as the long-running events organised by the Birmingham
- Women’s and Children’s NHS Foundation Trust, Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust and many others. One of the most unusual and innovative events was developed by the Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, where the big conversation takes place in a large tent.
- Where one large-scale conversation is not practicable because of multiple sites or model of service delivery, views can be sought through a rolling programme of smaller conversations. Existing engagement activity such as team briefings, or ‘quality huddles’ can be further opportunities for seeking views. Line managers will need support and briefings to help them get the most from this dialogue. Some organisations, such as Hillingdon Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, have developed strategies or vision documents through this process which have been really positive.
- Most organisations already have ward visits or ‘back to the floor’ days where senior leaders work with other colleagues and seek feedback. These could be adapted as opportunities to seek feedback on the Best Place to Work issues.
- The traditional focus group can also help give insight into views and gives an opportunity to explore an issue in-depth, although care does need to be taken to ensure that membership of such groups is representative of the workforce.

- Many trusts have used the 'listening into action' model of meetings with staff. These focus on moving from conversations based on sharing concerns to identifying solutions.
- It's also important to find ways to prioritise key issues to avoid creating lengthy and unrealistic 'shopping lists.' Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is implementing the concept of 'culture conversations' where there are facilitated but free-ranging, open conversations around the top three positives and the top three challenges for its organisation. Your organisational development specialists and staff engagement leads may have other tools that could be applied to this process.
- A focus on improving retention has led to some great engagement work which has centred on understanding and improving people's experience of working within Primary Care. Find out more in this toolkit: **[Making general practice a great place to work.](#)**



Other approaches have been used to overcome the challenges of bringing large numbers of people together in one place. Going out directly to discuss issues with people can be challenging in busy workplaces, but there are examples of it being done in an effective and innovative way. For example, the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust recently took a tea trolley out onto its wards to seek staff views over a cup of tea. Not only did this approach generate a lot of feedback, it also highlighted the importance of rest breaks and hydration. The tea trolley option may not be suitable for all workplaces, but it does enable staff to give their views without interrupting patient care.

When developing their local values, many trusts developed other direct ways for staff to gather views. The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust secured high levels of staff feedback in a recent refresh of its values. It used a champion-based approach with active listening via focus groups and use of tea trolleys for walkabouts. Other organisations have used postcard letterboxes and drop-in discussions with senior leaders to raise the profile of the issues and create momentum.



Sharing feedback on the best place to work and helping to shape the new Core Offer

The need for regular and effective engagement is an ongoing quest – and something integral to the ambitions of the Interim People Plan. This resource is intended to provide further support and best practice examples to assist with that quest, but there is a need to collect and share as much information as possible so the dialogue continues and we collaborate to make the NHS the best place to work.

5 b online portal has been established in order for organisations and **gngghYa g'hc'dfcj JXYXirect feedback**. Please share via the **portal**:

1. The engagement activities you have undertaken in recent months with the aim of improving your people's work experiences to make the NHS the best place to work. Please tell us what you are hearing from your staff and your local Staff Partnership Forum as well as your thoughts.
2. The priorities you feel should be addressed to improve our people's experience at work (for inclusion in the new Core Offer).
3. The system level at which you think these priorities should be addressed: local, regional or national.

There are also other ways that our teams and people can join in the discussions around how we make the NHS the best place to work and the development of a new Core Offer. Please also encourage all NHS people in your organisation to contribute their own thoughts, experiences and ideas through:

- **The Talk Health and Care platform**

Register and join the Department of Health and Social Care online community for staff working in health and care.

Talk about what matters by joining conversations, posting ideas and voting for favourite suggestions.

Find out more information on **how the Talk Health and Care Platform works**.

- Twitter, using #ourNHSPeople



Get involved and help to build an NHS that is an exemplar of inclusive, compassionate culture with our people at the centre; making the NHS the best place to work and delivering the best care for our citizens and local communities

Other helpful resources

[NHS Constitution](#)

[NHS Employers' engagement resources](#)

[Engage for Success](#)

[Social Partnership Forum](#)

