

# ENABLING WELLBEING

**within trusts**

OCTOBER 2023



# Providers Deliver

## Enabling wellbeing within trusts

### Contents

Foreword	<b>4</b>
Introduction	<b>5</b>
The view from Dr Lade Smith CBE	<b>7</b>
<b>1</b> A robust health and wellbeing strategy Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	<b>9</b>
<b>2</b> Supportive and inclusive cultures Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust	<b>12</b>
<b>3</b> Access to professional psychological support Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust	<b>15</b>
<b>4</b> Creating a sense of belonging Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust	<b>18</b>
<b>5</b> Ensuring psychological safety East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust	<b>21</b>
<b>6</b> Investing in adequate rest spaces Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust	<b>23</b>
Conclusion	<b>25</b>
Further reading	<b>26</b>
NHS Providers resources	<b>27</b>
References	<b>29</b>



Welcome to *Providers Deliver: enabling wellbeing within trusts*. This is the ninth report in the publication series where we celebrate and promote the work of NHS trusts and foundation trusts, as they respond to the challenges and opportunities facing the NHS and seek to improve care for patients and service users, in challenging times. This time we're looking at critically important initiatives to support staff wellbeing.

Since 2010, the demands of working in the NHS have been compounded by rising staff vacancies, squeezed funding, increases in patient demand, an underfunded social care system, and a health system designed around treatment rather than prevention. The Covid-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis and the longest period of industrial action in NHS history have exacerbated these pressures. Last year saw the highest staff turnover rates on record.

The importance of staff wellbeing is reflected in the current national policy context, with clear emphasis in the NHS People Plan (NHS England, 2020), Long Term Workforce Plan (NHS England, 2023a) and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Improvement Plan (NHS England, 2023b), all aiming to improve the operational environment through compassionate and inclusive workplace cultures. This is a welcome policy response from national bodies to worrying indicators such as NHS staff survey data, which shows that almost half of all staff often or always feel worn out at the end of their shift, over a third feel burnt out because of their work, and almost a third often think about leaving their organisation (NHS Staff Survey, 2023). We know too, from our work with our membership, that local action to nurture and develop inclusive, supportive and respectful working environments, remains a core priority for trust leaders.

The case studies in this report show trusts proactively responding to national data, local environments, and direct staff feedback, supporting colleagues by investing in interventions to support their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

People are the backbone of the NHS, and trust leaders know that caring for their workforce enables them to care for others. As NHS staff continue to tackle the extraordinary pressures they are facing and look to keep the service fit for the future, it is clear that a focus on wellbeing and experience at work will be key. With the right investment and focus, trusts will be able to ensure the NHS continues to be a great place to work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Julian Hartley'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Julian' being larger and more prominent than the last name 'Hartley'.

**Sir Julian Hartley**  
Chief Executive, NHS Providers

Support for staff wellbeing is a sound investment given it helps sustain a happy and healthy workforce and leads to better patient outcomes (Teoh et al, 2023).

The case studies in this report highlight some of the local initiatives trusts have deployed to support their staff through the current challenges of working in the NHS. They demonstrate the benefits, to both staff and employers, of creating working environments which actively promote wellbeing. The key themes explored include:

## Compassionate and inclusive cultures

Ensuring staff are respected and listened to is key to fostering a supportive environment that enables wellbeing. A compassionate and inclusive organisational culture not only means staff feel valued at work, but they are also more likely to feel satisfied in their jobs and committed to their organisations (Lilius et al, 2013). In this publication, we explore how Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust has implemented the 'Building a fairer Oxleas five step challenge' which is empowering staff to be agents of change and embed inclusive cultures within the trust.

By demonstrating openness and inclusivity, leaders improve psychological safety within their organisations. This is also key to ensuring effective speaking up processes. Research has found that organisations which specifically promote a healthy speaking up culture contribute to a more diverse and accepting workplace, supporting staff wellbeing and leading to better outcomes for patients (Okuyama et al, 2014). East of England Ambulance Service has worked to repair trust and improve confidence among staff that concerns will be responded to, resulting in a 900% increase in staff raising concerns.

## Enhancing physical environments

The physical environments in which employees spend their working hours are an important factor in job satisfaction and safety, impacting on motivation and morale. Features of a healthy workplace that allow staff to function well include access to an appropriate rest area, and an environment that is well maintained and equipped (Public Health England, 2015). To support staff wellbeing and productivity, investment in adequate break spaces that remain protected for staff-only use is vital. This can often be challenging within constrained NHS budgets and for services where staff are dispersed across multiple sites or locations, but many trusts are seeking to use their estate to best effect to support staff and patients. Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is one such example, and they spoke to us about the success of their dedicated staff health and wellbeing centre.

## Supporting mental wellbeing

Many risks to people's health and wellbeing at work are psychological. In 2022, 44.8% of NHS staff reported feeling unwell due to work-related stress (NHS Staff Survey, 2023), and stress, anxiety and depression continue to be the most common reasons for NHS staff

sickness absence (NHS Digital, 2023a). Supporting mental wellbeing is not only vital for staff to be able to remain in work, but research has shown employers obtain a return of £5 for every £1 invested in staff mental health, as a result of reduced turnover, sickness absence and other organisational costs (Deloitte, 2020). In line with this, Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has seen demonstrable benefits from its investment in staff access to mental health practitioners.

## A sense of belonging for all staff

Metrics across different protected characteristics show NHS staff currently have inequitable experiences at work. Workplace exclusion and unfair treatment impacts employee wellbeing and sense of belonging (Song X and Guo S, 2022). It is essential that all staff feel part of a team and organisation which is respectful and values their unique skills, experiences and perspectives. Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust recognised the importance of this and has addressed inequalities that staff face to notable effect.

## Measuring impact and making informed investments

To ensure wellbeing interventions are effective, they must be continually monitored, analysed, and adjusted as necessary to ensure they have the greatest possible impact for colleagues. An insight led approach is essential to meaningfully improving staff experience at work (Teoh et al, 2023). This is how Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust has approached its *Working well, living better* health and wellbeing operational plan, yielding a 4% reduction in long-term sickness absence between 2021 and 2022.

This report shows just some of the ways in which trusts are adapting to and providing for changing staff needs within a difficult operational context. Continual innovation in the face of challenges has always characterised the NHS, and this is true for its approach to staff wellbeing as well as other areas.

## The view from Dr Lade Smith CBE



President, Royal College of Psychiatrists

The NHS is wholly reliant on its workforce. Delivering free, universal and comprehensive healthcare is only possible because 1.4 million people – from porters to psychiatrists – choose to come to work. Without those workers, the NHS ceases to exist.

Despite this dependency, the NHS has sometimes overlooked the fundamental needs of its workforce. The latest NHS data shows approximately one in 20 workers is on sick leave, with many experiencing debilitating anxiety, stress and depression (NHS Digital, 2023a). Workforce shortages are endemic and entrenched, particularly in mental healthcare where one in five nursing and one in six medical posts in England are now vacant (NHS Digital, 2023b).

While the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (NHS England, 2023a) provides a framework for recruiting skilled workers over the long term, more action is needed to address retention in the short term.

Improving wellbeing is key to ensuring colleagues continue to come to work. For that reason, addressing wellbeing can no longer be considered a ‘nice to have’. The future of the NHS depends on it.

Equally, responsibility for wellbeing is not something that can be outsourced to others to worry about. We each have a role in ensuring colleagues are always treated with “respect, dignity, compassion and care” (Department of Health and Social Care, 2023, p3) as envisaged by the NHS Constitution. As the NHS Constitution reminds us, “patient safety, experience and outcomes are all improved when staff are valued, empowered and supported” (Department of Health and Social Care, 2023, p3) and it’s also the right thing to do.

As part of our efforts to improve the wellbeing of NHS workers, the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2023) recently published guidance to support healthcare employers to tackle covert and overt racism in the workplace. We know workplace inequity and racism in particular drive colleagues out of the NHS.

Our guidance was developed over two years in consultation with medical directors, doctors with lived experience of racism, patients and others. While the guidance focuses on tackling racism, the principles can be applied to improving workplace culture generally as well as staff wellbeing.

The College guidance identifies 15 actions to implement meaningful change at a strategic and systemic level across six domains: leadership and strategy, accountability, addressing concerns, equity of opportunity, organisational culture, specific sections of the workforce.

Our guidance highlights the importance of developing a robust strategy underpinned by measurable targets, creating an environment where staff feel safe to speak up and accountability for delivery assigned to a senior leader.

It provides clear and pragmatic actions for employers and a step-by-step guide to implement change. It shows employers how to recognise and respond to instances of discrimination on racial and ethnic grounds and signposts them to sources of support within and outside their own organisation. These are all themes that will resonate after reading this report.

This report provides practical examples of how some employers are actively improving staff wellbeing. It highlights the importance of targeted and informed interventions rather than tokenistic approaches. The emphasis on compassionate leadership, accountability and transparency echoes the findings of our work. It is vital that colleagues of every background feel psychologically safe at work and trust that their concerns will be listened to and acted on.

Improving the wellbeing of NHS workers requires a collective effort to ensure every colleague is treated with respect, dignity, compassion and care. This report shows how this can be achieved. It is a timely and welcome reminder of the importance of supporting staff to improve their wellbeing, so they feel valued, empowered and supported so patients can experience the best care and achieve the best outcomes.



# A robust health and wellbeing strategy

## Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust



### Themes >

- Data gathering and analysis
- Strategic decision making
- Sound investments

## Background

Supporting workforce wellbeing in the NHS has evolved significantly across the past 15 years, moving beyond perks and token gestures and towards developing and implementing comprehensive health and wellbeing strategies.

A robust health and wellbeing strategy is central to driving meaningful change at work. It helps create a supportive environment for staff to perform at their best, remain motivated and engaged, and to reduce costs associated with high turnover and sickness absence.

## Working well, living better

In April 2022, Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (MWL)<sup>1</sup> published their health and wellbeing operational plan. This followed acknowledgement, investment and commitment from the trust board and senior executive team to support and promote staff health and wellbeing. Developed around two models of support for staff (empowerment and self-help, and employer and leadership teams) and seven areas of wellbeing (spiritual, social, emotional, psychological, physical, environmental and financial), the plan supports staff to work together to provide a safe, healthy and well led culture; enabling them to thrive and bring their whole selves to work in order to provide outstanding patient led care.

The plan encompasses all aspects of MWL's approach to creating and sustaining a culture of wellbeing within the trust. This includes education and awareness programmes, training and support for managers, help in developing personal resilience, access to professional clinical support and various policies around stress and wellbeing, menopause and sickness absence. One example of positive change is the inclusion of a wellbeing section in all staff appraisals. Staff are asked whether they had an opportunity to talk about their wellbeing in the past year and are encouraged to include a wellbeing objective for the 12 months ahead.

<sup>1</sup> St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (STHK) joined together with the former Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust to become Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (MWL) in July 2023. Any reference to strategy and procedures prior to 1 July 2023, is representative of work undertaken by the team at STHK, which is now benefiting staff across the newly formed MWL Trust.

Adam Hodkinson, assistant director of health, work and wellbeing, said: "Establishing a health and wellbeing model within the trust has ensured a shared vision and objectives to support staff wellbeing, and has been crucial in driving forward focus and investment into workplace wellbeing strategies". Adam continued: "Our plan has also shifted understanding within the trust that it is everyone's responsibility to progress this agenda".

## Wellbeing dashboard

Using data insights to measure impact ensures organisations are aligning and updating their health and wellbeing objectives effectively as priorities evolve, and staff needs change. Monitoring data is essential to understanding staff wellbeing within an organisation, and can help shift focus from reactive interventions to preventative measures.

To go alongside the trust's health and wellbeing operational plan, a bi-annual report is produced to gather insight and empirical assessments of the impact the plan has had at an organisational and local level. The report is championed by the trust's wellbeing guardian who is a non-executive director and chair of the wellbeing community.

Data is gathered through the trust's staff survey, wellbeing hub surveys, sickness absence data, occupational health data, providers of services data, accidents and incidences data and assessments of staff mental health. Then, using NHS England's (NHSE) health and wellbeing framework audit tool, MWL measures improvement against each element of NHSE's Health and Wellbeing Framework to identify trends, key movements in performance and highlight priorities going into the next period.

Adam said: "Gathering data and undertaking robust analysis has been fundamental for us being able to identify where to focus health and wellbeing interventions, and what form they should take to support the diverse needs of our workforce".

MWL found that measuring the impact of actions undertaken meant interventions could be expanded, adapted or stopped if they were not having the desired effect. It has enabled support for staff to be tailored and better targeted and has informed wellbeing investments. For example, 46% of staff at MWL were reporting experiencing a muscular-skeletal problem for over 12 weeks, which was 5.2% above the national average. Through a targeted campaign and promotion on various intranet channels, the trust increased awareness of the physiotherapy service available to staff and has subsequently seen an increase in treatment referrals. As a result, in the first six months, the trust saw pain reduced by an average of 62% and mobility increase by an average of 22% for those who accessed the service.

## Reflections

MWL recognises its responsibility for the health and wellbeing of its staff and has implemented a holistic and informed approach to health and wellbeing that supports staff both during and outside of working hours.

The trust's wellbeing network, comprised of the trust's wellbeing champions, wellbeing guardian, people networks and people governance committees, has been an important catalyst for driving forward the organisational and cultural support for staff wellbeing. The return on investment highlighted in the wellbeing dashboard has ensured continued investment and commitment from the trust board.

As a result, MWL was the top performing trust in the Northwest and Cheshire and Merseyside regions for the 2022 NHS Staff survey indicator 'We are safe and healthy'. Additionally, the trust has seen long-term sickness absence reduced by more than 4% between 2021 and 2022, and there has been a 114% increase in staff accessing a session or event focused on supporting health and wellbeing.

# Supportive and inclusive cultures

## Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust



### Themes >

- Positive cultures
- Individual agency
- Supporting disabled staff

## Background

Approximately 23.6% of NHS staff identify as having a disability or long-term illness which affects their day to day lives (NHS Staff Survey, 2023). However, only 4.2% of the NHS workforce disclose a disability to their employer (NHS England, 2023d). Further, a recent survey found that 69% of disabled doctors feel they are part of a supportive team, compared to 74% of non-disabled doctors (General Medical Council, 2023).

It is essential staff feel safe and comfortable to identify as disabled within their organisations so employers can provide appropriate support and, more importantly, so staff are empowered at work. The ability for staff to be their authentic self and thrive in the workplace is a key lever to ensuring their job satisfaction and role fulfilment, supporting wellbeing, motivation and staff retention.

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust's strategy puts making the trust a 'great place to work' as one of its three core aims. As part of realising this ambition, Oxleas have implemented a range of inclusivity tools used to help staff feel safe and valued. These take into account, and some are specifically targeted at, different protected characteristics. As a result, Oxleas has seen an 11% improvement from their staff survey results in 2021 in staff agreeing the trust takes positive action on health and wellbeing (NHS Staff Survey, 2023), and disability disclosure rates are now above the national average at 5%.

Dr Ify Okocha, chief executive of Oxleas, said: "We have had a strong focus as an organisation to make Oxleas a great place to work and part of this has been to tackle issues of inequality. I am delighted to see that this work has made a difference to our colleagues, and we are committed to taking this work further and deeper across the organisation".

## Building a fairer Oxleas

The tools arose from extensive employee listening sessions and the opportunity for staff to submit anonymous feedback about their experience of working at the trust. Oxleas was then able to identify the improvements and innovations that would best enable disabled colleagues to give their best at work. One clear area of feedback was the lack of an inclusive culture in the trust.

The 'Building a fairer Oxleas five step challenge' is one initiative the trust implemented to address this. All staff are supported to complete the following actions of the challenge:

- 1 Facilitate a team discussion on any aspect of inclusion.
- 2 Have a discussion on any aspect of inclusion every quarter.
- 3 Photograph themselves with the five step challenge charter.
- 4 Implement something innovative within their team or in their area to improve inclusion.
- 5 Include an action on their development plan that is related to inclusion.

"Our Building a fairer Oxleas five step challenge has made a difference to the culture in teams and increased psychological safety which enables people to talk about issues. Alongside this cultural change, teams have taken actions to reduce inequalities both within their immediate teams and across the wide trust," said Rachel Evans, director of strategy and people. Rachel continued: "It is part of a wider programme that is making real change for colleagues and having a positive impact on staff satisfaction and staff retention."

Empowering staff to drive improvements within the organisation and supporting teams to be agents of change has improved employee confidence and trust within teams. One result of this has been an increase in staff declaring a disability at all levels of the trust. Oxleas now has data showing 28 colleagues at bands 8a and above are disabled, and 20% of the trust board have declared a disability. By comparison, over half of NHS trusts have only five or fewer disabled staff at bands 8a and above, and most trusts have no board members who have declared a disability.

## Supportive approach to reasonable adjustments

Disabled people, irrespective of the nature of their disability often share a common feeling of exclusion due to barriers at work that prevent them from gaining equal access to employment (Coleman et al, 2013). As such, Oxleas has developed a reasonable adjustment (RA) policy that is more supportive for all staff members with a disability or long-term condition.

The policy promotes open, sensitive and regular conversations between managers and staff to understand what individual team members need to thrive in the workplace. Feedback from staff is that this created an environment that is genuinely positive about disability. In addition, the latest Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) report identified that trusts with a RA policy perform better on WDES metrics than trusts that do not have one in place (NHS England, 2023d).

National-level NHS Staff Survey data shows disabled staff consistently feel more pressured, compared to non-disabled colleagues, to be at work even when they do not feel well. In response, as part of their RA policy, Oxleas has implemented a comprehensive disability leave policy to support colleagues who require time off for this reason. Oxleas' disability leave covers a range of absences from work, both planned and unplanned, for short and

prolonged periods. Having a disability leave policy is a powerful way to support disabled colleagues, showing they are valued by the organisation, and giving some of the flexibility needed to support their career aspirations.

To complement the RA policy, Oxleas implemented a central reasonable adjustment budget. Some staff were experiencing resistance from managers who were unsure about the extent of affordability for reasonable adjustments, and this delay in arranging adjustments was impacting disabled colleagues' experience at work. By centralising the budget, Oxleas has eased line managers' concerns about costs affecting their individual budgets and reduced the period between requests and arrangements of adjustments. The latest WDES data also found more staff reporting their employer has made adequate reasonable adjustments when adjustments are funded from central budgets (NHS England, 2023d). This is the most recent additional evidence for the benefits of a centralised approach to reasonable adjustments budgets.

## Reflections

The extensive support and commitment Oxleas employed to understand and work with the differences within teams, and celebrate diversity, has led to a workplace culture that is safe and compassionate. In recognition of this commitment at Oxleas, the trust won the award for the Sunday Times' top place to work for people with disabilities. Notably, it was Oxleas' own disabled and non-disabled staff who nominated the trust for this award.

Working with staff to create a truly inclusive workplace culture, effectively improving disability declaration rates, and creating a supportive reasonable adjustments policy, have built a greater sense of belonging among staff, supported staff wellbeing, and improved workplace experiences for disabled colleagues. This approach is having a positive impact on the trust's retention rates. Vacancy rates are 6% lower than peer trusts and turnover has reduced and stabilised.

# Access to professional psychological support

## Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust



### Themes >

- Evidence-based interventions
- Confidentiality
- Funding

## Background

Stress, anxiety and depression are the most common reasons for NHS staff sickness absences (NHS Digital, 2023a). Access to support for staff struggling with their mental health when carrying out extremely challenging roles is therefore vital. Providing such support also sends a clear message that the organisation values the mental wellbeing of its workforce.

Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (LPFT) has been running its in-house staff wellbeing service (SWS) for almost 13 years. The dedicated team consists of cognitive behavioural therapists, occupational therapists, counsellors, a psychological wellbeing practitioner, assistant psychologist, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist, and a physiotherapist. The SWS is separate from the trust's occupational health service and supports all aspects of staff health and wellbeing.

## Access to confidential psychological therapy

Healthcare professionals can face specific barriers to accessing mental health services, including concerns that by using services delivered by their colleagues they could be perceived as vulnerable (Zaman et al, 2022). To improve access, the trust funded a separate psychologically safe space for staff. Nikki Gibson, staff wellbeing service and hub lead, said: "Confidentiality is paramount to the service. It has its own dedicated building and clinical system which ensures all support provided is discreet and completely confidential."

Staff have access to psychological therapy such as one-to-one counselling, in-person and online cognitive behavioural therapy, as well as a consultant psychiatrist who is able to support with medication reviews and contribute to the management and treatment of mental health problems. Support is offered for both work and non-work related reasons.

## Employment support and domestic abuse pathway

Run by occupational therapists, the SWS's employment support pathway targets staff who are currently absent from work, or those who are struggling to maintain work. Upon receipt of a referral (either self-referral or management referral), SWS aims to offer initial support within five working days, followed by a further assessment from an occupational therapist.

Working in collaboration with the staff member, their manager, human resources, occupational health and other relevant professionals, workplace adjustments are provided to support the individual. Interventions can include a phased return to work or a phased remain at work, by reducing working hours, changing working patterns, redeployment and reviewing job design.

Staff can also contact the SWS if they are experiencing domestic abuse (or they are concerned someone else is) and would like support. The domestic abuse pathway helps staff to identify risks to personal safety and develops an action plan for the individual at risk which can include support from a range of professionals, including external agencies. Staff are empowered to take each step at their own pace, with no pressure or expectation to continue accessing support.

## Wellbeing workshops

The SWS offers a range of core and bespoke wellbeing workshops open to all staff. Core workshops focus on improving self-esteem and sleep, reducing burnout and managing moral injury, understanding emotions, becoming more assertive, and managing menopause. The bespoke workshops offer team level support for unique issues.

The workshops increase understanding and awareness of issues related to wellbeing and equip staff with tools to support themselves and their team colleagues.

The trust has received a range of feedback about the SWS and the services it offers, one staff member said: "The SWS and hub do an amazing job. Supportive, proactive and offering lots of options for me to support myself as well as receiving support from them 1:1 or in groups". Another said: "Excellent service. Our staff wellbeing service offer is a motivator to stay within this trust as it's one of the best services I've accessed."

## Reflections

99% of all staff who accessed the support offered through the SWS said it's had a positive impact on their wellbeing, it helped them do their job better and supported them to stay in work or get back to work more quickly. One staff member said: "The practical parts I found most helpful were support with planning for the short-term, to recognise the importance of asking for changes in the here-and-now at work and support for communicating boundaries." Further, 70% of staff said they would recommend LPFT as a place to work – almost 10% above the national average (NHS Staff Survey, 2023).

LPFT is convinced that workplaces which actively promote and support colleagues' mental health secure benefits for themselves and their employees. Offering a wellbeing service and standing by staff when they are experiencing a mental health problem is not only about retaining a valuable staff member, but also highlights the level of commitment the organisation has to colleagues.



Access to clinically led support services is vital to anyone experiencing a mental health problem. NHS staff mental health and wellbeing hubs were established during the Covid-19 pandemic to support staff struggling with their mental health, however, funding is due to end in March 2024 and many hubs have had to close as a result. With a third of NHS staff reporting burnout because of their work (NHS Staff Survey, 2023) and over a quarter of doctors reporting a mental health diagnosis at some point in their life (British Medical Association, 2019), it is more pressing than ever to ensure the NHS workforce has access to support services within their trust.

# Creating a sense of belonging

## Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust



### Themes >

- Race equality
- Cultural intelligence
- Supporting internationally educated staff

## Background

Internationally educated staff play a vital role in the composition, skills, and experience of the NHS workforce. Despite this, data has consistently shown that they experience inequities in the workplace. The General Medical Council (2023) found that more international medical graduates feel they are not part of a supportive team (35%) compared to UK graduates (22%), and the Nursing and Midwifery Council (2022) found that their registrants who have qualified overseas or trained outside of the UK have an increased risk of referral to regulatory processes.

Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (CFT) recognises the importance of creating a sense of belonging through an inclusive and compassionate environment for its staff and investing in specific support for an increasingly diverse workforce. The trust's international nursing recruitment programme ensures these colleagues are well supported, improving their wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Debbie Richards, chief executive of CFT, said: "The health and wellbeing of staff is a priority at CFT. Addressing inequalities and embracing diversity is central to fostering an organisational culture which positively impacts all staff, their workplace experience and their wellbeing."

## Comprehensive support for internationally educated staff

By region, the South West has the least diverse workforce in the NHS across all trusts, with only 12.8% of staff from an ethnic minority, compared to the most diverse region (London) at 49.9% (NHS England, 2023c). With over 4,000 staff members at CFT, 97% of those identify as white (NHS Staff Survey, 2023). Due to these figures, and the increasing national focus to address inequalities faced by staff, the board at CFT is acutely aware of the importance of supporting their ethnic minority staff and internationally educated workforce (IEW).

Overseas recruitment is complex, and internationally educated staff face many challenges in joining and integrating into the workforce. Staff at CFT who joined from overseas were no exception and faced challenges such as a sense of loneliness due to being far away from the support of loved ones, language complexities and difficulties with cultural adaptation – particularly due to the trust covering a more rural area of the country. Consequently, despite the positive opportunities and professional development that working in the NHS

has to offer, the challenges of adjustment, and at times differential negative treatment, was having a significant impact on the sense of belonging of the IEW at the trust and their wellbeing.

CFT has deployed a comprehensive international nursing recruitment programme, with the aim of supporting nurses who are joining the trust from overseas by providing high quality pastoral care. The trust has employed an international recruitment support officer – a full time role dedicated to supporting the trust’s internationally educated nurses throughout their recruitment journey, from pre-employment to deployment as UK-registered nurses. As well as providing emotional support and supervision for new staff to allow for effective integration into the trust and the community, the trusts’ internationally recruited nurses have access to comprehensive practical support, such as accommodation for three months upon arrival and assistance with securing ongoing accommodation.

Alongside this, managers undertake training to ensure they have in-depth knowledge and skills to recognise various forms of discrimination and how to address them to support their IEW. For example, the workforce transformation team devised ‘This Is Us’, a programme to develop inclusive and compassionate leaders within the trust. Alongside this, ‘Cultural Capability’ workshops for staff explore unconscious bias, cultural judgement, prejudice, discrimination and power structures and asks staff to explore their own attitudes and beliefs and the inclusive teams training. Combined, these elements ensure the wider workforce are well-placed to integrate and learn from their IEW colleagues.

CFT’s commitment to helping their IEW by working to provide a culturally compassionate environment allows staff to thrive as they navigate their new role and life in the UK, one staff member said: “When I arrived it was a lot of new faces, a new environment and a lot of things to get used to but my support officer was of great help by showing me around the community, ensuring I was comfortable and helping me to sort documents etc. My recruitment manager along with my OSCE trainer made me feel even more welcomed here. The induction trainings were insightful and prepared me for some of the skills I was expected to perform on the wards. Even though there were differences in the nursing skills here compared to my home country I was able to easily adjust.”

Notably, from August 2022 to August 2023, turnover of the trust’s IEW through the international nursing recruitment programme was 2.7%.

## Reflections

Effectively integrating internationally educated staff at CFT and supporting them to feel part of a team has led to more effective collaboration, better communication and more confidence in team working. Developing an inclusive culture at CFT has led to a 7% increase from 2021 to 2022 in staff agreeing the trust proactively supports their wellbeing, and contrasting to national trends, between 2021 and 2022 there was a 5% decrease in staff considering leaving the trust (NHS Staff Survey, 2023).

International recruitment plays a significant role within the NHS and is an important part of workforce planning. Supporting this critical cohort of staff and ensuring they have an equitable, positive workplace experience and career by ensuring they feel a sense of belonging and value is essential to their wellbeing, workplace satisfaction and to the delivery of high-quality patient care. At CFT, this has been enabled by funding to install dedicated support and full board acknowledgement and endorsement of staff wellbeing as an organisational priority.

NHS Providers' *Guide to supporting your internationally educated workforce*<sup>2</sup> provides practical advice and examples.

NHS Providers' Race Equality programme<sup>3</sup> helps to embed race equality as a core part of the board's business by encouraging hearts and minds change and building their confidence and capability to implement and embed accountability. The programme focuses on sharing research, evidence based interventions and lived experiences through a range of events<sup>4</sup> and resources.<sup>5</sup>

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2 <https://nhsproviders.org/a-guide-to-supporting-your-internationally-educated-workforce/creating-a-sense-of-belonging>

3 <https://nhsproviders.org/development-offer/race-equality>

4 <https://nhsproviders.org/development-offer/race-equality/events>

5 <https://nhsproviders.org/development-offer/race-equality/resources>

# Ensuring psychological safety

## East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust



### Themes >

- Speaking up
- Building trust
- Transparency and accountability

## Background

The challenges of working in the ambulance sector are well known. Practicing emergency care often involves exposure to stressful environments, alongside difficult and demanding working conditions. In the most recent NHS Staff Survey (2023) just over half (51.6%) of ambulance trust workers said they felt safe to speak up about anything that concerned them in their organisation, compared to a national average of 63.5%.

East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST) is no exception to the rule and has faced cultural issues which previously discouraged staff from speaking out. Trust chief executive Tom Abell explains: "Staff often felt cases were handled poorly with issues not acted upon, and this acted as a barrier to staff voicing their concerns, and in turn creating an open culture. We have worked hard to shift the culture to one of honesty, transparency and inclusivity."

## Taking ownership to build trust

To repair trust among staff, Tom has worked to demonstrate his ownership of problems and been honest and explicit about cultural issues within EEAST. Despite the potential reputational and regulatory risks of this approach, the trust board and executive team were primarily focused on the potential irreparable negative consequences for staff of not tackling the challenges head-on.

As a first step in 2021, an internal engagement campaign around the culture and approach to speaking up highlighted some of the bureaucratic issues and challenges the trust faced, such as timely employee relations case handling and lengthy suspension time. As a result, the trust initially focused on core HR systems and processes, ensuring they worked effectively in order to build staff confidence. In time, staff were able to raise concerns anonymously, receive timely support to progress concerns, and if there was any indication a member of staff was being disadvantaged for flagging a concern, it was to be escalated to the board. This initially resulted in a 900% increase in the first quarter in staff raising concerns through the trust's Freedom to Speak Up Guardians scheme once the revised Freedom to Speak Up offer was in place.

A willingness from the very top of the organisation to listen to staff, explore problems and create time and space to work through difficult issues has developed a culture of ownership and accountability. This in turn is improving staff confidence in that the trust is taking action to ensure truly meaningful change and make EEAST a great place to work

with improved staff engagement. As a result, staff turnover at the trust has decreased from a peak of 14% in 2020 to 8% in 2022, a significant drop, and markedly below the national turnover rate of 12.1% for all trusts (NHS Digital, 2023c).

## Proactive engagement

EEAST hold fortnightly open Q&A sessions with a member from the senior executive team to enable an open exchange regarding any issues staff wish to raise. Although this can sometimes mean responding to difficult questions or even having heated discussions, it has helped embed a culture of transparency within the trust. In addition, Tom dedicates every Friday to visiting staff in different parts of the trust's region, answering concerns and questions directly from staff, and following up on action taken to address issues raised.

Increasing time spent to proactively engage with staff and ensuring two-way feedback between workforce colleagues and the senior executive team has demonstrated the commitment of the trust to build a truly open and honest culture. Tom said: "This has fostered a sense of unity within the trust, where staff feel able to voice their ideas, challenges, and concerns, without fear of negative consequences or overall inaction."

As a result of this improved culture, the staff attrition rate has turned around, so that between 2021 and 2022 there was more than a 30% drop in staff leaving the trust in the same year they joined.

## Reflections

Fostering an environment where staff are actively encouraged to speak up with their ideas, questions and challenges creates a sense of belonging, and is key to improving staff wellbeing and workplace culture as a whole. Confidence that senior leaders will truly listen and act on concerns helps foster a safe, transparent environment for staff to thrive in and enhances satisfaction within the workplace.

# Investing in adequate rest spaces

## Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust



### Themes >

- Funding
- Workplace environment
- Dedicated rest area

## Background

The 2022 NHS Staff Survey found over 21% of respondents often or always felt every working hour is tiring for them (NHS Staff Survey, 2023) and a BMA survey, the same year, found 38% of doctors said the lack of available rest space was having a 'negative' or 'significantly negative' impact on their wellbeing at work (British Medical Association, 2022). Adequate rest areas are an effective way to support the wellbeing of frontline staff and their ability to deliver high quality patient care, but constraints on space and funding in trusts mean this is all too often difficult to ensure.

In October 2022, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust (RBFT) opened a dedicated staff health and wellbeing centre, the Oasis, separate from the buildings delivering patient care. Soon after its opening, we spoke to RBFT about this dedicated area and the trust's ambition to enable staff to rest and recharge during their working day and improve their wellbeing (NHS Providers, 2022). Checking back in with them a year later, the Oasis has delivered clear benefits for its staff.

However, it has only been possible due to the combination of a significant private donation, capital investment from the trust itself and a close working partnership with the Royal Berks Charity. This highlights the importance of appropriate dedicated capital funding to enable good physical working environments – something which NHS Providers has long noted is lacking at national level (NHS Providers, 2023).

## Appropriate rest spaces

RBFT is one of the first trusts in the country to provide a bespoke health and wellbeing centre for its staff. One year after opening, the centre has averaged 2,800 visits per month, with roughly half of all staff visiting the building at least once, and the benefits for wellbeing are clear.

The trust has seen a 6% improvement in staff feeling supported by the trust and they are now 12% above the national average for all acute trusts for staff agreeing that positive action has been taken on their health and wellbeing (NHS Staff Survey, 2023).

The Oasis has also had a direct impact on staff morale, one staff member said: "The ability to take advantage of the facilities at the Oasis during my break helps me feel valued and supported as a member of RBFT staff. Taking my break in a non-clinical, patient-free area helps me re-set and relax and puts me in a more positive frame of mind for the rest of my shift".

This shows how investment to ensure break spaces for staff are functional and remain protected for staff-only use can improve wellbeing and productivity of staff and thereby have a positive impact on patient care.

## Access to occupational health

Additionally, in partnership with Reading Borough Council and the BOB Integrated Stroke Delivery Network, the trust recognised the difficulties staff were having in being able to access health check services outside of work. The Royal College of Physicians (2015) highlight that due to the physical demands of working in a healthcare environment, NHS staff are more likely to incur a work-related illness or injury than comparative staff in other sectors. Taking this into account, the partnership agreed to invest in a project to provide free staff health checks to staff over 40yrs old (in line with the NHS health checks), from the Oasis. Within 72 hours of its launch all 300 initial appointments were booked. To date over 740 staff members have had a health check (around a quarter of all eligible staff), and 95% of staff who have accessed the service said they found the health check beneficial. Of those seen, 500 members of staff have been advised to see their GP to discuss health issues identified which in turn should help those staff improve their general health and reduce the risk of future ill health.

## Reflections

The way funding to maintain and improve workplaces for NHS staff has fallen is a real concern. Providing facilities for the workforce that are quiet, non-clinical and designed to support the physical, emotional and mental health of staff is a clear demonstration that they are valued and supported to carry out their roles to the best of their ability.

The physical presence of RBFT's Oasis staff health and wellbeing centre sends a clear and visible message to staff that the trust executive team and leaders are invested in the health and wellbeing of their staff. Offering free health checks onsite has also demonstrated the trust's commitment to supporting staff's physical health and preventing long-term sickness. However, the undeniable positive impacts of the wellbeing centre are difficult for other trusts to replicate in their entirety without the necessary capital funding, which for a long time has been the key limiting factor in trust's ability to improve rest spaces and facilities for staff.

The benefits of the centre have been undeniable, not only on morale indicators and an improved sense of staff feeling valued by the trust, but also on the physical and mental health of staff – the staff feedback video<sup>6</sup> highlights the positive impact the Oasis has had on staff morale and wellbeing. The Oasis has become a hub for all health and wellbeing activity and its success acts as a source of pride for trust staff.

6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0KLehJULRM>



## Conclusion

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There is an urgent need for interventions and support for the NHS workforce, to address concerning data on staff wellbeing, and to ensure high quality patient care. While vacancy rates and workload demands across the NHS will require action by government and national NHS bodies to resolve sustainably, the case studies in this report highlight how local, proactive measures can help to improve staff wellbeing and retention.

The key enablers to the initiatives featured in this report include access to adequate funding, senior leadership understanding and buy in, and continuous impact monitoring and evaluation for interventions. An overall understanding that staff wellbeing is everybody's business, and vital to the success of organisations, is also imperative.

The benefits to employers proactively enabling wellbeing are undeniable. With staff working in a healthier and more inclusive culture, organisations benefit from better employee morale and engagement. As trusts are continually challenged to deliver more activity within existing resources, and to maximise productivity without compromising on patient care, supporting staff and their wellbeing will be essential in achieving the asks of the NHS.

## Further reading

<b>NHS People Plan</b>	NHS England <a href="https://www.england.nhs.uk/ournhspeople/">https://www.england.nhs.uk/ournhspeople/</a>
<b>NHS equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) Improvement Plan</b>	NHS England <a href="https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-edi-improvement-plan/">https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-edi-improvement-plan/</a>
<b>NHS Long Term Workforce Plan</b>	NHS England <a href="https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan/">https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan/</a>
<b>NHS health and wellbeing framework</b>	NHS England <a href="https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-health-and-wellbeing-framework/">https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-health-and-wellbeing-framework/</a>
<b>Looking after your team's health and wellbeing guide</b>	NHS England <a href="https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/looking-after-your-teams-health-and-wellbeing-guide/#introduction-and-getting-started">https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/looking-after-your-teams-health-and-wellbeing-guide/#introduction-and-getting-started</a>
<b>NHS England retention hub</b>	NHS England <a href="https://www.england.nhs.uk/looking-after-our-people/">https://www.england.nhs.uk/looking-after-our-people/</a>
<b>Health and social care review: leadership for a collaborative and inclusive future</b>	GOV.UK <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-social-care-review-leadership-for-a-collaborative-and-inclusive-future">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-social-care-review-leadership-for-a-collaborative-and-inclusive-future</a>
<b>Tackling racism in the workplace</b>	Royal College of Psychiatrists <a href="https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/act-against-racism/tackling-racism-in-the-workplace.pdf?sfvrsn=d926586f_2">https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/act-against-racism/tackling-racism-in-the-workplace.pdf?sfvrsn=d926586f_2</a>

<b>NHS England equality, diversity and inclusion improvement plan</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/next-day-briefing-nhs-england-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-improvement-plan">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/next-day-briefing-nhs-england-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-improvement-plan</a>
<b>NHS Long-term Workforce Plan</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-nhs-long-term-workforce-plan">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-nhs-long-term-workforce-plan</a>
<b>A guide to supporting your internationally educated workforce</b>	Report <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/a-guide-to-supporting-your-internationally-educated-workforce/creating-a-sense-of-belonging">https://nhsproviders.org/a-guide-to-supporting-your-internationally-educated-workforce/creating-a-sense-of-belonging</a>
<b>Wellbeing and inclusion: How ambulance trusts are seeking improvements for staff</b>	Long read <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/wellbeing-and-inclusion">https://nhsproviders.org/wellbeing-and-inclusion</a>
<b>Stretched to the limit: Tackling the NHS productivity challenge</b>	Report <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/stretched-to-the-limit">https://nhsproviders.org/stretched-to-the-limit</a>
<b>No more sticking plasters: Repairing and transforming the NHS estate</b>	Report <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/no-more-sticking-plasters">https://nhsproviders.org/no-more-sticking-plasters</a>
<b>Make the mental health of NHS staff a priority</b>	Blog <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/make-the-mental-health-of-nhs-staff-a-priority">https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/make-the-mental-health-of-nhs-staff-a-priority</a>
<b>Joint letter to the secretary of state for health and social care to extend mental health and wellbeing hub funding</b>	Letter <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/letters/joint-letter-to-the-secretary-of-state-for-health-and-social-care-to-extend-mental-health-and-wellbeing-hub-funding">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/letters/joint-letter-to-the-secretary-of-state-for-health-and-social-care-to-extend-mental-health-and-wellbeing-hub-funding</a>
<b>NHS industrial action: The impact on patients, staff and performance</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/nhs-industrial-action-the-impact-on-patients-staff-and-performance">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/nhs-industrial-action-the-impact-on-patients-staff-and-performance</a>
<b>Recruiting, retaining and sustaining the NHS workforce</b>	Report <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/providers-deliver-recruiting-retaining-and-sustaining-the-nhs-workforce">https://nhsproviders.org/providers-deliver-recruiting-retaining-and-sustaining-the-nhs-workforce</a>
<b>Caring for the carers: We need to talk about tackling staff suicide</b>	Blog <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/caring-for-the-carers-we-need-to-talk-about-tackling-staff-suicide">https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/caring-for-the-carers-we-need-to-talk-about-tackling-staff-suicide</a>
<b>NHS People Plan</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-nhs-people-plan-202021">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-nhs-people-plan-202021</a>
<b>2022 Workforce race equality standard</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-workforce-race-equality-standard-wres">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-workforce-race-equality-standard-wres</a>

<b>2022 Workforce disability equality standard</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/next-day-briefing-2022-workforce-disability-equality-standard-wdes-report">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/next-day-briefing-2022-workforce-disability-equality-standard-wdes-report</a>
<b>2022 NHS staff survey results</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-nhs-staff-survey-results-2022">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-nhs-staff-survey-results-2022</a>
<b>Rising living costs: the impact on NHS, staff and patients</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/rising-living-costs-the-impact-on-nhs-staff-and-patients">https://nhsproviders.org/rising-living-costs-the-impact-on-nhs-staff-and-patients</a>
<b>Community Network: The staffing challenges facing community health services and how we can address them</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/community-network-the-staffing-challenges-facing-community-health-services-and-how-we-can-address-them">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/community-network-the-staffing-challenges-facing-community-health-services-and-how-we-can-address-them</a>
<b>How trusts are supporting disabled and neurodivergent staff</b>	Blog <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/how-trusts-are-supporting-disabled-and-neurodivergent-staff">https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/how-trusts-are-supporting-disabled-and-neurodivergent-staff</a>
<b>The NHS must be more ambitious in combating inequalities faced by disabled staff</b>	Blog <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/the-nhs-must-be-more-ambitious-in-combating-inequalities-faced-by-disabled-staff">https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/the-nhs-must-be-more-ambitious-in-combating-inequalities-faced-by-disabled-staff</a>
<b>Leadership for a collaborative and inclusive future</b>	Briefing <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-leadership-for-a-collaborative-and-inclusive-future-general-sir-gordon-messenger-and-dame-linda-pollard">https://nhsproviders.org/resources/briefings/on-the-day-briefing-leadership-for-a-collaborative-and-inclusive-future-general-sir-gordon-messenger-and-dame-linda-pollard</a>
<b>Opening up to the power of speaking up</b>	Blog <a href="https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/opening-up-to-the-power-of-speaking-up">https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/blogs/opening-up-to-the-power-of-speaking-up</a>

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## Interactive version

This report is also available in a digitally interactive format at:  
[www.nhsproviders.org/providers-deliver-enabling-wellbeing-within-trusts](https://www.nhsproviders.org/providers-deliver-enabling-wellbeing-within-trusts)



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NHS Providers has all trusts in England in voluntary membership, collectively accounting for £115bn of annual expenditure and employing 1.4 million people.



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