

The opportunity to engage: work experience and our future workforce

In 2007, NHS Careers launched *Step into the NHS* – a programme of activity targeting 14–19-year-olds that aims to promote the broad range of careers in the NHS and to encourage individuals to think about joining the NHS team. NHS Careers has also produced a toolkit, *Enabling work experience in the NHS*, for employers planning to start or increase work experience programmes.

Trusts will find these resources useful in building their own relationships with local schools and colleges. Recruitment and workforce planning is primarily a local issue for each trust. This *Briefing* explains why the onus is on each trust to seize the opportunity that work experience programmes provide.

Key facts

- A key challenge for NHS employers is to maintain staffing levels in the face of increased numbers of staff reaching retiring age, a finite pool of school and college leavers and increased choice and competition for young people from other sectors.
- Work experience is an important, affordable investment in the quality of the future workforce. It can demonstrate the huge range of careers associated with healthcare, improve diversity by encouraging under-represented groups to look at these careers and reduce drop-out rates from healthcare training.
- Patient care and confidentiality are not normally obstacles to young people's participation in a wide range of tasks in hospitals and clinics.
- Against the background of a changing school curriculum that focuses on work-preparedness and 'employability skills', work experience offers NHS trusts the opportunity to take the lead in recruiting graduates and school-leavers.

Why work experience counts

The NHS has a vested interest in the aspirations and work-preparedness of school and college students. Every year, around 35,000 places on healthcare professional courses are taken up by people who are the clinical workforce of the future. Many of these join the courses as school leavers.

There are only about 600,000 school leavers each year, and it is therefore an ambitious target to attract 5 per cent of this annual cohort into clinical training. In addition, there are similar

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numbers of individuals recruited each year into non-clinical roles. The reliance of the NHS on the career choices being made by school leavers is evident. The capabilities and attitudes to work of these young people will have a decisive effect on the quality of care that the NHS is able to offer in the future.

Employers in the private and other public sectors are also vying to attract young people and many are investing heavily in attracting the brightest and the best.

Research by NHS Careers gives an insight into the challenges of communicating with these individuals. They are marketing aware and media savvy. Their opinions of the NHS tend to be based on media stories and TV dramas such as *Casualty* and *Holby City*: a service staffed mainly by doctors and nurses who appear to be over-worked, under-resourced and poorly-paid.

However, their attitudes are also heavily influenced by any personal contact and experience they have with NHS organisations, either in a careers or personal capacity. Along with other initiatives to increase awareness, work experience programmes enable NHS employers to engage directly with young people.

Work experience is not the only

solution to the recruitment pressures being created by the UK's changing demographics; but it is a low-cost and direct channel of communication with this vital target group.

What work experience can achieve

NHS organisations need staff who can deliver the work required of them. Work experience gives participants the skills and abilities needed for the work environment. It gives them an understanding of the choices available to them. Work experience is a useful recruiting tool and an investment in the quality and work-preparedness of the future workforce.

Good work experience programmes quickly repay the marginal costs and resources they require to set up. It therefore makes good business sense for NHS trusts to recognise this and put strategies in place to improve and increase the opportunities they offer.

Work experience programmes can:

- demonstrate the huge range of careers associated with healthcare, reveal options that a young person may not previously have considered or confirm a career choice that they have already made

Positive impact on students

Interim results from a national survey conducted by the National Education Business Partnership Network (NEBPN) highlight the positive impact that work experience has on students:

- 84 per cent believe they have developed new skills that employers value (customer awareness, IT etc)
 - 74 per cent believe their work placement has made them clearer about what they want to do in their future education and career
 - 78 per cent said they found their work experience very or mostly enjoyable
 - 89 per cent were either very or quite satisfied with their work experience.
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- help fulfil each employer's corporate social responsibility strategy in engaging with the local community – a particularly relevant issue for existing and would-be foundation trusts
 - improve diversity by encouraging under-represented groups to look at careers in the NHS
 - connect the local NHS more

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closely with local schools

- help produce more informed patients as well as more aware future staff through greater exposure to how healthcare works
- reduce drop-out rates from healthcare training because students have a better understanding of the work involved
- link the school curriculum more closely with the world of work
- help develop new skills among staff who supervise students on placement.

Support for trusts setting up work experience programmes is available from NHS Employers at www.nhsemployers.org/workexperience

'What's the problem?' – the changing demographic of our workforce

Each year, approximately 600,000 students leave school or college. Most will get a job or enter a further course of learning and training. This figure is fairly steady, although it may dip if the school leaving age rises.

The real change is coming at the other end of the working age spectrum as the baby boomers

Catching them early

The time lag between pre-GCSE work experience and university entry at age 18 or 19 can make it difficult to track what happens to young people who have been on NHS placements. However in a survey of previous work experience students conducted by United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust, 66 per cent of those who responded had progressed into a clinical training course.

A similar survey at Southampton University Hospitals Trust showed that – one year after their placements – over 75 per cent of respondents intended to go on to a healthcare-related course.

approach retirement. Among a total working population of 29 million people, 45–59-year-olds constitute the largest age group. As they reach retirement age, there will be difficulty in maintaining staffing levels to provide continuity of service.

The scenario for NHS employers over the next few years is challenging:

- a finite – and possibly diminishing – pool of school

and college leavers to recruit from

- increased numbers of staff reaching retiring age
- increased choice and competition for young people from other sectors faced with the same demographic problems as the NHS
- loss of skilled staff and the need to replace them with people who are better prepared for work and keen to acquire new skills.

Structural labour shortages may be addressed in variety of ways:

- better targeted staff development
- new working structures
- incentives for older staff to stay longer
- attracting more older people into the workforce.

The NHS must continue to compete for and secure a healthy supply of school and college leavers. Other options such as international recruitment are controversial and more unpredictable in terms of long-term planning. Failure to secure sufficient numbers of appropriately skilled staff may increase reliance on expensive temporary staff, and impact on quality of care.

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Becoming an employer of choice – the communications challenge

An internet poll conducted by NHS Careers in 2007 shows how much ground the NHS has still to make up if it is to be considered an employer of choice among today's young people.

Among 1,090 14–19-year-olds in England:

- 82 per cent had never spoken to anyone associated with the NHS about careers available within the service
- 41 per cent had never considered working in the NHS.

More positively, 33 per cent said they would consider working in the NHS but would first want to know more about the options.

It is essential that NHS trusts engage at a local level with schools to make young people more aware of what they offer as employers.

Work experience, along with a package of other schools-related activities, is an important tool in helping build this awareness.

Preparing for work – education and skills

In December 2006, the Leitch Review of Skills was published. It showed how important it is for the UK to improve its skills base. It pointed to particular deficits in scientific skills, and the alarming number of people (five million) who are not functionally literate.

The NHS compares well with other sectors. A much higher proportion of NHS staff are qualified to degree or diploma level than the national average. Staff are exposed to further training and development opportunities to refresh existing skills and develop new skills. The task for NHS employers is to continue to secure a sufficient supply of new entrants into healthcare-related activity.

The Government has made a commitment to keep young people in education or training until the age of 19, and linked this policy to changes in the school curriculum designed to increase 'employability' skills. Work experience will be an important part of this approach.

This presents a huge opportunity to NHS employers. There is already in place a wide range of education and training provision – from degree courses to apprenticeships and cadet schemes – that fulfil the criteria

for building a more highly-skilled workforce. The focus on encouraging economically and socially valuable skills has also led to the introduction of ten new work-related qualifications, developed in association with employers. The diplomas offer alternative routes of learning to 14–19-year-olds whose needs are not met by more 'academic' courses. These courses will require NHS trusts to engage actively with local schools and colleges.

The Society, Health and Development (SHD) Diploma, to be launched in September 2008, will have specific relevance to NHS jobs and will demand the involvement of employers and their willingness to provide work experience opportunities – often over longer periods than the one or two weeks that is typical at present. This will enable diploma students to enter higher education or employment with a strong awareness of the skills and knowledge needed in the world of work.

For more information on the SHD diploma visit <http://diploma.skillsforhealth.org.uk/page>

Busting some myths

There are various 'myths' associated with work experience that are offered as obstacles to creating opportunities in

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hospitals and clinics. The most often cited are:

- that all students will require Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks
- that there are unacceptable risks to health and safety, and patient care
- that patient confidentiality will be compromised
- that there are no clinical tasks

that students can participate in. Except in some quite special cases, none of these myths are true. Students under 18 on supervised work experience programmes will not usually need CRB checks. Risk assessments should be carried out before young people are placed in clinical or other work situations, but these will rarely show up any significant

problems. Work experience students will also be covered by an employer's own liability insurance or through the school.

Whilst patient confidentiality and care is always paramount, these are not normally issues that prohibit any young people from participating safely in a wide range of tasks, given the patient's consent. Acute trusts may want to compile their own

Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery and City of Lincoln Community College

Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery is one of Lincoln's largest employers. 2,000 people work for the company, which is a world leader in the design and manufacture of gas turbines. The company has been running work experience programmes for more than 20 years as part of a broader policy of building close links with local schools. The objective is to combat negative stereotypes of manufacturing, and promote engineering as an attractive career option.

The City of Lincoln Community College is a school with which Siemens has nurtured close links. Besides work experience for students, teacher placements are arranged to provide teachers with a work-based context for the school science curriculum. Siemens engineers also visit the school to participate in lessons that prepare students for their work experience placements.

The company offers around 70 placements a year for 14–16-year-olds. Most are five-day programmes where students are assigned to a team and engage in real work tasks. The philosophy is that they should be treated as far as possible like any employee in terms of punctuality, self-discipline and attitude to work. Almost universally, the students respond positively to being part of a team and quickly take ownership of the work they are asked to do.

Work experience and broader school liaison are the overall responsibility of the company's collaborative projects officer, but also involve other Siemens staff who supervise the students. This opportunity to develop and practise their leadership and communication skills has often given these staff the confidence to move their own careers forward.

The results of the programme have been tangible. About 20 per cent of the intake of new apprentices each year have been on work experience with the company. Applications for apprenticeships have increased by almost 40 per cent in recent years, attributed largely to the company's investment in education links.

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Resourcing work experience

Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust runs an active work experience programme which, in the last three years, has doubled its number of placements to almost 800 a year. The programme is organised by a voluntary services and work experience manager who is also responsible for the hundreds of volunteers working within the hospitals every day, and for the interpreters' service. She is assisted by a work experience administrator and some part-time support. Total budget allocated to the department is £74,000 which covers everything from staff costs and volunteer expenses to stationery.

The placements form part of a wider relationship with local schools and colleges that has the aim of increasing awareness of how a hospital runs and the wide range of careers involved: for example, in healthcare science. It includes tours for teachers and careers advisers, visits by staff to schools and 'working lunches' when up to 60 students come in for a half-day to see at first hand how a hospital works. The department's activity is seen as making an important contribution to building the profile of the trust as an employer and engaging the community in the life of their local hospital.

lists of suitable clinical tasks for ward settings. Primary care trusts can also create placements with a range of staff, including out in the community.

Seizing the opportunity

Work experience is an important, affordable investment in the quality of the future workforce. Against the background of the changing school curriculum and greater emphasis on work-preparedness of students, it offers NHS trusts the opportunity to take the lead against other employers in the competition

to attract school-leavers and graduates into employment.

Implementing good work experience programmes requires the backing and active support of senior management, prompted from board level. Some of the key issues to address are shown below:

- To fulfil your responsibility as a major local employer – and to make a relatively low cost/high value investment in the quality of your future work force – a board member should be charged with ensuring the

active development of work experience programmes within the trust.

- Responsibility for arranging programmes should be located within a central function – typically HR, training and development or volunteer services. This central function can stimulate activity and provide administrative support and advice to any department that wants to offer a programme.
- Assistance with planning and paperwork is available from organisations who act on behalf of schools in finding work experience placements: local education and business partnerships, Trident Edexcel, Connexions and others. These should be approached to explore how new opportunities can best be developed.
- The resource and cost committed to work experience programmes should be agreed. Where trusts run year-round programmes receiving 300 or more students each year, this can become a full-time job for one person. Less ambitious programmes may still need the support of a dedicated member of staff, perhaps as part of a wider schools liaison policy or volunteer management role. However, there are plenty of examples of staff who combine organising

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work experience along with other responsibilities.

- Work experience programmes should look to improve the 'employability' of students, nurturing a positive attitude to work and developing some or all of these key attributes: self management, team working, problem solving, application of IT, application of numeracy, communication and literacy and customer/business awareness.
- Closer relationships with schools should look to be built through 'ambassador' visits, open days and attending local careers exhibitions.

Further information

A practical toolkit from NHS Careers:

www.nhsemployers.org/workexperience

NHS Careers:

www.nhscareers.nhs.uk

Step into the NHS:

www.stepintothens.nhs.uk

Department for Children, Schools and Families:

www.dcsf.gov.uk

Publishes *Work experience: a guide for employers* and *Work experience: a guide for secondary schools*, downloadable from

www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications,

search ref: 1471-2005DOC-EN

Learning and Skills Council:
www.lsc.gov.uk

Connexions:
www.connexions.gov.uk

Skills for health:
www.skillsforhealth.org.uk

Aimhigher:
www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Trident-Edexcel:
www.trident-edexcel.co.uk

National Education Business Partnership Network:
www.nebpn.org

National Council for Work Experience:
www.work-experience.org

'What work experience meant to me.' A young scientist's view

'As a science A-level student, I was offered a hospital placement that turned into a five-week project investigating possible bacterial cross-contamination in food and drink distribution. I was encouraged by the directorate nurse manager and was given the assistance of the microbiology department in analysing samples of various materials which came close to patients' meals and drinks. As a result of the research, new procedures have been introduced, including replacing sticky tape with metal clips to attach paper rubbish bags to patients' personal trays. The tape contained cellulose, which is an energy source for *C. difficile* bacteria. Metal clips can easily be washed and sterilised.

Seeing the workings of a hospital lab was fascinating, and being able to effect change very exciting. The extension to my educational experience has been profound, not least in opening my eyes to the day-to-day running of a hospital ward. Being able to go into a hospital for a decent length of time, and to be accepted as part of a team, could be invaluable in helping students decide about their careers. The more placements that are made available, the greater the likelihood that students will consider career paths that are healthcare based.'

David Bendell

For more information on Nuffield Science Bursaries, email Sharmila Banerjee: sbanerjee@nuffieldfoundation.org

NHS Careers resources

NHS Careers is the information service for careers in the NHS in England, managed by NHS Employers.

Step into the NHS programme – includes a website www.stepintothenhs.nhs.uk, a programme of ongoing communication and support for individuals, lesson plans for teachers and associated support for NHS employers.

Enabling work experience in the NHS – contains examples of good practice, help and advice for employers, and templates for the paperwork involved in setting up and running work experience placements. Available in print form or online from www.nhsemployers.org/workexperience

NHS Employers

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NHS Employers represents trusts in England on workforce issues and helps employers to ensure the NHS is a place where people want to work. The NHS workforce is at the heart of quality patient care and we believe that employers must drive the workforce agenda. We work with employers to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

NHS Employers is part of the NHS Confederation.

Contact us

For more information on how to become involved in our work, email getinvolved@nhsemployers.org

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