IMPROVING STAFF RETENTION
A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS
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Introduction

During 2016/17, trustees of the NHS Confederation granted funding for NHS Employers to work closely with 92 NHS organisations, to help equip them with tools and resources to develop and implement their workforce retention plans. This guide draws on the learning and experience from the organisations we worked with, and is aimed at individuals who are leading or working closely on retention issues.

Why retention is important

The retention of staff is a key issue for the NHS. As organisations focus on their workforce supply to create a recruitment pipeline, it’s important that both new and existing staff are supported and encouraged to remain with their employer.

There is no single action that will resolve staff retention issues; retaining staff is a result of the combined actions that are taken by the organisation.

All employers require a healthy level of staff turnover. This will be different for each organisation and brings with it several benefits such as:

- enabling staff to move on to new opportunities
- different skills and ideas being brought in by new starters
- remaining staff being able to share their existing knowledge with new employees.

The challenge is to find the right balance between turnover and retention by understanding what is going on in your organisation overall and in specific staff groups, teams and departments.

There is significant evidence (Kings Fund, 2016) that retaining skilled and competent staff improves patient experience, the overall quality of patient care and staff satisfaction.

During the work programme, several key retention themes emerged which are explored in more detail in this guide. These are:

- looking at data in depth
- developing organisational values and culture
- supporting new starters
- supporting flexible working
- development and career planning
- flexible retirement options
- building line manager capability.

Methodology

Our work with the 92 NHS organisations followed the ‘plan, do, study, act’ (PDSA) cycle, which is a tried and tested continuous improvement methodology. The approach allows practitioners to try interventions and make improvements without having the perfect solution straight away. If something does work, then you can build on it. If it doesn’t, you can tweak or review without having committed significant resources.
Looking at data in depth

The starting point for employers looking at retention is to know your workforce and to understand what you want to achieve.

The existing data that your organisation holds will show you what is happening across it and identify the issues you are trying to solve. For example, is there high or low turnover in particular areas? Are there organisation-wide issues or are they specific to certain staff groups, demographics, departments or teams?

To identify where turnover is an issue and to make improvements, there are a number of data sources which are available including:

- staff turnover and stability rates
- the NHS staff survey
- locally designed surveys
- workforce information from your electronic staff record (ESR)
- exit surveys
- conversations with existing staff.

Collecting and analysing this data and then tracking trends will help to identify the starting point for your activities.

### Things to consider when collating data

- Metrics can be useful but only if they tell you what you need to know about the workforce. Think about what information you want to find out and then tailor your questions to get the right insights and richer responses.

- What data already exists within the organisation and who has access to it? How can you work collaboratively with different departments to collect this? What information do you actually need to support the team / directorate and organisational decision-making processes?

- Do you need to introduce new data sources? If so, can you co-develop and co-design these with different people and departments within your organisation?

- How can you improve the decision-making process around deciding what data you need, the way you collect it and how you use and present it?

- Analysing the data and tracking trends will help identify organisation-wide issues or retention hot spots. Identify themes and use these to have better conversations with your teams that will lead to improvements in retention and other aspects of organisational development.

- There are many reasons why staff have a good experience at work and stay with organisations. The data you collect will be vital in shaping the interventions you introduce and the tools and resources you choose to use.
CASE STUDY

Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

The trust developed mechanisms to help managers view and analyse data in a way that aids their decision-making. By creating a dashboard which intuitively forecasts trends in workforce data, it allows teams to manage potential retention hotspots before they occur.

The organisation consolidated and created a standard set of data for all departments on staff retention. This included staff turnover, agency rates, patient care data and finance data. The trust set benchmarks against each data set, and shared three months of data so teams were able to see trends and flag any problems. This early warning system then allowed managers to intervene before trends continued.

Additional benefits of the dashboard:

- Acts a good practice tool – teams can ask exemplars within their organisation for support in areas they need improvement.
- Breaks down barriers between different areas as data is the same for all departments.
- Allows prioritisation so work is focused in the right areas for the right reasons.
- Improves buy-in from directorates as data is all in one place.
- Provides an opportunity to tailor retention strategies in each directorate or ward as the manager is able to see what’s relevant for each area.

Since the implementation of the dashboard there has been a reduction in healthcare assistant turnover of 2 per cent and nurse turnover of 1.5 per cent. Agency spend has also reduced to 0.7 per cent of overall staff. The trust’s overall turnover figure is around 10 per cent.

For further information about the dashboard please listen to the using data to retain staff webinar on the NHS Employers website.
Developing organisational values and culture

One of the key learning points to emerge from our work with organisations is that improving staff retention should be approached as a transformational rather than a transactional process. Putting the majority of your effort into embedding a culture of transformational change will help you to focus on what’s important to patients and staff.

Once the 92 NHS organisations we worked with had identified the issues they were seeking to address and the changes they wanted to make, they followed an improvement methodology approach to generate and implement solutions.

Organisational development (OD) practitioners are an invaluable resource in generating and implementing solutions to the specific retention issues you have. Involving them in the planning stage will prove helpful, and there are many OD models which you can choose to support the development of your retention activities, such as the PDSA cycle which was outlined earlier in this guide.

Developing organisational values and creating a positive workplace culture are ways of improving staff retention. Having values that staff relate to, and which they apply on a daily basis, will help build an organisational culture that staff enjoy being part of. This will help increase their attachment to the organisation and increase their likelihood of remaining. OD practitioners can provide support and leadership in developing your values and culture.

**ACTIVITY**

**What does good look like?**

Try an activity with your board or leadership teams. Split the team into four groups and ask them to look at ‘what good retention looks like’ from one of the following perspectives: the board, an HR professional, line managers and staff within the organisation. Compare and contrast where there are similarities and differences between the four perspectives. Draw up three to five actions from the activity to take away and work on.

**Tools and further reading**

There are a number of additional OD diagnostic tools available on the NHS Employers website for specific areas of focus including identifying strategic priorities, problem solving, team building and development.

- NHS Employers culture change
- System wide OD
CASE STUDY

Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

In 2014, Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust went through the process of acquiring Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which at that time was in special measures after being rated as inadequate by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This was in contrast to Frimley Park Hospital which had received an outstanding rating.

Teams, including HR, were given the task of restructuring the trusts and organisational policies in order to unify the hospitals. They conducted diagnostics, built a new OD strategy and delivered training to line managers to support this.

Throughout this large scale organisational change, the senior team was committed to ensuring that staff and the organisation remained focused on changing the climate and that internal engagement continued following the merger.

The HR and OD teams collected data through interviews and questionnaires, and triangulated these with other measures such as staff sickness, recruitment feedback, and staff survey data to identify strengths and weaknesses, and inform the strategy. Values and behaviours were strongly embedded at Frimley Park, so working groups were formed at Wexham Park to see how these values would be accepted. There were some adjustments to behaviours before the launch of a revised set of values across the newly merged organisation.

A total of 600 line managers received training on customer care and values, and a further 700 line managers on leadership. To further improve culture, members of the senior management team are now based across all sites and role model the values and behaviours.

Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust saw an increase in staff recommending it as a place to work, rising from 44 per cent to 77 per cent in one year. Staff stability rates also improved from 81.4 per cent before the acquisition to 81.9 per cent afterwards. The benefits to the organisation have been so significant that staff continue to commit to continuous improvement and culture change.

Listen to the podcast with Frimley Healthcare on the NHS Employers website.
Supporting new starters

A key element of retaining staff within your organisation begins with robust recruitment practices and effective inductions and, where relevant, preceptorships, for new members of staff. A good recruitment and induction process helps to ensure that:

- staff with the right knowledge, skills and values are recruited into the organisation;
- the time from interview to start date is as short as possible, so staff can begin their new role promptly;
- new staff are supported when they join an organisation, and throughout their first year of employment, to ensure that they are more likely to remain with the organisation for a longer period of time.

Values based recruitment (VBR) is an approach to help attract employees whose personal values and behaviours align with the values outlined in the NHS Constitution. VBR can help to contribute to a reduction in staff turnover by ensuring that the staff recruited have values that fit with those of your organisation. Senior leaders from across the NHS have also said that VBR has boosted morale and made staff feel valued, while creating a positive environment.

While streamlining approaches to recruitment, induction and pre-employment checks are mostly focused on the start of an employee’s journey within an organisation, they can also contribute to an employee’s intention to remain. By reducing the time to hire and ensuring that statutory and mandatory training is completed as quickly as possible, organisations enable new recruits to start in their roles promptly, creating a good first impression of the organisation.

Providing support through a good induction also strengthens attachment to the employer and this can be followed up by investing time and resources in staff development. A number of organisations have simplified processes to enable staff to move easily between departments without have to resign or reapply for new roles.
Things to consider

- Has your organisation implemented values based recruitment and standards of behaviour in employment?
- How can you streamline your recruitment processes and pre-employment checks?
- Do you keep in touch with new starters between offering them a job and their first day?
- What does induction look like in your organisation? Are there areas of good practice which could be rolled out across the organisation?
- Do you provide support to employees beyond induction (ie preceptorships) and do all staff have meaningful objectives and development plans?

Tools and further reading

- NHS Employers values based recruitment
- The Streamlining programme
- Employment checks
- ThinkFuture
- Preceptorships for newly qualified staff

CASE STUDY

East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust

East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust has worked to improve the experience of staff in their first year of employment. The approach of the trust has included values based recruitment, a focus on attracting the right staff, introducing an online portal for new starters, the introduction of a high-quality corporate induction programme and a robust and consistent local induction programme.

Further details of how the trust improved new starter turnover can be found on the NHS Employers website.
Supporting flexible working

One of the clearest ways that organisations can demonstrate their commitment to improving staff experience is through flexible working. Flexible working can take different forms including part-time working, compressed hours, flexitime and job sharing.

By being as flexible as possible while still maintaining high standards of patient care, organisations can help staff balance their professional and personal lives and demonstrate that the organisation is a good place to work. This will help to form a key part of an organisational retention strategy.

To support flexible working, many organisations have implemented e-rostering as a way of bringing together, in one central place, management information on shift patterns, individuals’ shift preferences, annual leave, sickness absence, staff skill-mix and movement of staff between departments. This enables managers to quickly build rotas to meet patient demand and to allow employees to access the system to check their rotas and make personal requests.

In addition to supporting staff retention, implementing an e-rostering system appropriate to your organisation’s needs can deliver efficiency savings by releasing more time for staff to deliver higher quality services as well as helping to reduce spend on agency staff.

The UK workforce is more diverse than ever and demands for flexible working arrangements are on the increase.

Flexible working is part of good employment practice and as such we’ve developed top tips to help you maximise arrangements in your organisation.

**Things to consider**

- How can flexible working policies be used to support the retention of staff?
- How are your managers applying flexible working policies?
- Does your organisation use e-rostering?

**Tools and further reading**

- Flexible working
- E-rostering information and case studies
Development and career planning

Providing education and training opportunities for your staff is another way of making people feel valued, supported and professionally fulfilled. Building on a strong induction programme, regular appraisals and one-to-one meetings between managers and staff should be a key part of your retention strategy. These meetings are an opportunity to discuss and agree development needs that can support the delivery of patient care and staff career development.

There are many learning and development opportunities which organisations could offer to staff and not all of these need necessarily cost the organisation money. In addition to training courses, development could include secondments, specialist qualifications, stretch projects and mentoring and coaching.

Taking the time to create a career pathway for individuals can help incentivise them to remain within the organisation.

Some NHS organisations have put support in place for staff so they can develop their careers while remaining with the organisation. These have included initiatives such as career clinics and advice for staff on the opportunities that are available within the organisation. Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust provides a confidential career development conversation, particularly for Band 5 and 6 nurses, to discuss opportunities in the trust and the support that can be offered to them.

Organisations may need to consider how their policies encourage development and career planning and what support line managers require to be able to implement this. Managers need to be aware of the support that the organisation offers and be knowledgeable about how they can support their staff to develop and career plan while continually learning.

Tools and further reading

- Education and training
- Apprenticeships
CASE STUDY

Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

In 2016, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (BHT) had a high number of nurse vacancies. As this reflected the shortage of nurses nationally, it meant the team had to shift their focus from recruiting nurses to retaining the current workforce. The trust needed to identify why nurses were leaving and what could be done to improve retention in the future.

Along with the knowledge that the trust had high nurse turnover (16.8 per cent in January 2016), BHT reviewed additional data to better understand the needs of its nursing workforce, and how this correlated with nurses’ reasons for leaving.

BHT created a series of 12 focus groups with existing nurses to identify the reasons that nurses were leaving. The reasons included:

- poor line management
- poor work-life balance
- lack of professional development
- lack of appreciation.

Following the feedback BHT, with commitment from the executive team, created a nurse retention action plan which was based on local intelligence. This enabled the trust to tailor a number of actions to specific groups of nurses and to address the feedback from the focus groups.

Key priorities were:

- focusing on supporting the third of the nursing workforce who are aged over 50 – this helped this group to work longer by developing flexible retirement options and equipping managers to understand and support an older workforce
- improving second year preceptorship support – BHT now provides as much support in the second year of preceptorship as the first year
- introducing an ’itchy feet’ programme – BHT has made it easier and simpler for staff to move around internally, before advertising a role externally
- recognising length of service at five, 10 and 15 years, as well as at 20 years, which was already happening.

By taking the time to identify the specific needs and concerns of nurses before starting to formulate or implement any actions, the trust improved nurse retention by 2 per cent from January 2016 to December 2016. In addition, the trust has been able to evidence a significant reduction in recruiting and funding temporary and agency staff.

Read the case study from Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust on the NHS Employers website.
Flexible retirement options

Flexible retirement gives employers the opportunity to retain staff in their organisation who may be approaching retirement and who would otherwise leave the organisation. It is important that employers are aware of these options and discuss them with staff.

The retirement options provide an opportunity to support staff while retaining valuable experience within the workforce. They allow flexibility for organisations and staff around:

- the age at which staff retire
- the length of time a staff member takes to retire
- the nature and pattern of work in the lead up to final retirement.

**Available flexibilities:**

- **Step down** – staff can step down to a different role to reduce the level of responsibility while remaining in NHS employment.
- **Wind down** – staff can wind down to retirement by remaining in their current post but reduce the number of hours or days they work.
- **Retire and return** – members of the NHS Pension Scheme can request to retire, claim their pension benefits and then return to NHS employment. The Department of Health has released guidance to help employers put policies in place to consider applications from staff.
- **Draw down** – members of the NHS Pension Scheme can take part of their pension benefits and continue in NHS employment.
- **Late retirement enhancement** – members can retire later than their normal pension age and have their pension benefits increased.
- **Early retirement reduction buy out** – members or employers can pay additional contributions to buy out the reduction applied to the member’s pension if they retire before their normal pension age.

**Things to consider**

- Do your existing policies include retirement flexibilities?
- How do you incorporate flexible retirement and retirement planning into appraisal discussions?
- How do you support staff who manage individuals or teams to have retirement planning discussions with their staff?
- How do you evaluate and manage requests for flexible retirement?
CASE STUDY

Approaches to flexible retirement

NHS organisations are using flexible retirement options to support their overall workforce planning. Initiatives such as incorporating flexible retirement options into flexible working procedures, providing staff with as much information as possible, encouraging staff to attend pre-retirement workshops and ensuring line managers are aware of the options will all contribute to your retention strategy.

Further information on the approaches that NHS organisations are taking to flexible retirement, including City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, can be found on the NHS Employers website.

Tools and further reading

- Flexible retirement options
- Flexible retirement tools and resources
- Department of Health retire and return guidance
Making improvement and change

During the planning stage of your retention activities you will want to consider some of the challenges you could encounter when trying to make improvement and effect change. Anticipating these challenges could improve the plan and ensure that it has a greater chance of achieving its objectives.

Things to consider

- What are the constraints in your organisation that prevent line managers and teams becoming involved? Look for ways you can remove these barriers.
- You may find that your future vision is so different from where your organisation is today that it becomes daunting. Acknowledge this, build trust and minimise concerns by helping line managers and teams to break the long-term vision into shorter-term actions for making change.
- If there’s still resistance, try using information and stories to connect in a different way and get line managers and teams engaged. Use examples of issues that are currently minor and explain how they can become major challenges for teams in the future if left unresolved.
- Encourage managers to create the vision for their team or department. The process is as important as the vision itself, as it gives everyone time to consider the change, what it means for them, and to voice any concerns.
- Where the change may be perceived as negative, talk openly about it to build trust. Also value your sceptics as they will help you identify things you may have missed.
- Continue the dialogue over time so that line managers and teams stay engaged and up to date with changes, and continue to see the benefits to them.
- Role model both the values and behaviours needed to create transformational change within your organisation.
- Taking time to slow down and observe what is going on in your departments will give you the opportunity to gain real insights into what is happening for staff and patients on the shop floor.
**ACTIVITY**

**Driver diagrams**

A driver diagram is a visual activity for tackling complex issues such as retention, and can be used to plan improvement project activities. The resource is usually one to two pages in length and is quick and easy to refer back to. It can be used with teams and boards when sharing details around your retention improvement project. Take a look at this information on [driver diagrams].

**ACTIVITY**

**Ritual dissent activity**

Ritual dissent is an activity for making improvement and creating a vision which everyone can buy into. Teams create a visual storyboard to describe retention within their organisations, and then prepare a two-minute narrative to go alongside this. This narrative is then critiqued by listeners to make tweaks if needed. See the [knowledge sharing toolkit] for steps to follow to do this activity.

**Tools and further reading**

- Speak with your improvement lead about ways you can work together to improve workforce retention.
- Watch this video from the NHS Institute for Improvement and Innovation UK on [measurement for improvement], which shows you how to identify what steps to take when making change and improvement.
- East London NHS Foundation Trust’s quality improvement hub has everything you need to get started, from [step-by-step videos] for creating driver diagrams to [real improvement examples].
Evaluating impact

During the planning stage of your retention strategy you will want to consider how you are going to evaluate the impact of the changes you intend to make. Being clear about what you want to achieve and making time to regularly review your activities will help you to assess how successful it is and whether changes need to be made. This will form a key part of a continuous improvement cycle.

Having a plan in place to evaluate your activities will help you to better communicate what you’re doing around retention and the value it has. It will also help you to identify risks and issues that might arise during implementation and helps you recognise where you have done good work.

The evaluation process can help you to think through how you will measure the impact of your retention activities from the start.

1 DEFINE OBJECTIVES
Make sure they are clear, measurable and relevant to your staff groups, team or organisation. Getting your objectives right at the beginning will make it easier to measure them throughout.

2 IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS
This will be all the people affected by your retention initiatives. Consider who you can work with collaboratively to deliver your retention activities, such as your improvement team and OD leads, and identify the benefits you hope to achieve for each.

3 MAP TASKS & ACTIVITIES
Think about how your retention activities are expected to meet objectives, what tasks and activities will be included, and how each of these is expected to influence the behaviour of your stakeholders.

4 DEFINE PERFORMANCE MEASURES
To assess performance against retention activity objectives, you will need to identify which elements of the activities worked well and which worked less well. Think about impact and outcomes as well as financial or staff turnover targets.

5 IDENTIFY DATA SOURCES
Identify, for each performance measure, what data you will use and how you will source it. Make use of tools, such as the NHS electronic staff record (ESR), exit interviews and feedback from staff.

6 IDENTIFY RISKS & CONSTRAINTS
These will include financial risks and resources, and the time and capacity of staff you’re asking to support the retention activities.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS
Engaging with the board

The development and implementation of workforce retention activities cannot sit with one person or team alone. It needs to be the responsibility of everyone in the organisation from board members and senior leaders through to line managers and HR leads. Therefore, engaging with the board in a meaningful way is very important. Helping the board to define the vision and understand the planned retention activities, and clearly articulating the role that they can play in retaining the workforce, will help to ensure their leadership and support.

TOP TIPS
Engaging with your board

- Be assured. You are the expert, you know the workforce and understand the data you’ve collected and the information you have produced.
- Link retention to strategic priorities for your organisation. Be prepared to adapt information to engage with different people such as the finance director or the medical director.
- Look at successful retention pilots that have already been adopted in areas of your organisation or other organisations and consider how they can help you meet your current objectives.
- Present a concise business case that clearly explains the high-level benefits to improving retention. Try using the driver diagram resources on East London NHS Foundation Trust’s quality improvement hub to support you with developing a clear and concise action plan and describe the detail of your proposal in your narrative.
- Create a visual of what the ideal looks like from different perspectives and review what is achievable to implement.
- Get clear commitment from the board to champion retention initiatives and provide the necessary resources to implement the plan.

Tools and further reading

- NHS Employers influencing boards and leaders
- Engaging your board
Manager and staff engagement

One of the key challenges for those leading the development of retention activities will be engaging staff across the organisation.

A key audience to engage and co-develop retention activities with is line managers, who will be keen to see how activities can support their staff and improve patient experience. Depending on what your data has told you, line managers may deliver different elements of the activity in different parts of the organisation.

Things to consider

- Know your workforce – who will they respond best to in conversations? How and what will make the most impact?
- When you’re trying to get your line managers on board, consider their agenda so that you can influence effectively.
- Reframe the message to build commitment. What motivates and inspires you may be different for others.
- Make retention relatable – what are the benefits to staff?
- Share your agenda and what you want to achieve from conversations with employees.
- Create an open and honest culture so that any concerns can be shared.
- Treat people as individuals and actively listen to the information they’re sharing with you.
- Develop an action plan and feed back regularly to keep line managers engaged with the agenda.

TOP TIPS

- Identify colleagues such as improvement and organisational development leads, who share your commitment to improving staff retention and think about how you can work collaboratively to make more impact.
- Individually or in small groups, do a quick stakeholder mapping exercise on who to influence first. Keep revisiting your map as you encounter new stakeholders to engage with, this will help you see your circle of influence.
- Use techniques such as co-coaching, to explore different ways to work through issues and find different ways to approach your workforce.

Tools and further reading

- NHS Employers organisational development
- NHS Employers staff engagement
Building line manager capability

Once you’ve engaged your line managers, you may identify that these colleagues require some development to support the workforce retention agenda.

Being a people manager is crucially important, as individuals and teams will look for support and guidance from their line manager. In addition, a line manager will impact greatly on staff experience in the workplace.

Line managers hold the responsibility of sharing the vision, values and activities of the team, department and organisation. Keep in mind that some of your line managers may find themselves in this role unexpectedly and may need extra support.

Key ways to build and support line manager competency

- Coaching or mentoring.
- Buddying newly qualified line managers with a more experienced manager.
- Role modelling.
- Providing feedback.
- Formal training.
- Signposting to resources from both within and outside your organisation.

Tools and further reading

- NHS Leadership Academy coaching
- NHS Employers supporting line managers
- Guide to being an engaging line manager
- People performance management toolkit
CASE STUDY

Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust

Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust built line manager capability through supportive leadership and management behaviour training. The training was led by human resources and formed part of a five day mandatory programme for all Band 7 staff.

The train the trainer approach built line manager capability around managing sickness absence and complemented the work the trust was already undertaking around values based recruitment and values based appraisal. The approach the trust took in building line manager capability could be applied to supporting a workforce retention strategy. Further information on the training programme is available on the [NHS Employers website](https://www.nhsemployers.org).
What did you learn?

As part of the development and implementation of your organisation’s approach to workforce retention, you will need to review the objectives you set at the beginning and establish progress against them.

Your activities might not be as successful as you’d first expected. There could be lots of reasons why this might be the case, such as:

- internal barriers blocking progress
- the retention issues in your organisation have changed
- there could be external factors influencing your activities.

Even the most successful strategies will need to be reviewed periodically to reflect changing circumstances.

The implementation plan, particularly the performance measures which you identified, will be a key document.

Questions to consider:

- What is your data telling you and who can help you to analyse it?
- Which elements of the activities are working well and which less so?
- What can you learn from the elements of the activities that are working well? What are the key enablers that are leading to success?
- Where the activities are not as successful – what are the issues here? These could include things such as time, resources, resistance from teams and line manager competence.
- Are external factors having an impact on your activities?

Asking some or all of these questions will help you to continue to engage with your colleagues and decide whether you need to revise any of the activities.

You will want to consider that individuals who leave your organisation may return in the future. Some organisations are considering how they support staff to be ‘happy leavers’, so that they are not only more likely to return in the future but that they may act as advocates for your organisation.

Evidence suggests that generations X and Y are more likely to change jobs if their needs are not met (Mind the gap, 2015). It is helpful to consider the needs of different generations in your workforce when designing your retention activities and what they value from you as their employer. This will help tailor your activities to their needs.

Further reading

Mind the gap – exploring the needs of early career nurses and midwives in the workplace.

Narrowing the gap – following on from Mind the gap, this report looks at ways to retain and grow a resilient future workforce of nurses and midwives.
Revision or roll out

The final stage in any continuous improvement cycle is to adjust your workforce retention activities if the data suggests that some of the objectives are not being met. When adjusting the activities you might find it helpful to repeat the actions that you undertook when you first designed the activities.

Adjusting the activities over time to reflect changing circumstances is something most organisations will need to do. You will find the questions below helpful in considering the steps you need to take.

- **Do you need to engage with the board again to update them on the changes and seek their support?** This could potentially include additional resources.

- **Do you need to spend time with certain line managers and teams to keep them up to date on the changes to the activities and to get their input to implement the activities?**

- **Have you updated your evaluation plan to reflect the changes and the new performance measures you are using?**

- **How are you going to tackle some of the constraining factors you identified?**

- **How can you build on the enabling factors?**

- **How can you up-skill managers and teams if necessary in order to support your activities?**

- **Are there any new stakeholders you need to engage with?**
Readiness checklist

Not sure where to start? Identify which areas of this guide will be most useful for you, then answer the questions below. For any question you answer ‘no’ to please take a look at the recommended section(s).

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<th>YES, I’ve got this covered</th>
<th>NO, go to page</th>
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<td>Have you reviewed a variety of data and identified where you need to make improvements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you considering how to support new starters?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you got support from your board to implement retention activities?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you considering how to facilitate flexible working?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are your managers and teams engaged with your retention activities?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you considered the need to support your line managers?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you got experience in making improvement and change?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is your organisation focusing on development and career planning?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you using organisational development ideas to support with retention?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you got an evaluation plan in place?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you know what NHS Employers resources are already available to support you with retention?</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□, ▶ 25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Resources to support your retention activities

This section summarises the different elements that contribute to workforce retention and identifies some of the tools and resources that NHS Employers has produced to support you. The tools and resources that you choose to use will be dependent on the content and focus of your retention activities. They are grouped into different sections, reflecting an employee’s journey. These are recruitment and induction, experience working in the organisation and the reward offer that the organisation uses to retain staff.

RECRUITMENT AND INDUCTION

A key element of retaining staff begins with recruitment and supporting new employees. This helps to ensure that:

- staff with the right knowledge, skills and values are recruited into the organisation
- the time from interview to start date is as short as possible, so staff can begin their new role promptly
- new staff are supported when they first join to ensure that they are more likely to remain with the organisation for a longer period of time.

Values based recruitment (VBR)

Values based recruitment (VBR) is an approach to help attract and select staff whose personal values and behaviours align with the values outlined in the NHS Constitution. Details of how this approach can be used to support your retention strategy can be found on page 6.

To help employers implement VBR, we have developed a range of information and resources, including toolkits and case studies.

Induction and Employment Checks

While streamlining approaches to recruitment, induction and employment checks are focused on the start of an employee’s journey within an organisation, they can also contribute to an employee’s intention to remain.

There are six NHS employment check standards that outline the type and level of checks employers must carry out before recruiting staff into NHS positions. Ensuring these are carried out correctly and promptly will reduce time to hire and create a good first impression of the organisation.

Providing support through a good induction can also strengthen attachment to the employer and this can be achieved by investing time and resources in the development of new starters. Further information on these approaches can be found on page 8.

Streamlining

The streamlining programme has brought together a wealth of information on how HR and occupational health professionals can improve the quality and efficiency of NHS recruitment and induction. The resources include a guide on how to establish a programme in your region as well as outlining the other benefits of streamlining which include financial savings.
There are a number of ways in which organisations can seek to improve the experience of staff in the workplace. By focusing on one or more of these areas as part of your retention activities, employers can help staff to feel more valued, engaged and connected to the organisation and therefore more likely to remain.

Staff engagement

By involving staff in decisions and communicating clearly with them, organisations can maintain and improve staff morale, especially during periods of difficulty and change.

Engaging with employees, seeking their views and acting upon the results, increases the likelihood of people remaining with the organisation. Staff engagement can also have other benefits such as improved staff motivation and productivity.

Flexible working and e-rostering

One of the clearest ways that organisations can demonstrate their commitment to improving staff experience is through flexible working.

By being as flexible as possible while still maintaining high standards of patient care, organisations can help staff balance their professional and personal lives and demonstrate that the organisation is a good place to work.

Many organisations have implemented e-rostering as a way of bringing together, in one central place, management information on shift patterns, individuals’ preferred shifts, annual leave, sickness absence, staff skill-mix and movement of staff between departments. Further information on these approaches to retention can be found on page 10.

Diversity and inclusion

Having a focus on diversity and inclusion in the workplace forms a key part of organisational retention activities. It helps to build a talent pipeline and a workforce that is representative of the local communities that your organisation serves.

Staff are more likely to recognise the organisation as a good place to work if there is a culture that recognises and values difference and seeks to ensure individuals have a good experience within the workplace.

Tackling bullying

Another way that employers can demonstrate their commitment to creating a positive organisational culture is by tackling bullying in the workplace. In addition to forming part of your retention activities, tackling bullying can also help reduce sickness absence.
Organisational development
Developing and implementing successful workforce retention activities is a transformational rather than a transactional process. Workforce retention leads need to consider working jointly with organisational development colleagues in order to tap into their skills and knowledge of implementing transformational programmes.

Development and career planning
Providing education and training opportunities for your staff is another way of making people feel valued, supported and professionally fulfilled.

Information on building this into your retention strategy can be found on page 11.

Flexible retirement
Flexible retirement gives employers the opportunity to retain staff in their organisation who may be approaching retirement and would otherwise leave.

Details of the flexibilities available, along with things to consider in applying them, can be found on page 13.

REWARD
Organisational reward is a strong element of an overall retention strategy. During a period of pay restraint in the NHS, many organisations are increasingly communicating to staff the full range of rewards and benefits they offer. If employees understand the benefits available to them, they will place a higher value on the overall reward package and this will help inform decisions they make about leaving or remaining with the organisation.

Reward offers can include elements such as salary sacrifice, cycle to work schemes, buying/selling annual leave, long service awards, recognition schemes and discounted season tickets.

Employee pay, as well as terms and conditions of employment, form an important part of the overall reward offer and include areas such as access to the NHS Pension Scheme, annual leave allowances, flexible working arrangements and family-friendly leave and benefits.
NHS Employers is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first.

We actively seek the views of employers on key workforce issues and use our expertise to support them to develop a sustainable workforce, improve staff experience and provide high quality care to patients. We influence workforce policy at regional, national and European levels and turn policies into practical workable solutions.

NHS Employers is part of the NHS Confederation.

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