

Improving Working Lives

Introduction

Since the launch of the Improving Working Lives (IWL) initiative in 2000, the NHS has seen a huge amount of investment to improve the work-life balance of its staff. The achievement of Practice Plus by NHS Trusts in England in 2006 is evidence that there has been a real culture change around partnership working and staff involvement. Although the initiative officially came to an end as a centrally monitored programme in 2006/7, IWL is still very much seen by the NHS as the cornerstone of its work on becoming a good, healthy employer and the catalyst for improvements in partnership working at a local level. As such, it underpins and supports current Government initiatives such as the NHS Constitution and the Health, Work and Well-being agenda.

In 2009, NHS Employers worked in partnership with the NHS Staff Council to develop the Improving Working Lives Framework. The framework maintains the principles of the original standards and takes into account recent changes in the NHS, new working practices, and UK Government initiatives and legislation. It aims to help organisations become employers of excellence.

The IWL Framework

The IWL Framework aims to be a reference point for all healthcare organisations in the UK who are committed to the principles of being an employer of excellence. It is a practical tool that can be used as a checklist locally. It provides examples of good practice and references to further information.

The framework is for employers to use:

- to measure the performance of their organisations
- to develop joint action plans in partnership
- to identify areas for improvement and to support them in working towards becoming a model employer
- to develop good human resources (HR) policies, that will not only improve the working lives of staff, but will lead to improved outcomes for service users
- to assist them in meeting standards laid down by the Department of Health (DH) and regulatory bodies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The framework supports key NHS objectives and principles of good HR practice, and it supports all of the current government initiatives and assists with the delivery of an organisation's objectives. It will also help organisations to meet their obligations under the NHS Constitution (England), which enshrines staff rights to representation, fair treatment, flexible working opportunities, and a safe and healthy workplace.

Approving the new framework document on 9 July 2009, the NHS Staff Council commended the IWL Champions who ensured, at trust level, that the principles contained in both the IWL standard and the new framework continue to underpin partnership working at a local level.

More information

NHS Employers' staff engagement web pages:
www.nhsemployers.org/EmploymentPolicyAndPractice/staff-engagement/Pages/Improvingworkinglives.aspx