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# Collaborating across units to increase bank shift fill

In just one year, Norfolk and Waveney Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust has more than doubled its bank fill rates and reduced by 35 per cent the number of agency staff shifts through implementing a managed flexible worker solution.

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## High impact change 1: Increase understanding of the issue

In order to address the trust's excessive agency spend, we first had to identify the area-specific problems that were leading to uneconomical temporary staffing practices.

### What we did:

A rural trust covering an area of more than 2,000 square miles across the East of England, we had operating units in 28 different locations and each unit had developed its own temporary working practices and individual staff banks.

We discovered that bank shift fill was inconsistent across the organisation with specific resource issues outside of urban areas, and the trust management team saw the need to streamline the entire temporary workforce management system.

Getting a baseline for demand and agency usage proved difficult but we took the calculated risk of beginning the process, while being aware that gaps might emerge.

## High impact change 2: Manage the process and take control

We aimed to create a management system that would meet the requirements of the Working Time Directive, reduce shift demand, increase fill rates and bring our agency use under control.

### What we did:

The project was led by the recruitment, retention and reward manager, who is a former nurse. By working directly with ward managers, the trust lead was able to understand the specific problems they were having in their units.

Through working together to come up with new staffing strategies, we saw the attitudes of our managers change towards bank usage, and subsequently we were able to bring our agency spend under control.

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## High impact change 4: Work collaboratively

Having identified non-collaboration across units as a key issue in the trust, we chose to adopt a transparent process with high visibility.

### What we did:

We realised that many frontline ward managers felt that their staffing problems were unique. One of the critical aspects in the management of this project was recognising the need for a cultural shift in the approach and management of temporary staffing for managers and their staff.

With increased accountability, we found that managers were much more willing to share their experiences of good practice across the trust. A key tool for managers was the regular provision of temporary staffing data which highlighted issues such as reasons for booking agency staff and type of staff needed. This information allowed the trust to begin to identify trends and patterns and to work with managers to plan and identify different strategies for managing the workforce.

### Results and next steps

Since beginning this process a year ago, we have seen our total shift fill increase from 89.1 per cent to 94.8 per cent. Our nursing bank shift fill rates are up from 27 per cent to 72 per cent and our A&C bank shift fill is now at a 97 per cent average across the trust. We have successfully reduced our use of agency nursing staff from 55 per cent of shifts to less than 25 per cent, now using agency staff much more specifically for specialist skills.

The task of working out how many flexible staff are needed in the trust has been tricky, and though we have worked hard to drive demand down there is more work to be done. But our results indicate that as we increase accountability for ward managers and work closely alongside them, our agency spend will continue to fall as bank shift fill rates rise.

