Overview

To address vacancies in its paramedic workforce, South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust developed a five-year paramedic workforce plan. The plan led to a significant reduction in workforce vacancies and helped the trust to ensure sufficient paramedic supply in future.

Key benefits and outcomes

1. Significant reduction of paramedic vacancies.
2. Full paramedic establishment at the end of 2018/19, projected to maintain in 2019/20.
3. Supported 250 existing staff to become qualified paramedics.

What the organisation faced

With responsibility for ambulance services across 10,000 square miles to a population of over 5.5 million, South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWASFT) needed to address the existing vacancies in its paramedic workforce and ensure that there was a strong pipeline for the future.

The trust set about analysing its current workforce profile and trends, including the average age of paramedics, length of service, trends in turnover rates, the gender and diversity splits of the workforce and trends in requests for flexible working.

This information was used to make assumptions about what might happen going forward in relation to turnover, changes in workforce profile and supply lines. The assumptions and the analysis together formed the basis for the five-year plan.
What the organisation did

Graduates are a major source of supply to paramedic roles and SWASFT worked in partnership with local universities to increase cohort sizes, as well as employing a dedicated university liaison officer to act as a link between internal teams and university students.

SWASFT also ran four successful student paramedic conferences, each attracting up to 200 students. Highlights of the conference included CPR training sessions, HART (Hazardous Area Response Team) demonstrations, and presentations from the trust’s award-winning Macmillan Cancer Care Team. The event continues to grow year on year and aims to showcase SWASFT as a great place to work and encourage future generations of paramedics to join, either through traditional university routes or through internal progression opportunities.

SWASFT invested significantly in internal development pathways for its own staff to become paramedics. The trust has also explored additional recruitment opportunities such as supporting paramedics to join from New Zealand, and launched an ambulance nurse programme in 2019.

The plan also looked at future impacts that will affect the sustainability of paramedic numbers over the next five years. This includes increased opportunities for paramedics to work across the system and outside of the ambulance service, as well as changes to paramedic registration requirements and the development of a paramedic apprenticeship standard.

Results and benefits

The trust’s actions have led to a significant reduction in its paramedic vacancies and allowed further development of the organisation to better meet patient needs. SWASFT employs around 1,500 frontline paramedics and reached full establishment at the end of 2018/19. This projected year-end position has been maintained into 2019/20, despite a significant increase in overall paramedic establishment.

Through development of new internal pathways, the trust has supported around 250 staff to become qualified paramedics. SWASFT has increased partnership working and strengthened its relationships with its local higher education institutions, Health Education England, sustainability and transformation partnerships and integrated urgent care systems.
Contact details

For more information about SWASFT’s work to increase its paramedic workforce, contact Clare Melbourne, Deputy Director of People and Culture, clare.melbourne@swas.nhs.uk