

APRIL 2018

## CASE STUDY

# TACKLING WORKFORCE SUPPLY CHALLENGES THROUGH LOCAL COLLABORATION

### INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is the action where two or more people or organisations work together to achieve a shared goal. As NHS organisations continue to work in a tough environment, working together on workforce supply challenges in an efficient way can help ease pressure placed on services.

It is widely accepted that working collaboratively to deliver health and social care is the way forward, and the plan is to do this through the development of sustainability and transformation partnerships (STPs) and integrated care systems (ICSs). But are we using the power of collaboration to drive forward improvements in how we approach workforce supply across organisations?

This resource explores key ways of developing collaborative relationships, and showcases how organisations have already taken steps to address local supply challenges through partnership working.

### WORKING IN COLLABORATION

NHS organisations have their own priorities, however, they will often face similar challenges to those of their neighbours. By viewing neighbours as local partners, rather than as competition, organisations can benefit from a number of advantages brought about through collaboration.

Collaboration allows multiple organisations to tackle local challenges in ways that may not be possible when working in isolation. As well as organisational advantages, there are benefits for staff too. It helps build new relationships outside of the organisation and provides an alternative space to think and generate new ideas.

Working collaboratively has many benefits for organisations, including:

- a coordinated approach to common issues
- capacity to replicate the success others have achieved
- shared knowledge and good practice
- a network of contacts to draw upon
- bringing together existing resources to make financial savings.

## HOW ARE EMPLOYERS WORKING COLLABORATIVELY?

For each of these collaborative approaches it is important to understand the principles they are based on, and take these elements forward as you look for collaborative solutions to your own local workforce supply challenges.

### **Delivering an apprenticeship strategy regionally**

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust led five trusts across Lancashire and South Cumbria to work in partnership to deliver an apprenticeship strategy covering the regional health economy. One of the key strategic aims was to focus on collaboration and how the trusts could create more effective working relationships. This work encouraged the development of new relationships with organisations outside of the NHS too, for example the National Apprenticeship Service.

The partnership began with all five trusts completing a readiness assessment summary in the form of a face-to-face questionnaire. This identified the similarities and differences between trusts regarding current activity of apprenticeships, understanding of the apprenticeship levy, and capacity to deliver future plans. This assessment provided an ideal starting point to create a clear strategy and to understand the challenges the organisations faced. Having this strategy as a collective ensured that senior workforce managers across the Lancashire and South Cumbria footprint had a focus and were effectively planning apprenticeships at the time the levy was introduced.

The partnership supported the development of a local health economy apprenticeship strategy by ensuring it was well defined and clearly stated the actions required. These actions were divided into short, medium and long-term goals and allowed existing good practice to be identified and then shared with all organisations involved.

### **Engaging with your STP to attract members of the Armed Forces**

Eleven organisations in the Surrey Heartlands STP partnership have become the first region to pledge to the Step into Health programme as a collaborative. Step into Health connects employers in the NHS to talent from the Armed Forces (AF) community.

Ashford and St Peter's NHS Foundation Trust's chief executive Suzanne Rankin and AF champion Andrea Lewis, both ex-forces themselves, took a lead in proposing the programme to the STP at the workforce board. They realised that a collaborative approach and working inclusively across both health and social care would benefit the area much more than the organisations working in isolation.

The STP set clear objectives and agreed to fund a new project lead role which will provide a link between the organisations, but also with key stakeholders such as the Career Transition Partnership and Armed Forces charities. This allows each organisation to benefit from the relationships built.

Working together means the reach to members of the AF community is significantly increased as well as improving the capacity and flexibility of organisations to facilitate placements for candidates across the area. The STP have also aligned on their recruitment open days so each organisation in turn takes the lead on hosting. The sharing of resources

allows ongoing interaction with talent from the Armed Forces community with minimal costs.

One key piece of advice from this collaboration is the importance of having a clear buy-in among leaders, which has had huge success bringing people on side.

### **Using mobile technology and partnership working to reduce agency spend**

Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust developed an innovative mobile app that allowed clinicians to select their shifts. After a successful pilot stage, matching locum availability against demand, the trust collaborated with neighbouring foundation trust Ashford and St Peter's, to create a subscribed pool of clinicians which both trusts can access.

The two trusts, through effective communication, were clear about how the process would work. The collaboration has resulted in over 2,800 clinicians subscribing to the app and over 5000 filled shifts with 100 per cent shift attendance. Ashford and St Peter's has so far saved over £1 million and filled over 2000 rota gaps in the past ten months.

You can read more about this via the [NHS Employers website](#).

## **WHAT MAKES COLLABORATION WORK?**

Below are some of the key principles that you can put in place to help make your collaborative approach successful.

### **Recognition**

Partnership working is most effective when all parties recognise the value of working together. If organisations and senior staff are not fully invested into the idea, there will be no drive or motivation behind an agreement.

### **Having senior level buy-in**

Collaborations succeed when leaders demonstrate collaborative behaviour themselves. Securing buy-in from senior leaders and having their visible support will demonstrate your organisation's commitment, drive, momentum and create a collaborative culture.

### **A clearly defined goal for all**

Clear arrangements are the backbone to effective collaboration and these should be simple to avoid confusion. Together, you need to decide what it is you are trying to deliver, how it will be delivered, what timescales will be, and what actions are required to achieve it. This should be established at the very beginning, making it clear who is accountable for each action.

### **Establishing trust**

Trust and collaboration are mutually reinforcing. Although you need to invest time at the beginning to develop trust, this needs to be actively managed and sustained through the

duration of the partnership. Mistrust is a common problem within partnerships, so each party must be open and honest. A [recent report](#) from the University of Bath, written for NHS Employers, describes how to build trust across health systems to promote more effective collaborative working.

### Inclusive decision making

It is important to provide opportunity for all participants to share their ideas. Including people in decision making provides them with a degree of ownership and keeps them motivated towards the common goal. Ensure you have a range of formal and informal channels to keep everyone connected.

### Having the right people in the room

Identify and bring on board colleagues who can shape and influence what you're trying to achieve. Having a range of expertise and knowledge adds huge value to a collaboration, offers various perspectives to provide solutions and allows people to draw on each other's skills.

## Tips for trusts

- Develop a simple shared goal with partners to work towards and ensure everyone is clear on what this is and how it will be delivered.
- Secure buy-in from senior colleagues and include them in the planning and delivery of the collaboration. This demonstrates your organisation's commitment and drives momentum.
- Engage the right people - you need to create a team of focused and motivated people to enable change.
- Create an open and honest culture where everybody is encouraged to share their ideas.

## Further information

For more information, please email [workforcesupply@nhsemployers.org](mailto:workforcesupply@nhsemployers.org)

## Contact us

NHS Employers  
2 Brewery Wharf  
Kendell Street  
Leeds LS10 1JR  
Published November 2017  
© NHS Employers 2017

[www.nhsemployers.org](http://www.nhsemployers.org)  
[enquiries@nhsemployers.org](mailto:enquiries@nhsemployers.org)

 @nhsemployers

 NHS Employers

 [www.youtube.com/nhsemployers](http://www.youtube.com/nhsemployers)