

Pillar three: Building belonging

Pillar three focuses on building belonging. This relies on cultural sensitivity and an awareness of how it feels to be working and living in a different country.

Research shows that having English as a second language can impact on an international nurse's sense of personal and professional belonging. Accents, abbreviations, local turns of phrase and conversational speeds can result in international staff feeling left out of workplace small talk or deskilled despite years of professional experience. Enabling your international staff to build social networks, to share stories and solutions to these challenges can help to reduce feelings of isolation and support them to bring their passions, culture, and personality to their role. You should also consider the role of leaders, managers and the wider workforce and what support or training they will need to raise awareness and support their international colleagues with these challenges.

How to build belonging



For international staff

Safe spaces

Establish active shared decision-making councils, international recruit forums or staff networks to listen to the voices and experiences of international staff. These safe spaces can become a driving force for change and improvement as international staff feedback on their experiences and develop solutions to any barriers or challenges they may be facing.

Personal integration

A study of international nurses' experience of the first two years working and living in England found that personal integration and life outside of work is just as important as professional integration.

Overseas staff arriving in the UK with their families will need further support and signposting to increase integration into the wider community. Identifying and building relationships with local faith leaders, schools, colleges, and services to provide support will be key to making the transition to a new culture easier for the whole family. Equally consider those who have been separated from their families due to financial constraint or visa processing issues. Adjusting in a different culture without family is known to be one of the most difficult factors of migration.

Professional integration

Professional support from line managers, clinical educators and mentors is also key to successful integration and can help ease uncertainty and anxiety. Ensuring international nurses have access to restorative clinical supervision by professional nurse advocates will support them to feel less stressed and isolated, increasing their confidence to develop personally and professionally.

Additional support

Consider signposting staff to support available from the relevant professional regulators, professional associations and trade unions, such as the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), the British Medical Association (BMA), the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, the Royal College of Occupational Therapy, the British Dietetic Association, UNISON, and Unite the union.

Cultural challenges

NHS Employers · Ruby Cultural Challenges

For leaders, managers and the wider workforce

Cultural awareness training

Cultural awareness is an important skill for existing staff and managers of internationally educated staff. It increases awareness of different cultural

norms, enabling teams to communicate more effectively, avoid misunderstandings, and build stronger relationships with colleagues from different cultures to their own. Where possible you should undertake learning about the cultures of international colleagues. This could be through a social event or more formal training.

Cultural awareness is also important in both the recruitment and disciplinary process to prevent unconscious bias impacting decisions and outcomes. NHS England has developed online training with Culture in Health for the line managers of internationally recruited staff. The training will help line managers to build and improve the skills they need to better recognise, understand, and meet the needs of their international colleagues. To find out more about the training and other resources which are available, visit the [Culture in Health website](#).

Celebrations

Acknowledging cultural holidays and events celebrated by international staff, or celebrating their achievements, can help to build a sense of belonging and connection to your organisation and enables them to share their culture and traditions with colleagues.

Health and wellbeing conversations

Line managers should have regular supportive [health and wellbeing conversations](#) or check-ins with all of their team, including international staff as they settle into living and working in the UK. Health and wellbeing conversations are regular, supportive, coaching-style one to one conversations that focus on the health and wellbeing of staff. By encouraging organisations to embed health and wellbeing conversations across their system, staff feel heard and valued, and in which diversity is respected.

Health and wellbeing conversations should consider the whole wellbeing of an individual and identify areas where the individual may need support, signpost them to that support, and regularly monitor their health and wellbeing over time.

NHS Employers' [health and wellbeing conversations webpage](#) has some ideas for things you might consider to ensure that quality health and wellbeing conversations and plans that best meet the needs of our diverse workforce are embedded within your organisation.

See the health and wellbeing section of the [Improving Staff Retention Guide](#) for more information on supporting workforce wellbeing.

Good practice examples

Liverpool University NHS Foundation Trust

Scouse School is an initiative of Liverpool University NHS Foundation Trust to support internationally recruited nurses, AHPs and doctors gain better understanding and appreciation of Liverpool's rich history, culture, people, colloquialism, and local and regional accents. Initially planned as a warm welcome and a means of helping recruits widen their networks within the organisation, the programme has developed into an activity that:

- makes recruits feel more comfortable and accepted, facilitating their integration into their local communities
- makes recruits feel more supported and valued during their transition to their new city thereby promoting retention
- showcases the diversity of their new city which could lead to a more inclusive culture which is important for attracting and retaining talents.

Co-produced by managers, educators and international recruits, participants receive certificates and are treated to a lunch of scouse and other UK food favourites.

There have been four cohorts since the introduction of the programme, and it will continue to run every other month. Participants have rated it highly, feeding back that it has helped them to understand terminologies and colloquialisms, improve familiarity with accents and meet new colleagues.

James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust ensures that international staff joining the trust feel a part of it by placing a strong emphasis on listening to their feedback through a variety of engagement activities. Staff engagement sessions enable staff to feedback on their experience in an open and safe space. At a senior level, trust executives take part in an in your shoes programme which enables them to experience a day in the life of a member of staff. The trust is also trialling a reverse in your shoes programme where staff can also shadow

executives. Ward-to-board sessions and non-executive director sessions held on the wards enable senior leaders to meet staff and hear what they have to say.

The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust has introduced cultural awareness training for leaders and managers of internationally recruited nurses. The training is designed to raise awareness of the importance and impact of culture in creating a sense of belonging as well as how this awareness can bring about positive outcomes. This training is delivered in conjunction with race equity masterclasses offered to nursing leaders and managers across the trust.

#StayAndThrive

#StayAndThrive is a research-in-action programme that began as a pilot in the North East and Yorkshire and South West regions, and launched nationally in November 2022 and has membership across all seven regions.

Through a series of learning events, a community of action was formed with a collective mission to create the conditions where internationally educated colleagues feel a strong sense of belonging and can thrive in their personal and professional lives while progressing in their careers. An analysis in March, April, June and November 2023 supported by the NHS regions in the programme, revealed a shift towards more positive experiences and fewer negative experiences of international retention and recruitment throughout the year as participants gained more experience of implementing the positive deviance approach through the programme. This approach identifies that solutions to problems already exist within communities, and that identifying, understanding, and sharing these solutions enables improvements at scale. The programme won the award for Best Employer for Staff Recognition and Engagement at the Nursing Times Awards 2023. The #StayandThrive bundle of interventions have also formed the four pillars of this toolkit.

Making a difference video

Mid Yorkshire Teaching NHS Trust

The Mid Yorkshire Teaching NHS Trust (MYTT) has launched Stay and Thrive to improve the experience of internationally colleagues. The trust commenced its international recruitment campaign in August 2020 with 366 internationally educated nurses joining the organisation. The trust also supports the recruitment of internationally educated midwives, AHPs and medical staff. MYTT's internationally educated nurses recruitment journey mirrors the four pillars set out in this toolkit.

- Creating strong foundations: MYTT has invested in dedicated resource to improve pastoral and educational support for internationally educated nurses. OSCE bootcamps have reduced the time from arrival to taking the OSCE exams by 50 per cent.

- Making new recruits feel welcome: anonymous surveys gather baseline data about internationally educated nurses recruitment experience and overall experience at MYTT. They are then invited to listening events which provide a psychologically safe space to share their accounts and experiences.
- Building belonging: a buddy system complements the pastoral support. Buddies introduce new internationally educated nurses to staff networks and a voluntary social media forum.
- Maximising personal and professional support: building on the feedback from internationally educated nurses it was clear that support was needed on pathways to progression, application, and interview process. Regular forums are conducted with clinical supervision and coaching offers. MYTT has also commissioned an internationally educated nurse leadership programme and to-date 130 internationally educated nurses have completed it.

Tools and further reading

- NHS England's report The expectations of line managers in relation to people management includes a new framework for line managers which creates a clear view on the expectations of line managers in the service in relation to people management and the implications for provision of people services.
- NHS Employers' health and wellbeing hub provides advice and guidance on stress, sickness absence and financial wellbeing for NHS provider organisations. The health and wellbeing network is free to join and enables health and wellbeing leads to connect, share good practice and find out what's happening across NHS wellbeing.
- NHS England has a number of health and wellbeing programmes for NHS staff signposting to support for a range of health and wellbeing needs.
- NHS England's NHS Health and Wellbeing Framework can support you in creating a wellbeing culture in your organisation and also has information on supporting our NHS people.
- NHS England's guidance on health and wellbeing conversations provides good practice advice and guidance on having safe and effective

health and wellbeing conversations.

- Keep up to date with interventions and practical solutions on [NHS England's retention hub](#).
- NHS England's [resource](#) on combatting racial discrimination against minority ethnic nurses, midwives and nursing associates is designed to help them recognise and challenge racial discrimination and by doing so, it supports staff wellbeing, physical and psychological safety. It also supports those in leadership roles to be inclusive leaders.

Newcastle Hospitals' Philippines Recruitment

How will you play your part?

Reflect on what you have read and consider how you or your team will play your part.
I/we will...