

Chapter 1: introduction

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"Health outcomes are improved by education, training, support and access to employment. We can open those doors and create opportunities."

Kath Evans, Director of Children's Nursing/Chair of the Children's Board, Barts Health, Children and Young People's Clinical Lead, East London Health and Care Partnership.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated longstanding inequalities such as, a lack of access to healthcare, poor health outcomes and poor access to education, training and employment opportunities. We know that access to good work is one of the most important factors for reducing health inequalities and supporting inclusive sustainable economies. As the NHS is the largest employer in England, with a presence in every place, it can play an important role in supporting local communities beyond the provision of health care. As an anchor institution the NHS can offer good work to local people to help address inequality, contribute to wider economic and social recovery and support levelling up.

Through inclusive recruitment the NHS can fill workforce gaps, create a sustainable pipeline of talented staff and better retain its people. It can support social mobility and play a key role in tackling health inequalities. This will mean promoting and opening job opportunities to those in greatest need of good work and recruiting differently.

Throughout the pandemic, the health service became a beacon of hope and pride for the public. This translated into a surge of visits to the Health Careers website, universities reporting unprecedented interest in

healthcare degrees and large numbers of applications to work in roles in the sector, including in the new vaccination centres. Despite the rapidly changing labour market we have an opportunity to explore different ways of working with other organisations (for example, local government and colleges) to focus on skills, development and employment and to create more of these sorts of opportunities for the mutual benefit of the NHS, our partners and the communities we serve.

This briefing is for ICS leaders and decision makers in local NHS organisations, who are working to ensure local recruitment and employment strategies help to tackle inequalities and support social and economic recovery, as well as create a sustainable supply pipeline of talented staff.

Using this briefing to get started

The briefing is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter two highlights the opportunity for the NHS, as the largest employer in England, to tackle health inequalities through inclusive recruitment while meeting its own workforce supply issues. This includes by addressing economic challenges as a partner in place and by optimising its role as an anchor institution or system.

Chapters three and four provide information on current policy, resources and tools, national skills and employment initiatives and financial incentives that may support your work.

Chapter five provides a series of case studies to showcase how NHS and non-NHS partners are coming together to support people into work and the positive impact this is having locally.

Throughout the briefing you will find thought-provoking questions and prompts. These are designed to help you reflect and consider what

needs to progress at local organisation level or across a system along with practical information to get started.