

MARCH 2021

## INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT INTO APPRENTICESHIPS

### Aim of the project

NHS Employers was commissioned by Health Education England (HEE) to deliver a 13-week project with the aim to identify; how employers in the NHS are using apprenticeships to increase diversity and widen participation, and what would further help and enable employers to attract, support and retain people with protected characteristics in apprenticeships.

The delivery of this project was to include:

- A scoping exercise and analysis of the available data to identify which groups are under-represented within the apprenticeship workforce
- Identifying and reviewing the resources available to support employers with attracting and recruiting people with protected characteristics
- Identifying guidance and resources available to enable employers to take positive action during the recruitment process
- Identifying any existing practice across the NHS, or other sectors where learning is transferrable
- To find out if employers are using apprenticeships to help meet the strategic objectives of the Workforce Race Equality Standard, the Workforce Disability Equality Standard and the NHS People Plan
- Engaging a range of employers to hear about the steps and approaches currently being taken, and to understand the obstacles and challenges to progressing this agenda locally

### Outcome of the project

- Produce a report with recommendations as to what further guidance or support might enable employers to become more inclusive and support the Widening Participation agenda.

## Available Data

The Equality Act (2010) defines 9 protected characteristics. These include:

• Age • Disability • Gender reassignment • Marriage and civil partnership • Pregnancy and maternity • Race • Religion or belief • Sex • Sexual orientation

There are various sources of national data available on the outcomes for apprenticeships, however, many of those only provide 'headline' figures for the NHS as a whole, or report against Health and Social Care as one sector. While some datasets can be broken down against the characteristics of Gender, Age range, Ethnicity and Disability we did not find any that are openly available that report against all 9 protected characteristics.

For the attribute of Disability many sources of data report those with a physical disability, health problem, learning difficulty and/or disability as a single assigned category. For the purpose of this project, therefore, we focussed on the attributes of Gender, Age and Ethnicity.

### *Search criteria*

The figures shown below are taken from the data published for the number of apprenticeship starts during the Q1 period (August to October) for the 2019/20 academic year<sup>1</sup> in the sector area group of 'Health, Public Services and Care' by apprenticeship level, ie, intermediate, advanced, and higher.

We then identified those apprenticeship standards relevant to the health sector, for example, Nursing, Healthcare Science, and the Allied Health roles and further narrowed the search to count advanced and higher-level apprenticeships only, ie, at Level 3 and above, by Gender, Age and Ethnicity. This search identified 16 apprenticeship standards representing 14 roles within health services (the Nursing and Nursing Associate apprenticeships each having two standards).

### *Across Health, Public Services and Care*

During Q1 (2019/20) there were 12,220 apprenticeship starts across the health, public services and care areas: 70% were female and 30% male, almost two-thirds (65%) were aged 25+, and 14.2% who disclosed and identified as being from an ethnic minority, of those 9.7% were female and 4.5% were male.

As a comparison, for apprenticeship starts across all sectors in England for 2018/19<sup>2</sup> there were almost equal numbers of women and men, with slightly more starts by

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/861548/201920-Q1\\_PT1\\_app\\_start\\_ach\\_demog\\_LAD.xlsx](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/861548/201920-Q1_PT1_app_start_ach_demog_LAD.xlsx)

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons briefing paper [Apprenticeship statistics for England - House of Commons Library](https://www.parliament.uk/resources/briefing-papers/201819-01-02) ([parliament.uk](https://www.parliament.uk))

women at 50.1% and 49.9% by men, 46% were by people aged 25+, and the overall number of learners who declared were from an ethnic minority was 12.3%.

### ***Apprenticeship Standards relevant to health:***

There were 3,540 starts in apprenticeship standards relevant to health. Of those who declared: 80% (2830) were female and 20% (710) were male, 75% were aged 25+, and 9% (320) identified as being from an ethnic minority (of those 7% were female and 2% were male).

Of the 900 (25%) apprentices aged 24 and under, there were only 20 females (0.57%) and no males who declared and identified as being from an ethnic minority.

It would appear that for the reporting period we looked at that ethnic minorities, and especially males who identified as being from an ethnic minority were under-represented within the apprenticeship starts, particularly in those aged under 24 years. However, we also acknowledge that there is a commitment to improve race equality in the NHS and to have more ethnic minorities represented in the most senior roles as outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan<sup>3</sup> and reported through the annual [Workforce Race Equality Standard](#) (WRES)<sup>4</sup> reviews.

---

*“We have widened our scope by working with a range of third-party local organisations including schools, colleges, housing associations, charities and job centres”*

---

## **Legal context and guidance**

The Equality Act (2010) placed a legal duty on all public sectors to eliminate discrimination and advance the equality of opportunities for those who have protected characteristics.

Since April 2015 the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) requires NHS organisations to report against a set of metrics to demonstrate how well they are addressing issues of race equality, including employees from minority ethnic backgrounds having access to career opportunities. Alongside this, although not specific to the health sector, the government launched a five-year vision to increase the proportion of apprenticeships taken up by those from ethnic minority backgrounds by 20 per cent by 2020<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> NHS Long Term Plan <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/equality-standard>

<sup>5</sup> English Apprenticeships: 2020 vision <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-in-england-vision-for-2020>

The NHS Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES)<sup>6</sup> came into force in April 2019 and contain a set of specific measures that enable NHS organisations to compare the experiences of disabled and non-disabled staff.

To help meet these requirements employers are permitted, within employment law, to take positive action to assist people who are disadvantaged or under-represented in their workforce. For example, they can offer a guaranteed interview for disabled applicants who meet the minimum shortlisting criteria.

Whilst taking positive action is not a new concept, it would appear that not all employers consider how they can use this. Almost a third (30%) of employers engaged in this project said that they don't take positive action to support particular groups when recruiting as they were unsure or worried as to whether it would be seen as positive discrimination.

---

*"We would appreciate having some clear direction about what we can do around positive action"*

---

While there is some information available for employers on what is positive action a lot of this was published around the time the Equality Act came into force in October 2010. There is a guide from government [Employers: quick start guide to positive action in recruitment and promotion](#) that includes some practice examples, however this was published in 2011 and has not been updated since. Likewise, finding information that sets out in simple terms some of things that employers can do appears to be limited to articles featured on websites aimed at HR professionals, such as [Personnel today](#).

## Resources available to support inclusion

From our experience of engaging employers, what they value is having information that can be accessed quickly, is easy to understand, sets out clearly what they need to know with examples of good practice that they can easily replicate.

While there are a range of resources available to help employers, many focus on apprenticeships and recruitment in general. While some of these can be adapted and used to help employers become more inclusive there is limited guidance on positive action, and how to attract and support those with protected characteristics.

- [Employers: what is positive action in the workplace?](#) guidance and examples of positive action from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- *The College of Policing* have a website section dedicated to [Diversity and Inclusion](#) and several products including [guidance on positive action](#).
- [Apprenticeship diversity champions network: communications toolkit](#) - includes statistics, tips and case studies with a particular focus on increasing the

---

<sup>6</sup> Workforce Disability Equality Standard <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/wdes>

proportion of apprentices from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

- [Good Practice - Recruiting people with disabilities](#) – the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland outline some selection measures that can be used to benefit all job seekers
- The Learning and Work Institute [Employer Toolkit](#) is designed for employers wanting to develop a more inclusive and accessible apprenticeship offer.
- [Inclusive recruitment support](#) – a government webpage with guidance, case studies and information about how to attract, recruit and retain people from a variety of backgrounds.

NHS Employers has resources and information available to support recruitment and increase diversity:

- [Positive Action](#) - a web page to help employers understand what positive action is and how they can implement it.
- Information on how to build a diverse workforce: [recruiting from your community](#), [diversity and inclusion](#) and [accessible recruitment](#), and [supporting disabled apprentices](#).
- [Inclusive recruitment guidance](#) – information, tools and resources to help employers meet some of the actions of the NHS People Plan around recruitment.
- [Inspire, Attract and Recruit toolkit](#) – helps employers reflect and consider what they can do to improve workforce supply with practical information on getting started.

---

*“We have an active health careers ambassador programme and engage with local school and colleges and youth groups regularly to promote careers in health and our own apprenticeship opportunities”.*

---

## Employer engagement

Initial engagement was through a survey (see Appendices) that was circulated to a range of employers with an interest in education, recruitment and diversity and inclusion. The survey contained 12 questions set out under four main themes: workforce data, attracting and recruiting, retaining and developing staff, and being an inclusive employer.

The employers approached represented:

- A variety of trust types including Acute, Community, and Mental Health Trusts.
- In a range of geographical locations across the 7 HEE regions.

The survey received 70 responses, which represents 30% of Trusts across England.

Among the employers targeted included members of the NHS Employers apprenticeship network, recipients of the Education and Training bulletin and Recruitment and Retention newsletter, and members of the Diversity and Inclusion Partners Programme. Those completing the survey were asked to include their details if they were happy to have a follow up conversation about their responses.

26 employers who provided their details and a further 34 employers who did not take part in the survey, including those on the [Inclusive Companies Top 50 Employers](#) list, were contacted by email. Twelve follow up 1-2-1 calls were arranged.

## Outcomes and Key findings

### Data

- 79% of employers said their apprenticeship workforce reflects the community they serve while 21% reported 'not at all' or they 'don't know'.
- For the NHS Employers [Measuring up tool](#); 6% were aware of the tool and have used it, 43% who were not aware of it but said they will now consider using it. Of the remaining 33% it was unclear from their responses what comparative data they use.
- 67% do not track how far candidates get in the recruitment process.

---

*"NHS jobs includes an option to identify applicants with a disability, other personal information is only visible once shortlisting is completed"*

---

### Attracting and recruiting

- 50% of employers reported that they were not so good, or didn't know how good they are at attracting people with protected characteristics
- There are four prominent characteristics where employers take specific steps to attract people: Race (18%), Age (14%), Disability (13%), and Gender (8%).
- 30% of employers said that they do not take any positive action during recruitment.

## Retaining and developing staff

- 36% of employers use apprenticeships to support and develop existing staff into senior roles
- 60% have not considered how apprenticeships can help meet the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) indicators and Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) metrics.

---

*“We monitor protected characteristics for internal applications but the problem we always have is that we don’t know how many staff, or which staff do not apply”*

---

## Use of data

- The extent to which data around apprenticeships is collected and used appears to be mixed across the range of trusts that took part in the survey.
- A large percentage do not consider data that could be captured as part of their recruitment process. While they do consider the likelihood of ethnic minority staff being appointed from shortlisting as part of the WRES indicators, they do not always look into data around who they receive applications from and are being shortlisted.
- For those trusts where apprenticeships are embedded within the culture, and feature in workforce plans and strategies, data is used to help to monitor and report against progress, but this is often presented as workforce data that reflect demographics.
- Where used most effectively, the data is analysed and used to provide deeper intelligence, for example, one trust does not just report on the characteristics of their apprentices, but also the level of apprenticeships they are taking and the amount of levy that is being spent supporting apprentices by characteristic.
- Some of the employers engaged in this piece of work were not aware of what data their trust collects or how it is used, or they only collect data they are prompted for, for example, the number and level of the apprenticeships started. There was an assumption that data is collected by HR or by the recruitment teams, but this is not shared, and it is not clear whether it is being used to inform any strategies.
- One of the trusts we held a conversation with said how for them, the survey has prompted this conversation and they are to take this to a senior management group to look at how they can be better at monitoring.

---

*“We don’t have an overall strategy for targeting or tracking particular applicants to see how diverse we are being.”*

---

## Attracting and using positive action

- Many employers (41%) reported how they are aware that there are gaps within the demographics of their workforce, particularly around age, gender, disability and ethnicity.
- However, when it comes to addressing this, there is inconsistency in how employers attract and recruit apprentices. While most organisations have an inclusive statement within their adverts, many have said they would welcome clearer guidance and some examples from the sector.
- Some employers use training providers to advertise and carry out the shortlisting, particularly for Level 2 apprenticeships that attract high volumes of applicants, and the employer interviews those that are selected.
- Others are pro-active in engaging schools and colleges in their area or attending careers events to raise awareness about the opportunities available.
- On the whole these approaches do have positive results, particularly where schools and colleges in deprived areas are targeted and where the characteristic of health career ambassadors sent to talk to the pupils is considered.
- While employers are clear they can make reasonable adjustments to support applicants with disabilities, there is a lack of clarity or understanding around what constitutes positive action. The numbers of people visiting our webpage on this topic show there is an appetite for this, however, many of the employers we spoke with don't apply this approach as they are worried it may be seen as positive discrimination.
- There are some good examples of supporting applicants with learning disabilities, for example, offering guaranteed interview schemes, however, the use of NHS Jobs for recruitment was also raised as a barrier for applicants, particularly for entry level roles. Reasons for this include, the length of the online application form, the level of detail required around education, and a lot of people outside of the NHS are not aware of the website when searching for jobs.
- Some trusts offer pre-employment programmes and traineeships, have developed links with the job centre and are using initiatives such as the Princes Trust. The use of value-based recruitment and adjusting the entry-requirements for entry level roles is also a common approach.

---

*"We are looking into our eligibility criteria in relation to lowering the GCSE requirement and providing a pre-employment programme"*

---

## Developing and retaining staff



- While most trusts report that apprenticeships are available to all staff groups, only 36% said they are used to support and develop existing staff with protected characteristics into senior roles.
- In some **organisation's** awareness about the opportunities available to staff is raised through internal bulletins and expressions of interest. Others report that it is down to managers to have those conversations with staff and put them forward.
- It was noted that there is a need to raise awareness with managers about the range of apprenticeships available, and how to manage the “off the job” element of the training which is often raised as a barrier.
- While reporting against the WRES and WDES metrics has helped to open up development opportunities to staff with those characteristics some trusts have still to realise how apprenticeships can be used to support their diversity and inclusion strategies.

---

*“The manager’s perception is that they don’t think their staff would want to progress to the NA role, so they don’t have the conversation”*

*“we need a culture change at the trust in terms of bringing managers on board with apprenticeships”*

---

## Recommendations

While many employers would welcome additional funding and staff to take this agenda forward, they have also asked for further guidance and resources that are accessible and easy to use, in a range of formats and available when needed, ie, they don't have to wait until a course is arranged. One example could be a toolkit that provides a suite of information and signposts to supporting guidance and resources.

Further work should be done to raise awareness among employers about the range of advice and guidance that is currently available. For example, webinars could be used to outline resources and how they can be used to support the ambition for the NHS to become an anchor institution within their local communities.

Employers always welcome opportunities to come together and share ideas. This could include working with partners to engage communities at a system level and promote opportunities and the range of roles and careers available. This would not only support employers to meet the actions of the NHS People Plan around growing their own workforce but could support employers to become more inclusive and to meet the WRES and WDES indicators.

The further guidance and resources could include:

- Information for senior leadership teams - outlining the benefits of having a joined-up strategic approach, for example, that brings the D&I, apprenticeship and recruitment leads together

- A briefing paper, or practice resource that outlines how data can be used - the value this can bring when developing and reviewing strategies, and in meeting the WRES and WDES metrics
- Information about positive action – for example, an infographic that sets out in an easy-to-read format what employers can do
- Guidelines on positive action – more detailed information, with practice examples, such as mentoring and guaranteed interview schemes
- Resources on how to be more inclusive when attracting and recruiting, with examples of good practice and partnership working
- Examples of engaging communities to raise awareness of roles and apprenticeships
- Information for managers – how apprenticeships can support development and different ways to deliver ‘off the job’ training
- Example templates of success campaigns, posters, flyers for staff
- A resource on increasing capacity and supporting learners in the workplace

---

*“We keep a list and target those who applied but did not get shortlisted and offer advice and support, as it is often down to a poor application rather than don’t have the skills and competence.”*

---

As an organisation NHS Employers helps employers to develop a sustainable workforce, improve staff experience and be the best employers they can be and would be happy to consider any future commission in this area. The level of knowledge and expertise we hold as a team means that we are well placed to support any work going forward, engage employers and provide space and time for them to think, and develop and share new ideas for practice.

## Appendices

The survey questions (below) were sent to employers who were asked to consider the full range of protected characteristics when giving their answers:

### **Workforce data:**

1) To what extent do you consider your apprenticeship workforce reflects the community you serve?

a) very closely      b) to some extent      c) not at all      d) don't know

2) Are you aware of and use the NHS Employers [Measuring Up Tool](#) to support and enable the widening participation agenda?

Yes and we have used this

Yes but we have not used this

No but now I've seen it we will use it

No and we are unlikely to use this

Other:

3) Have you identified gaps in the characteristics of your workforce where apprenticeships could, or have helped you to increase workforce diversity?

Please tick all groups this applies to;

• Age • Disability • Gender • Marriage and civil partnership • Pregnancy and

If not, what would help you with this?

maternity • Race • Religion or belief • Sexual orientation • Gender reassignment

### Attracting and recruiting

4) How good would you say you are at attracting people with protected characteristics to your apprenticeship programmes:

We are good at this      We are ok at this      Not so good      Don't know

5) Have you taken any specific steps to attract people to your apprenticeship programmes from under-represented groups?

Please tick all groups this applies to;

• Age • Disability • Gender • Marriage and civil partnership • Pregnancy and

If Yes - please say a bit more about what you did      If no, what would help you with this?

maternity • Race • Religion or belief • Sexual orientation • Gender reassignment

6) Have you taken any positive action when recruiting apprentices with protected characteristics to help achieve diversity in the workforce?

Please tick all groups this applies to;

- Age • Disability • Gender • Marriage and civil partnership • Pregnancy and

If Yes - please say a bit more about what you did    If no, what would help you with this?

maternity • Race • Religion or belief • Sexual orientation • Gender reassignment

7) Do you track your apprenticeship applications to see how far people with protected characteristics get in the recruitment process?

Y / N

If Yes - please say a bit more about this

### Retaining and developing staff

8) Do you offer apprenticeship opportunities to support existing staff with protected characteristics to help them develop into senior leadership and/or clinical roles?

Please tick all groups this applies to;

- Age • Disability • Gender • Marriage and civil partnership • Pregnancy and maternity • Race • Religion or belief • Sexual orientation • Gender reassignment

If Yes - please provide an example of this            If No - what would help you to do this

9) Have you considered how apprenticeships can help you to meet the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) indicators and Workforce Disability

If Yes - please tell us a bit more about this

Equality Standard (WDES) metrics around appointing and developing staff?

### Being an inclusive employer

10) Has your organisation received any external recognition for its commitment to equality in the workplace. Please tick those that apply:

Disability Confident Employer    Age Positive    Stonewall Diversity Champion  
Mindful employer    Armed forces covenant    Step into health    other

If other please say which;

11) What resources or activities would enable you to further embed and scale up your commitment to widening participation in apprenticeships?

12) Please briefly share anything else that you are doing to become an inclusive

employer:

### Follow-up calls

Follow-up calls were used to gather more detail about what employers were doing to attract and recruit to their apprenticeship programmes, and how these are used to develop existing staff. We specifically asked about:

- any specific steps being taken to attract people into apprenticeships from under-represented groups
- any positive action taken when recruiting apprentices with protected characteristics
- if they look at data to see how far people get in the recruitment process
- are apprenticeships used to support and develop staff with protected characteristics into senior leadership roles and/or clinical roles.