

Supporting integrated care systems to be anchor employers

September 2023

About us

NHS Employers is the employers' organisation for the NHS in England. We support workforce leaders and represent employers to develop a sustainable workforce and be the best employers they can be. We also manage the relationships with NHS trade unions on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

- Anchors play a crucial role in addressing inequalities and access to good-quality employment and healthcare. The NHS, along with its partners, is central to advancing more inclusive recruitment practices to combat these disparities and mitigate the negative effects of limited job opportunities on people's health.
- Anchors that are already part of strong, established partnerships, whether at ICS, local, provider collaborative, or neighbourhood levels, are likely to be in the best position to tackle the social and economic challenges of employment. They can continue implementing strategies to enhance the health and wellbeing of their communities and find it easier to attract and retain staff due to their deep roots and commitment to local improvement.
- As an employer it is important that you inform your system lead of any good widening participation initiatives you are delivering. This allows the system to coordinate efforts with local partners, fostering a workforce strategy that emphasises hiring from the local community. This in turn will help support the ICS's broader goals of social and economic development and creating social value.

What is an anchor organisation?

Whether referred to as anchor, recruiting from your local community, widening participation, inclusive recruitment, or something similar, the idea remains the same. It involves the NHS acknowledging its role as one of the largest employers in its locality, and taking responsibility to ensure that good-quality local job opportunities contribute to the prosperity of both local residents and the community as a whole.

This helps ensure a reliable workforce supply, so your organisation can continue to provide excellent care. Local recruitment can reduce inequality, boost local economies, and promote health and care as the sector of choice for a vast range of people from varied backgrounds.

The current climate - health inequality and employment

The COVID-19 pandemic has made existing inequalities more apparent, including limited access to healthcare, poorer health outcomes and restricted opportunities for education, training, and employment. We know that access to good work is one of the most important factors for reducing health inequalities and supporting inclusive sustainable economies ([Taylor review, 2016](#)). Our employment status and other social factors greatly impact our health and wellbeing, accounting for around 60-80 per cent of it.

The NHS is the largest employer in England and has a strong presence across the country. Integrated health and care systems (ICSs) have been developed to address the broader needs of local communities, going beyond just providing healthcare.

Anchor networks – ICSs, ICBs and place level

Anchor institution organisations' long-term sustainability is tied to the wellbeing of the populations they serve. Anchors get their name because they are unlikely to relocate, given their connection to the local population, and have a significant influence on the health and wellbeing of communities (Building healthier communities: the role of the NHS as an anchor institution, Health Foundation, 2019).

NHS trusts and local authorities are examples of anchor institutions. An ICS that brings together various organisations to coordinate and provide services to improve the lives of people who live and work in the area, can be viewed as a network of these anchor organisations.

Within the ICS, integrated care boards (ICBs) work together, to help local communities grow and thrive. This is one of the four main goals of the ICS, and it's a key part of being an anchor institution. These networks provide jobs to locals, which helps reduce inequality, boost the economy and promote fairness. They also play a role in the broader social and economic recovery efforts, as well as supporting levelling up.

ICB people leads are responsible for forming a vibrant local labour market and promoting local social and economic growth in the wider community. The ICB gives guidance to all the organisations within the ICS in its region. This guidance can include encouraging healthcare providers to work together, coordinating with the health and wellbeing board, collaborating with local partnerships, and primary care networks. Depending on how your local system is structured and its development stage, there may be other individuals responsible for workforce-related matters, such as promoting wider participation or managing anchor programmes.

To support your local area, it's important to collaborate with the local ICS system and communicate your efforts with other partners in the community. This involves highlighting your initiatives, exchanging ideas, and learning from each other's successes. This collaborative approach helps fortify and maintain sustainable anchor work. A good example of this is system-level apprenticeship strategies, such as [apprenticeship levy transfers](#). See also our [apprenticeships briefing](#) for further guidance.

Good practice

[Read about](#) how Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, West Yorkshire and Harrogate, and North East London's sustainability and transformation partnerships (STPs) worked with local partners in their regions to deliver apprenticeships and maximise the apprenticeship levy.

Recruiting from your local community to support the future workforce

Despite the rapidly changing labour market, systems have an opportunity to encourage different ways of working, including partnership working between organisations, such as social, primary and secondary care, local authorities, schools and colleges and the third sector, to focus on skills, training and employment. This will create more opportunities, by sharing resources, for the mutual benefit of the NHS, our partners and the communities we serve.

Through inclusive recruitment systems can address workforce shortages by ensuring easier access to good jobs for those who need them most, and by actively seeking talent from the local community. This approach helps to establish a sustainable pool of skilled staff and also supports the retention of employees.

Anchor approaches to employment support social mobility and also play a key role in tackling health inequalities. The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) sets out plans to grow and enhance the NHS workforce. Employers can add social value, benefit communities and reduce inequalities through direct hiring practices, good work and career development. ([EDI improvement plan, 2023](#)).

Good practice

[Read about](#) how Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust (LCH) has had great success in filling vacancies by recruiting from the communities it serves with a variety of hyperlocal initiatives.

What being an anchor involves

Offering good work locally

Anchors play a significant role in a local area by using shared resources and assets to invest in and contribute to the local economy, creating an environment where people can lead fulfilling lives.

As evidenced in the Taylor Review (2016) having a good job is good for our health.

What is good work?



- Good work means:
- fair pay and lasting job security
- ensuring good working conditions
- a productive work life balance
- providing training and opportunities to progress in a career.

As an NHS organisation you are probably delivering anchor work already in the form of routes into training, such as apprenticeships and T level placements. Or you may offer career development routes such as degree apprenticeships or advanced practice opportunities or be a Real Living Wage employer.

See our [education and training web pages](#) for more information. Join our [NHS Employers networks](#) and share the good practice your system is currently delivering.

Good practice

Read about examples of good anchor practice on our '[being an anchor employer](#)' web page, including hyperlocal recruitment, career roadshows and multi-sector partnership approaches in the community.

Anchor employers as inclusive employers

Being an anchor employer means being an inclusive employer. This involves actively participating in, and supporting broader social and economic development, as well as contributing to the betterment of the local community by addressing inequalities. This can be achieved by:

- Recruiting more people from local communities with a particular focus on those who may experience health inequalities and/or income deprivation. This could include the Armed Forces and reserves community, young people and migrant groups.
- Facilitating programmes for skills development, social mobility and career progression, for example, interpersonal and employability skills, work experience, digital and virtual skills, and Project Choice internships.
- Working with Prince's Trust to help support disadvantaged young people into skills, training and health and care careers.
- Supporting the health and wellbeing of all staff and potentially their families.

Widening participation in your workforce

- Use data, like the NHS Workforce Race Equity Standard Survey and the Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES), to identify gaps in your workforce, and with agreed intent, develop a set of priorities to increase participation from underrepresented groups, which has board support.



- Target residents who might otherwise face barriers to work and work with local partners, third sector organisations and community groups that have a deeper reach and insight into local populations and culture.
- Engage with your workforce through drop-in sessions as these can provide solutions to the barriers you may be facing with creating a more inclusive workforce.

Good practice

Read our guide on making a business case for supporting a partnership with The Prince's Trust.

Further resources

More resources to support you

- [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan June 2023](#)
- [Integrated Care Systems diagram \(The King's Fund\)](#)
- [The NHS as an anchor institution \(health.org.uk\)](#)
- [NHS Providers – Being an anchor institution: Partnership approaches to improving population health](#)
- [Social Mobility Foundation \(SMF\)](#)
- [Standguide - Helping Britain back to work](#)
- [Moving on Up - Supporting care leavers through apprenticeships](#)

NHS Employers
2 Brewery Wharf
Kendall Street
Leeds
LS10 1JR

0113 306 3000
www.nhsemployers.org
@NHSEmployers