

Making links between health and care and further education

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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.

Key points

- A strong relationship between health and care and further education (FE) is crucial for identifying workforce supply gaps and ensuring students are supported in their career aspirations.
- Health and care organisations are typically the largest employers in an area, providing significant economic development and serving as the primary source of talent for recent graduates.
- Working together health and care and FE can support those from diverse backgrounds, providing opportunities for individuals to realise their potential.

This guide has been developed in collaboration with NHS England and the Association of Colleges. It supports health and care and further education to create a strong relationship to work collaboratively on workforce supply issues.

Background

In most towns and cities, the health and social care sector is the largest employer and FE colleges are the largest education providers. By working collaboratively there are opportunities to share knowledge, skills and experience to create a strong offer to the local population. That will enable more people to train, enter employment and continue to learn throughout their careers.

This document has been designed as a conversation starter to support the building blocks of initial engagement and continued relationship building.

Where can FE and health and care work together?

By working together health and care and FE organisations can support work vital to their communities. Below is a selection of qualifications and programmes you may wish to consider when forming these relationships.

Qualifications

- Higher Technical Qualifications
- T Levels
- Apprenticeships
- Work experience
- Care Certificate
- Traineeships
- Higher Development Award

Developing and inspiring

- Functional skills
- Careers advice and guidance
- Adult education
- Access to courses
- Sector based work academies
- Bootcamps

How do I start building a relationship?

To know where to start building a relationship, healthcare and FE will need to find out what relationships and connections already exist in their area. Understanding the current state of the workforce from both sides will set the tone for discussions on what could be useful for future demand. Health and care organisations can use their own networks to identify suitable contacts if a relationship is not already in place.

Once a relationship into FE has been established, it's recommended that a single point of contact is determined, as given the likely status of a health and care organisation as an anchor in the local community they will be one of, if not the sole, large local employer in an area.

At the start of the relationship organisations may wish to ask to view relevant policies and strategies, as this may frame how best to work together moving forward.

Using networks to build relationships across areas

The Association of Colleges (AoC) South West Health and Social Care Widening Participation Network is a legacy network which has been funded jointly by NHS England and AoC.

The network works across a number of key areas including apprenticeships, careers guidance, pathways into healthcare careers and the higher development award.

The network supports sustainable and transformational partnerships, identifying joint agendas across the healthcare and education sectors to:

- strengthen the relationship and collaborative engagement between health and care service provision and further education providers in the South West.
- consider education and skills policy and how these impact on health and care service providers.
- raise challenges and solutions within the system.
- identify future working partnerships going forward to meet existing and future workforce needs.

Which publications can inform our work?

The below documents set out ways of working that are expected from each sector as well as plans for their futures. It's worth having them in mind when meeting as they can inform both sides of the conversation.

NHS Long Term Workforce plan

The [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#) which outlines the need for increased recruitment, upskilling and development of staff working in the sector.

NHS England's Priorities and operational planning guidance 2024/25

[NHS England's Priorities and operational planning guidance 2024/25](#) covers the importance of working closely with placement providers to support long-term growth, this is of relevance to FE as qualifications such as the T Level have placement components that could lead to a health and care career.

Opportunity England

The above aims to align with the opportunities outlined in a report published by the Association of Colleges titled [Opportunity England](#), which indicates how colleges can transform life chances, overcome inequalities and boost economic growth.

OFSTED engagement requirements

The [Further education and skills inspection handbook](#) informs employers of Ofsted observing in the workplace.

Who should I contact?

Due to the size of both health and care and FE institutions, it can be difficult to determine the appropriate person to contact to establish a relationship. Below are some suggestions of the types of job titles to look out for.

In NHS organisations: learning and development teams, apprenticeship leads, organisational development leads.

In FE organisations: business development team, apprenticeship teams, employer relations teams.

In primary care: practice managers or leads for the relevant Primary Care Network.

In social care: care manager.

Top tip: General mailboxes or switchboards can be useful in finding the right individual, as internal staff will have a greater understanding of the most suitable contact.

You could explore with your contacts whether a local community of practice exists, to work collaboratively to address workforce supply and opportunities available to students. These communities of practice usually meet quarterly to discuss offers available, current and future demand, and how to work more effectively together. Attending these meetings will have many benefits, including identifying gaps in provision and working together to fill these and build relationships in the area.

Relationships should be established on multiple levels. Whilst a relationship with those involved in facilitating work experience or placements is vital, it is also crucial that those at a senior level are

engaged to guide strategic decision making. Communities of practice are the perfect space to facilitate this.

Case study: retaining 100 per cent of T Level students

University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust developed a close working relationship with their local college, leading to 100 per cent of Level 3 students remaining in health-related jobs or moving onto higher education courses after completion. They credit this strong relationship for the success of T Level placements at the trust, allowing them to co-design the curriculum, offer a strong induction package for placement students and upskilling existing staff to act as mentors for students.

NHS Employers have developed a range of infographics to help employers and providers understand how they can develop a sustainable talent pipeline for a variety of different staff groups.

- Routes into the NHS - this infographic covers access to many different careers.
- Your future nurses - focus on how to start or develop a career in nursing.
- Your future nursing associates - spotlight on how to become a nursing associate.
- Your future allied health professionals - information on how to start or develop a career as an allied health professional.
- Your future healthcare scientists - an infographic showing the route to becoming a healthcare scientist.
- Your future midwives - learn about the different routes to recruiting midwives.

What makes for a good working relationship?

This relationship should be based on openness, transparency and trust. By using the resources of both parties issues can be identified, and concerns addressed. Regular contact should be the norm for both health and care and FE, with semi-regular formal meetings alongside an ongoing dialogue. The placement organiser from the health and care organisation could spend some time on campus to integrate further with FE staff and college tutors and vice-versa.

How Gateshead College equipped their tutors to understand healthcare placements

Tutors at Gateshead College thought they would benefit from the opportunity of undertaking a placement to better manage the expectations of their students who may have a different understanding of working in health and care than the reality of being on placement and an eventual career.

Therefore the college approached Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust to ask if three of their BTEC and T Level college tutors could attend a one-week placement in May 2023. They rotated through several different medical wards as well as the stroke unit, the placement also involving an induction similar to that of students on placement.

They found the experience crucial in being able to provide relevant information and guidance to parents, as well as being able to explain the difference between the different placement opportunities.

This fits with the college's ethos of having an emphasis on employment, reflecting a belief that students should leave with

not just their qualification but also the relevant skills to succeed in the workplace. The placement experience provided up to date knowledge to tutors who had not worked directly in health and care for some time and only in certain roles. The college hope to repeat this experience in the future to ensure that staff understand what the student placement experience will be like.

Health and care organisations can serve as a conduit for relationships with organisations affiliated with their work. Including sub-contractors they use to provide services, or those working in the third sector to support health and care goals.

By using established networks of staff working in these areas the education institution can benefit students seeking placement or career support. External contacts can be maintained through a strong employer-provider relationship alongside internal connections including business development teams, apprenticeship teams and other employer-facing teams.

Working as a system lead

- Be the influencer – you will have a clear understanding of workforce priorities across the system, this can be used to influence the direction of travel for both providers and employers.
- Creation of opportunities – working at a system level you will be able to create opportunities for colleagues to come together to overcome obstacles and share expertise. This may manifest as a stakeholder working group or providing timely workforce updates to further education. This may be the perfect opportunity to work at a strategic level, engaging with colleagues at that higher level which in turn will influence operational delivery.
- Understand the expertise already available – there will be a wealth of experience available across health and care and FE.

Make sure you bring those with expertise together and support them in developing their relationships.

- Consider organisations in the system – some NHS trusts may already have strong relationship with FE, however smaller organisations, such as social care organisations and primary care may benefit from more support.



Top Tip: To formalise the relationship between health and care and FE a memorandum of understanding can be used to ensure that all parties involved are aware of their obligations, how disputes will be resolved, and what data will be shared. We would recommend speaking with your organisation's legal team to understand the format to use.

How do we plan for the future?

Employers and providers need to identify present and future workforce needs, to inform the discussions with FE.

This should be done mindfully as there is limited capacity for work placements. Several different models can facilitate placements more effectively, for example only placing students on certain days, or higher education placements are shifted to school holidays. Providers and employers should start the conversation around placements early, to ensure that capacity is available.

Health and care providers and FE organisations should monitor attrition rates to prevent students from leaving their qualifications. A high attrition rate can affect workforce planning in the short-term, but longer-term students may change their career plans and leave healthcare completely. Having these conversations early can ensure that both parties can put in place interventions that could encourage students to consider alternatives to leaving their courses.

A strong relationship between health and care and FE will support the resilience, wellbeing and pastoral support available for students.

The [busting myths on recruiting under 18s into the NHS guide](#) addresses the myth that placements in health and care are only accessible for students over 18. It includes cases studies of employers hosting younger students, and top tips to help alleviate any concerns.

A strong relationship can also facilitate a joined-up experience for students, moving some of the classroom teaching into the health and care organisation, by having staff enter the classroom to share teaching.

This can be further supported through working with multiple FE providers and health and care organisations, to offer support to different cohorts simultaneously. To supplement this, or where co-teaching isn't feasible, health and care organisations should be invited to have a vested and ongoing interest in curriculum development. If the curriculum is closely linked to the needs of the employer, the students will have a greater understanding of how to achieve success in their placements and have the necessary skills and attributes to pursue a career directly after finishing their education.

Health and care careers: With over 350 careers on offer in health and care finding information on a career pathway can be difficult. The Health Careers website allows individuals to explore the vast array of roles available and potential pathways.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) have created progression profiles for T Level learners that outline career pathways on completion of their course. They have also created apprenticeship occupational maps that look at the range of qualifications suitable for each level of study.

How do we ensure we're widening participation?

Widening participation can take many guises and involve working with several different organisations. This could be a focus on employment opportunities for young people, care leavers, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, individuals who are long-term unemployed, people with lived experience of homelessness and older workers to name just a few groups.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) can be a source of support for both healthcare and FE. The support they offer, both directly and through JobCentre Plus can encourage individuals to consider qualifications and support them with the transition from training to work. Some suggestions are outlined below:

- Employers and providers could advertise their development opportunities at free job fairs that are directly advertised through the JobCentre. This could involve FE institutions sharing details on qualifications, or employers providing information on how further education can support them into a role.
- JobCentre Plus has a network of employer advisers who can work with employers to provide services such as CV advice, promotion of vacancies and the selection and interview of priority candidates.
- One of DWP priority groups is the 50+ workers. Employers and providers should be working with the DWP to support older workers into health and care, which may involve training and reskilling that would be provided by FE.

Top tips for trusts and colleges

- This is a symbiotic relationship, working well with FE will benefit talent pipelines into health and care organisations and support FE in providing the best support and guidance to their learners.
- Ask colleagues from other organisations for the best contact details to establish a relationship and meet with colleagues to discuss concerns and resolution.
- Put in standard review meetings, with other conversations taking place on an ad hoc basis.
- Honesty is key to a strong working relationship, share concerns early and work together to resolve them.
- Stay local, working with local providers is helpful in facilitating a stronger working relationship.
- Key contacts allow relevant delegation rather than communication channels being confusing. For smaller organisations a single point of contact is best, for larger organisations multiple points of contact may be more useful.
- Get involved, relevant people from health and care organisations may wish to be on curriculum boards, and employer boards and be involved in other aspects of developing the further education offering.
- If you're a system lead, be the influencer, set up opportunities for organisations then encourage them to take it forward.
- As a system lead, don't negate the expertise that is already within the system, there may already be strong relationships developed rather than starting from scratch.

Glossary

Anchor institutions

Anchor institutions are large organisations where long-term sustainability is tied to the wellbeing of the communities they serve. The NHS is deeply rooted and connected to its local community, allowing it to positively impact the health and wellbeing of the local people by offering employment opportunities, quality work and career development.

There are 225 colleges in England and many of them now also work as a collective, therefore a relationship with one can lead to relationships with multiple different providers in the area. To find your local further education provider the AoC website can be used.

Integrated care boards (ICBs) and integrated care systems (ICSs)

Every NHS trust will also sit under an Integrated Care Board (ICB) as part of the Integrated Care System (ICS). An ICS is a partnership between health and care organisations, local authorities and other partners with a vested interest in improving services, population health and reducing health inequalities in their area. This ICB will be a useful source of information to support establishing a relationship, as well as having a system-level understanding of what organisations may need. A map of all the ICSs in England is available.

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP)

LSIPs are intended to set out a clear statement of employers' skills needs in a local area. Led by employer representative bodies (ERBs), the plans provide an agreed set of priorities for employers, colleges, universities and other learning organisations and stakeholders to drive skills development and boost productivity.

The three year plans identify key priorities and the changes needed to ensure that skills provision responds to need and that they reflect the strengths and opportunities of the local areas. The plans can be viewed on the [ERB websites](#).

Higher Development Award

The Higher Development Award (HDA) is a personal and professional development programme that enables clinical and non-clinical support workers' to develop skills. It's free for employers and support staff. The programme enables workers to improve patient outcomes and understand leadership and decision-making skills across work settings. FE can play a crucial role in offering this qualification to local NHS organisations and supporting them in upskilling their staff leading to positive personal and professional outcomes.

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