

The background of the page features a photograph of two men. On the left, an older man with white hair and glasses is looking towards the right. On the right, a younger man with dark curly hair, a beard, and glasses is looking towards the left, with his hand raised as if speaking or gesturing. The image is partially obscured by a green text box on the left and a blue bar at the bottom.

Attracting people into healthcare support worker roles

A practical guide to developing your
healthcare support worker workforce

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Foreword

Now, more than ever, we want to attract new healthcare support workers to help the NHS address the ongoing challenges of responding to and recovering services from COVID-19.

Healthcare support workers play a vital role in providing excellent care to patients across all NHS care settings. This work can also offer some fantastic career opportunities. With the right support, those who exemplify the skills and core values essential to delivering high-quality, compassionate care could go on to become our future nurses, nursing associates and midwives.

To help you recruit and develop newcomers into skilled, caring, compassionate healthcare support workers and beyond, I'm delighted to launch this resource. It provides practical case studies and good practice to help you develop your workforce.



Ruth May
Chief Nursing Officer for England



"We are thrilled to be welcoming people from all different walks of life into the NHS. A healthcare support worker can be the perfect entry point to the NHS, they are an essential part of a healthcare team and are at the very heart of patient care."

Ruth May



Introduction

The importance of healthcare support workers

Healthcare support workers (HCSWs) play a crucial role in all aspects of care for patients. HCSW is an umbrella term including healthcare assistants and nursing assistants, working in settings including community care, primary care, mental health, maternity services and learning disability services.



Our (NHS England and NHS Improvement) national HCSW programme

A national HCSW programme began development in September 2019, to minimise healthcare support worker vacancies. By June 2020, the urgency of this increased as the COVID-19 pandemic saw demand for HCSWs rise sharply. Reducing and maintaining minimal HCSW vacancy rates is essential to supporting system recovery from COVID-19 and delivery of the Long Term Plan.

The programme supports organisations to minimise vacancies via:

- A national recruitment drive through the 'We Are The NHS' campaign and other platforms to raise awareness of the HCSW role.
- Working with Health Education England (HEE) on a revised Care Certificate and enhanced onboarding.
- Offering support to providers with the highest number of vacancies to address specific workforce challenges.

This guide showcases examples of best practice in addressing challenges facing the HCSW workforce and forms part of the programme's universal support offer for organisations. This package of support can be found on the [FutureNHS Platform](#), and aims to help you reduce HCSW vacancies quickly and sustainably.

Attracting HCSWs from outside the NHS and social care

The importance of healthcare support workers

HCSWs are in high demand across the health and social care system. It is important to consider the impact of only hiring staff who already work in the NHS or social care on existing services, and to consider widening your recruitment pool. The qualities and skills required to be an excellent HCSW do not necessarily come from experience of working within the health and care sector. Many individuals possess transferrable skills and core values from other industries and have lived experience that make them a fantastic fit for HCSW roles.



CASE STUDY: Mark, trainee nursing associate

Mark became a healthcare assistant after retiring from the Army in his early forties. He brought transferable skills and experience including medic courses, managing teams, being an instructor and working in an operational base. Mark says witnessing injuries during his service and his passion to care made him want to work in healthcare.

CASE STUDY: Becky, healthcare assistant

Becky worked in admin from leaving school at 16, including in regional TV, the aerospace industry and for a local authority. Twelve years ago, aged 38, she decided to change career and be a healthcare support worker. She also now helps with the HCSW recruitment and provides pastoral support to new HCSWs at her trust.



CASE STUDY:

Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICS cabin crew career framework

Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICS has developed a specific career framework for ex-cabin crew from the airline industry who wish to make the most of their customer service and first aid experience by joining the NHS.

Following initial mandatory training – either face-to-face or using the eLearning for Health (eLfH) [Cabin crew supporting the delivery of patient care module](#) – staff can be deployed as HCSWs. Following completion of the Care Certificate they can progress to nurse associates and onward to registered nurses (or equivalent) with further training.



CASE STUDY:

Jess and The Prince's Trust 'Get into Hospital Services' Programme

The Prince's Trust supports young people into entry level roles in the NHS such as HCSW positions. Their 'Get into' and 'Get started' programmes offer work experience and skills development support, alongside healthcare specific introductions and skills training.

Jess, aged 21, always wanted to work in the NHS. But after health issues saw her leave college with half a degree, Jess didn't feel optimistic about her chances. After seeing a poster promoting The Prince's Trust 'Get into Hospital Services' programme, she decided to apply. Once on the programme, Jess excelled and has been working at Birmingham Children's Hospital as a clinical support worker in intensive care for two years now.

She says: "My dream of a career in nursing is being realised. With help and support from The Prince's Trust and colleagues at work, I'm now feeling happier. In the past I've had times when I thought my disability was a barrier to employment, however I now believe my attitude to work and helping others is valued and appreciated. I've gone from feeling like a failure to seeing a future full of possibility."



RESOURCE:

NHS Employers' 'Inspire, attract and recruit'

[Inspire, attract and recruit](#) is an interactive toolkit that aims to improve providers' understanding of their workforce supply and talent pool. It also provides support around simplifying and improving recruitment processes to create a positive candidate experience.



Maximising the effectiveness of recruiting new people to the NHS

Due to the economic impact of COVID-19, growing numbers of people from different sectors are looking for a career change; many could be perfect for HCSW roles, but are unaware of them.

This section provides examples of how organisations have maximised this national opportunity to recruit high-quality HCSWs locally and at scale. It looks at:

- The importance of values based recruitment
- Addressing local recruitment challenges
- Large-scale and centralised recruitment.



Values based HCSW recruitment

People often feel a lack of qualifications to be a doctor or nurse bars them from working in the NHS. As such, it is vital to raise the profile and understanding of the HCSW role, the huge variety of work it covers, and the skills the role requires.

When hiring, it's important to look beyond a person's qualifications, formal experience and knowledge. Many people have lived experience of providing care, or possess the right transferrable skills from another sector, such as being calm under pressure, that would make them ideal HCSWs.

Hiring people who demonstrate the right caring and compassionate values that HCSWs need to provide high-quality care to patients is critical. That is why we recommend providers use values based recruitment approaches to recruit their HCSWs and then design onboarding and educational processes to equip them with the necessary clinical skills thereafter.

Values based recruitment

The HEE values-based recruitment framework encourages NHS employers to recruit in line with the values of the NHS Constitution. A suite of resources and advice on how to conduct values based interviews and assessment centres are available from [HEE](#).



CASE STUDY:

The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust recruits apprentice clinical support workers (ACSWs) based on their values. As part of the recruitment and selection process, applicants discuss the role of the ACSW in detail with the apprenticeships team to understand the responsibilities and expectations of the role prior to attending the assessment day.

At the assessment day, candidates participate in scenarios such as looking after a patient who is complaining of pain. The behaviours the candidate demonstrates at assessment enable the trust to assess if they are in line with the 'Leeds Way Values' – patient-centred, accountable, collaborative, empowered and fair – and so can be successful in the role.

For more information email leedsth-tr.OrgLearnGetIn@nhs.net

[See more examples of best practice here.](#)



Addressing local recruitment challenges

It is important to understand the skills and experience of job seekers in your area, including the barriers that they might face in becoming HCSWs and to have a plan in place to address these issues as part of your recruitment strategy.



CASE STUDY:

Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

To address increased HCSW vacancies at their trust, Aintree University Hospital NHS FT developed apprenticeship open days to raise awareness of employment opportunities in the area. They also promoted nursing as a career with local schools and colleges and developed an improved career pathway for existing HCSWs to become trainee nursing associates or registered nursing students.

[Find out more about this work here.](#)

CASE STUDY:

North Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust

The trust faced challenges in recruiting HCSWs, including deprivation and mixed educational attainment levels in the area. They addressed this by widening participation and routes to entry through developing a 'Career Confidence' programme. The programme encouraged people to explore the possibility of HCSW roles through a redesigned apprenticeship route, combined with clear career pathways. This included use of the Care Certificate and science qualifications for staff to transition into Band 5 trainee nursing associate and assistant practitioner roles over 18 months to two years.

[Find out more about this work here.](#)



A good understanding of the local community, allied with the right promotion of the HCSW role and its career opportunities, can help you develop a sustainable, continuous increase in the number of new HCSWs. This can also support those who want to move into nursing through well-developed career pathways.

Large-scale and centralised HCSW recruitment

If your organisation advertises multiple HCSW vacancies separately, candidates may be confused as to which roles they are most suitable for (or which are most suitable for them). This often sees candidates making several applications to several posts, which can impact on the quality of each application, and a single suitable candidate may be interviewed on several separate occasions.

To maximise staff time, reduce costs, improve candidate experience and benefit from economies of scale, organisations can streamline their HCSW recruitment processes by centralising recruitment and/or using assessment centres.



CASE STUDY:

University Hospitals Southampton NHS Foundation Trust

The trust developed a recruitment strategy which centralised recruitment across the trust. This included allowing for multiple HCSW vacancies to be recruited via a single advert and giving the recruitment team, rather than clinical hiring managers, responsibility for shortlisting candidates. The team used a three-step assessment process, that included an online application, a telephone interview and an assessment centre (conducted by clinical staff) to reduce clinical time needed to recruit HCSWs and ensure good fit for the role.

[Find out more about this work here.](#)

Not only do streamlined processes improve time to hire, vacancy rates and candidate/staff experience, there are also benefits to collaborating with other organisations to recruit HCSWs across a larger footprint; for example, at sustainability and transformation partnership (STP) or integrated care system (ICS) level.

Co-ordinating recruitment across an organisation or wider footprint offers scope to maximise the variety of the HCSW role, by offering a rotating placement in a range of care settings. This could include an acute setting, mental health, learning disability services and more. Such approaches can give newcomers a breadth of skills and experience and could encourage them to make a career in the NHS.

Using technology to support recruitment

NHS Employers' blog features the work of Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust to improve the pace of recruitment and reduce the rates of those who did not attend their interviews by using online competency assessments.

[Find out more here.](#)



Onboarding, retention and career development

Effective processes are needed to rapidly induct HCSWs into an organisation and equip them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to provide high-quality care quickly. An enhanced onboarding process may be useful to consider.

It is also essential that your recruitment strategy and your onboarding, education and training processes include and communicate ways to retain your HCSWs and 'grow your own' workforce by supporting people to further their career in the NHS. A clear pathway for progression from HCSW roles through to registered nurses and midwives should be developed and made clear to potential recruits and existing staff. You should also ensure there are career development opportunities in place for those who wish to remain in HCSW roles.

Enhanced induction and the Care Certificate

The Care Certificate is designed to be used at the very beginning of an HCSW's career as part of their onboarding, induction and training. It is aimed at equipping HCSWs with the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to feel safe and supported at work, and to enable them to provide safe and compassionate patient care. This improves health outcomes and the experience of both patients and the multidisciplinary care team; which in turn improves early attrition and retention.



Accelerated Care Certificate delivery model

HEE has worked collaboratively with the system to develop content to support an accelerated delivery model of the Care Certificate in 4-6 weeks (traditionally 12) via a blended learning approach.

In partnership with eLearning for Health, HEE has also created a refreshed and rebranded [landing page and animation](#) for audiences new to healthcare. This introduces the Care Certificate and supports an accelerated delivery model.

RESOURCE: Skills for care

The organisation Skills for Care has produced a range of resources to support implementation of the Care Certificate. This now includes [new resources](#), to contextualise some of the Care Certificate standards to different working situations, including learning disability, mental health, dementia and lone working roles.



Reducing HCSW attrition

Being an HCSW can be challenging. Ensuring people feel supported and safe to undertake their role to the best of their ability is a critical part of reducing attrition and to improving the experience of patients and staff. Building resilience is imperative; making sure HCSWs feel supported and confident in their role is crucial.

A main driver of retention is staff having access to ongoing learning and development opportunities in addition to ongoing supervision. It is therefore important to consider not only how to recruit innovatively, but how to retain and support HCSWs in their new roles and reduce early attrition through your induction and education and training processes.

CASE STUDY: Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust

To ensure that HCSWs had a thorough induction process and that there were clear pathways for progression between Bands 2 and 4 for HCSWs, Frimley Health developed a robust six-day induction process, taking place over six months, using a blended learning model to deliver the programme.

Key features include:

- Fundamentals of care delivery to begin supporting patients in the first two days
- A focus on communication, including handover and the importance of both verbal and non-verbal behaviours, dementia, safeguarding and an e-learning module on falls
- HCSWs are inducted together which is an important element of the programme as it helps to foster peer support amongst HCSWs
- HCSWs are buddied up with someone on the ward they belong to and undertake a period of supernumerary training for two weeks

- Four weeks after starting the programme, HCSWs undertake a fourth day of induction, which covers additional skills that will help them in different settings, including ECGs, palliative care, diabetes, pain and mobility
- Eight weeks after joining the trust, HCSWs come back and undertake an e-learning review and action learning sets to ensure their knowledge and skills are embedded
- Four to six months after joining the trust, HCSWs undertake a study date focused on deteriorating patients. This whole process ensures that for the first six months a HCSW is in the trust they have several learning opportunities.

Induction days for new starters to the trust are run every two weeks as part of the programme.

[Find out more about this case study here.](#)





HCSW career development and pathways for progression

It is important to think about career development opportunities for those that wish to develop within their role while remaining as a HCSW and staff that would like to progress over time to become a registered nurse or midwife.

A clear pathway for progression, as well as education and training opportunities, should be developed and mapped out for both instances, then made clear to potential, new and existing staff. This will support individuals to maximise their potential in HCSW roles and also develop a 'grow your own' model that will help build an organisation's nursing workforce.

Organising regular discussions with staff to ensure there are opportunities to participate in improvement activity, or supervision of junior colleagues are just two ways to support HCSWs' development within their role. A shared decision-making council can be an effective model for this kind of engagement.

CASE STUDY:

University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust

UHL has developed a pastoral support package to help their HCSWs early on in their career and to help manage the practical realities of the role. Band 3 healthcare assistants (HCAs) support new HCSWs to complete the Care Certificate and assist those who need extra help.

The trust has a buddy programme from the first day of clinical practice. HCSWs will have someone waiting to meet and greet them on their first day, and can then learn their way around the ward.

Band 3 HCAs gain an understanding of the HCSWs and their skills, knowledge and experience. This enables them to identify which career pathways are most suited to their colleagues.

UHL is also in the process of running development days 12 weeks after HCSWs finish their induction process. It is being led by Band 3 HCAs with space for the previous cohort of HCSWs to come back and attend a session. The day incorporates ward manager feedback for each candidate and a strong element of peer support through their own reflective scenarios that they have encountered in practice. The development and education team talk to the HCSWs about the different NHS career pathways and opportunities available to them both inside and outside of the HCSW role.

[Find out more about this work here.](#)





CASE STUDY:
Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

Imperial identified a need to increase their awareness and understanding of the skills and educational attainment of HCSWs coming into the trust. There was also a delay in the completion of the Care Certificate due to staff not having participation documents signed off in a timely manner.

A Band 4 associate educator role was developed to focus on HCSWs' training and education. The aim was to train an appropriate member of staff to fully understand and support the HCSW role, and introduce a culture of education and learning for HCSWs with two posts covering the whole trust.

It is intended that the post holder will support the trust nursing directorate's education team to further build on and articulate the development opportunities for HCSWs, by helping to champion and co-ordinate the development of HCSWs who are new to the trust and to the care environment.

[Find out more about this case study here.](#)



CASE STUDY:
Shane, student nurse

After 24 years in the Army, Shane first worked for a veterans' charity and in social care, before becoming a healthcare assistant in the forensic learning disabilities service of his local mental health trust. He went on to secure a trainee nursing associate role before being accepted onto a registered nursing degree apprenticeship programme. He's now a full-time student nurse.

Shane says: "Being a healthcare support worker is a good entry-level role, but if you do want to progress further you can use it as a springboard to a nursing career. I'm really glad I chose that role as it gives you an understanding of how the NHS runs, how wards and teams run, and you can see which area you might like to work in or specialise in."



Next steps

We hope to continue to add to this resource and the [FutureNHS Collaboration Platform](#) throughout the HCSW Programme.

Please watch this space and if you have any questions, suggestions or examples of best practice of your own to share, please contact us.



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