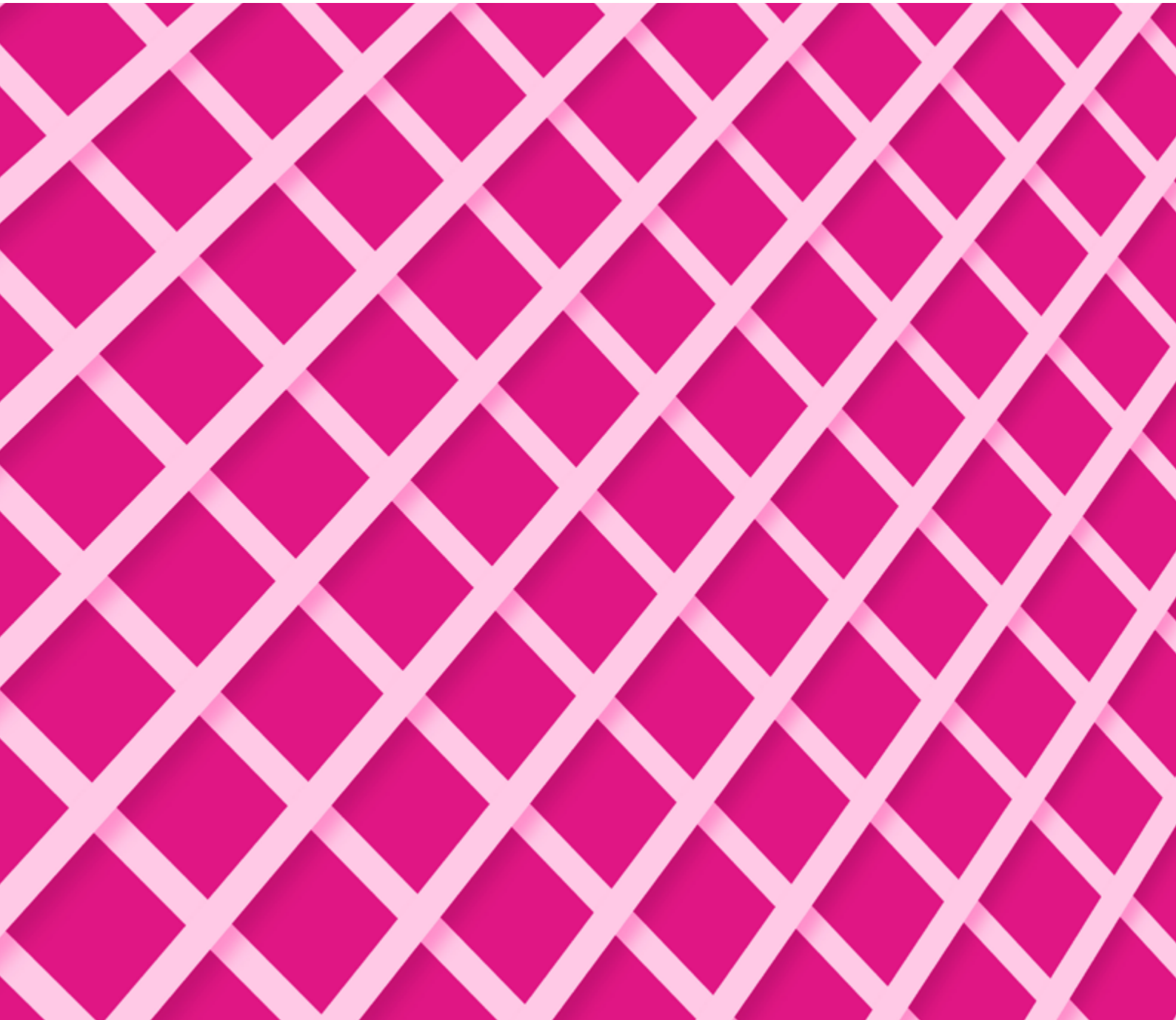
EXCEL 2026
hpma EXCELLENCE IN PEOPLE AWARDS

WINNERS' GUIDE



Thank you to everyone who took the time to enter the awards this year. The winners were announced on Thursday 12 November at the Ashton Gate Stadium, Bristol and once again it was a great celebration of the ideas, dedication and achievements of people professionals across the UK, highlighting the difference their work makes to colleagues, organisations and the communities they serve.

To both our finalists and winners, congratulations. Being shortlisted is an achievement to be proud of, recognising your commitment, creativity and care.

We'd like to say a very big thank you to all of our sponsors, as well as to the judges, who had a very difficult task of shortlisting and judging. This Winners' Guide showcases the winners and finalists, and we hope that they will continue to share their stories with passion and with pride. Congratulations to all our finalists and winners!

Terry Roberts, HPMA Chair and
Janine La Rosa, Chief Executive (Interim), HPMA



Terry Roberts
HPMA Chair



Janine La Rosa
Chief Executive (Interim), HPMA

MILLS & REEVE
Achieve more. Together.

Mills & Reeve Award for achieving impact through open & inclusive leadership



WINNER

Project Search – 10 years of impact

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

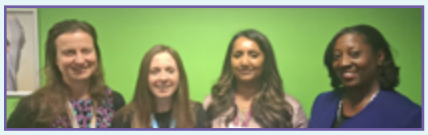
Project SEARCH launched in 2015 to provide one-year internships for young people aged 17–25 with a learning disability or autism, with the aim of supporting them into sustainable paid employment. Working with a wide range of partners within and beyond the Trust, as well as interns and their families, the scheme has created valuable opportunities and delivered lasting benefits.

Over the past ten years, 101 interns have completed placements, with 57 (68%) progressing into paid employment in roles including administration, portering, healthcare assistance, housekeeping and catering. These opportunities have had a significant impact on the lives of interns and their families.

The programme has also helped transform workplace attitudes towards inclusion. Managers and colleagues have developed their understanding, adapted roles and created more supportive environments, including making patient-facing roles accessible. The scheme has benefited not only the interns but also the teams supporting them and the patients who see its positive impact. Through ten years of dedication, the team has consistently removed barriers and helped young people build the skills and confidence to succeed.

sue.grange1@nhs.net

FINALISTS



Flex Evelina: Flexible working putting patients first

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

Through visible senior leadership advocacy, clear organisational expectations and staff-centred engagement, Flex Evelina has increased access to flexible working, reduced inequity in decision making and improved opportunities for staff satisfaction, inclusion and work-life balance across the Clinical Group.

cheryl.samuels6@nhs.net



Open by design: Achieving measurable inclusion through compassionate, board-to-Floor leadership

University Hospitals Birmingham

UHB transformed inclusion through the Wise Council—a 1,000-strong network enabling open dialogue, co-production, and compassionate leadership from Board to frontline, delivering measurable improvements in representation, belonging, and inclusive practices.

helen.cant@uhb.nhs.uk



Improving sexual safety at a regional scale

NHSE-London Region

Engagement, co-creation and compassionate leadership have been key to this programme, bringing together 33 NHS Trusts to improve sexual safety through collaborative training, intersectional data analysis, and a 120-member Community of Practice, creating consistent approaches across London.

olayinka.iwu@nhs.net



Ask Aunty Programme and Mobile App

NHS South West London ICB and St Georges Epsom St Helier Hospital (GESH)

The Ask Aunty Programme is a co-produced EDI initiative supporting international NHS staff through a digital platform and mentoring network of "Aunties" and "Uncles". Developed through a 2024 pilot involving surveys, induction feedback, forums and open dialogue across Trusts, it ensures staff voices shape its design and ongoing improvement. Compassionate, inclusive leadership has helped create a psychologically safe environment where colleagues feel heard and supported.

sandra.ovid@nhs.net

Aria Medstars

Medstars award for health and wellbeing



WINNER

Healthy Working Lives
Mid Yorkshire Teaching NHS Trust

Healthy Working Lives is a system-wide workforce wellbeing programme bringing together NHS, local authority and VCSE partners. It provides preventative support to address sickness absence and retention challenges through social prescribing, fast-track MSK support, digital learning, mentoring and compassionate leadership.

In 2025/26, £310,000 of investment delivered 750 MSK referrals, 463 social prescribing contacts, 720 active eLearning users across 73 organisations and 112 mentoring participants. Evaluation showed a reduced risk of long-term sickness absence, faster returns to work, improved staff confidence and resilience, and stronger leadership capability.

Staff feedback highlights improved physical health, reduced stress and greater confidence to remain in work. Through early intervention and strong partnership working, the programme helps reduce avoidable absence and pressure on Occupational Health services. Its flexible, blended approach provides a sustainable and transferable model that can be adapted or scaled to meet the needs of other areas.

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FINALISTS



New Hospital Programme Staff Welfare Space Standards

NHS England

This programme, developed through extensive engagement with frontline staff and global research, introduces standardised 'Hospital 2.0' designs, incorporating comprehensive, evidence-based standards for staff welfare spaces. This recognises that supporting staff physically, emotionally and professionally is an essential part of staff wellbeing, safety and the clinical safety system.

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Early detection, real impact: how workforce wellbeing is transforming staff health through proactive screening

Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust

The Physical Health MOT programme provides accessible health checks for a workforce of 3,500, screening cholesterol, blood pressure, pulse and glucose. Since 2023, 1,926 appointments have identified previously unknown health risks in an average of 10% of staff, enabling early referral and intervention. The programme supports staff wellbeing, reduces sickness absence risk and helps protect service delivery.

ruth.macdonald3@nhs.net



Rapid Access Physiotherapy Assessment (RAPA)

Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust

The RAPA pilot provides staff with specialist MSK support within 48 hours of reporting sickness absence. Between May and September 2025, it managed over 1,100 referrals, reducing MSK-related absence by 5.5% (1,139.8 FTE days saved). Back-related absence fell by 22%, while 93% of staff recommended the service. The pilot demonstrates the value of early intervention in improving workforce wellbeing and reducing absence.

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NHS Wye Valley NHS Trust

Optimising Your Wellbeing is our Commitment, Helping You to Help Yourself

Wye Valley NHS Trust

WVT has developed a strategic approach to address high sickness absence, introducing enhanced, holistic mental and physical health support to help staff remain well and in work, and enable a safer, earlier return following absence, reducing sickness absence from 6% to 3.8%, saving 5,000 working days, improving staff engagement by 12%, and cutting agency costs from £14m to £6m.

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GIG CYMRU NHS WALES | Addysg a Gwella Iechyd Cymru (AaGIC) Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW)

Health Education & Improvement Wales award for developing the profession and people professionals



WINNER

People Profession Map and Development Programme South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust

The NHS People Profession Map and Development Programme has been successfully rolled out across the ambulance sector, representing a pioneering, sector-wide approach to developing HR professionals. Through embedding national standards, enabling data-driven insight, and creating a connected professional community, the programme has strengthened capability, communication and consistency, positioning the people profession as a strategic driver of organisational success.

The programme demonstrates a robust and scalable approach to embedding professional standards and elevating the impact of HR. The Map is now the recognised national standard for defining excellence, outlining the knowledge, behaviours and impact required across the profession. Since its launch in February 2025, all ambulance Trusts have been successfully onboarded, achieving 100% engagement and 91% completion of self-assessments.

This data-led approach has provided, for the first time, a comprehensive view of sector capability. Insights have identified key development priorities, including business acumen, strategic thinking, technology and transformation, directly aligning workforce development with NHS direction and the 10-year health plan.

The work is supporting Trusts to take forward development and build a skilled, confident and future-ready people profession. The creation of the People Profession Network has demonstrated that connection, peer support, shared learning and collaboration are critical enablers of professional growth. There is a clear, renewed shared pride in the profession for the ambulance sector.

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FINALISTS



Peer Led Professional Development and Career Support for NHS People Professionals

Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust

In response to NHS workforce uncertainty following national job-cut announcements, the team established a private, not-for-profit LinkedIn group for NHS people professionals. Providing a professionally moderated space for peer support, coaching, shared learning and senior-leader Q&A sessions, the group helps members build confidence, recognise transferable skills and navigate change with professionalism and compassion. It now supports over 430 NHS professionals across the UK.

r.goodby@nhs.net



Developing a Future-Ready Profession: A National AI Capability Programme for NHS Wales Workforce & OD

HPMA Cymru

HPMA Cymru delivered the first national AI capability programme for the NHS Wales Workforce and OD community, addressing a critical digital skills gap. Informed by a national learning needs analysis, it equipped over 350 professionals with the confidence, knowledge and practical skills to use AI in workforce planning, recruitment and service transformation. The programme positioned HR as an active driver of digital change, with its impact continuing through ongoing Copilot sessions and cross-organisational collaboration.

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Justine Alldritt, Sarah Curran and the Sexual Safety Project Team

University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust

Justine Alldritt, Sarah Curran and the Sexual Safety Team developed UHNM's Sexual Safety Policy and framework, aligned with the NHS Sexual Safety Charter and best practice. Establishing a zero-tolerance approach to sexual misconduct, they introduced confidential reporting routes, clear processes and organisation-wide training. This has improved understanding, strengthened psychological safety and increased confidence that concerns will be heard and addressed fairly, embedding sexual safety as a core organisational responsibility.

emily.hilton@uhnm.nhs.uk

Hill Dickinson

Hill Dickinson Award for ‘Passionate about OD’





WINNER

From Banter to Boundaries: Transforming Workplace Culture Through ‘Respecting Each Other at Work’,

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board

“Respecting Each Other at Work” is an OD-led behavioural programme developed to address inappropriate behaviour, workplace culture and inconsistent management responses within Facilities services. Using real staff experiences and scenario-based learning, it challenged harmful workplace banter and promoted psychological safety, early intervention and leadership accountability.

Evaluation showed strong results, with over 92% of participants felt more confident to challenge inappropriate behaviour and over 90% having a better understanding of acceptable workplace standards. Managers also reported intervening earlier and feeling more confident handling difficult conversations.

The programme contributed to fewer escalated employee relations issues and safeguarding cases, alongside improvements in staff survey measures for confidence in addressing concerns (+19.8%), speaking up (+9.2%) and compassionate leadership (+14.1%). By embedding respectful behaviours into everyday practice, it has helped create a more compassionate, accountable and psychologically safe workplace.

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HIGHLY COMMENDED

Public Services Delivery Scotland

NHS Scotland National Succession Planning

Public Services Delivery Scotland

The programme establishes a consistent, national approach to executive talent management and succession planning across NHS Scotland. It provides a future-focused leadership model and processes to identify potential, assess readiness, support development and align executive recruitment.

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FINALISTS



21st Century Leadership Programme (21CLP)

Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust

CNWL’s 21CLP is a Trust-designed leadership programme developed in response to workforce feedback. It builds compassionate leadership and stronger management relationships, helping colleagues feel heard and valued. The 10-month programme focuses on self-awareness, relationships and performance, and supports a more diverse and compassionate leadership culture.

cnwl21.clp@nhs.net



Unprofessional Behaviours and Sexual Safety Programme

Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust

This initiative reframes sexual safety from a reactive HR issue to a proactive, organisation-led cultural intervention. Co-designed with the GMC, NMC and a staff member with lived experience, it is a Trust-wide model focused on governance and compassionate leadership. The pilot cohort achieved a 0.5% reduction in staff safety concerns in the 2025 NSS, alongside improved confidence and leadership accountability, demonstrating potential for wider adoption.

paul.taylor88@nhs.net



Call It Out!

North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust

This campaign was a 12-month initiative to challenge rudeness, incivility, hate and sexually inappropriate behaviour, supporting cultural improvement across the organisation. Delivered in four phases through Trust-wide communications, educational resources, manager support and facilitated discussions, it encouraged colleagues to reflect on their behaviour and its impact on others.

amanda.dunkley@neas.nhs.uk

KORN FERRY

Award for learner of the year

sponsored by Korn Ferry



WINNER
WALES

Olivia Seaton, Administrative Assistant
Swansea Bay University Health Board

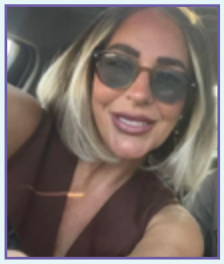
Olivia joined the Occupational Health and Staff Wellbeing Team as an Administrative Apprentice and has rapidly progressed into a highly capable and trusted member of the team. Now supporting a multidisciplinary service of around 45 staff, she demonstrates exceptional initiative, sound judgement and problem-solving skills, often anticipating operational challenges and supporting colleagues beyond her role. Her development of a Standard Operating Procedure has improved consistency and efficiency, while her flexibility during staff shortages helps maintain service continuity.

Olivia is committed to her personal and professional development and is currently undertaking an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) qualification. She has applied her learning by presenting to the senior leadership team and successfully leading a project to introduce a staff newsletter, demonstrating strong project management, communication and leadership skills. She is already exploring further opportunities to develop her qualifications and capabilities.

A positive and approachable colleague, Olivia builds strong relationships across roles and disciplines. Her staff newsletter has improved communication and engagement across three locations and remote teams, strengthening connections and team cohesion. Through her initiative, collaborative approach and commitment to continuous improvement, Olivia demonstrates considerable potential as a future NHS leader.

FINALISTS

WALES



Amy Jones, Associate POD Business Partner
NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP)

Amy is an outstanding and highly motivated POD professional, demonstrating exceptional commitment to learning, development and service excellence. Alongside her Associate Business Partner role, she is undertaking her CIPD qualification while balancing family and work commitments. She has successfully transitioned into new service areas, quickly building credibility and strong stakeholder relationships. Her enthusiasm, professionalism and proactive approach to development, combined with her positive impact on colleagues and services, make her an excellent candidate for this award.



Tom Leigh, Organisational Development Culture Lead,
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

Tom has quickly established himself as an exceptional learner and people professional. With a diverse background, Tom brings compassion, strong values, curiosity and credibility to organisational culture change. He combines academic learning with practical application in driving innovation and change within a large and complex Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Division. Tom is personable, inclusive and reflective, using evidence-based methods to measure, support and improve culture. His commitment to learning, collaboration, and continuous improvement has already made a tangible difference.

KORN FERRY

Award for learner of the year

sponsored by Korn Ferry



WINNER ENGLAND

Rose Ilunga, HR Advisor

Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust

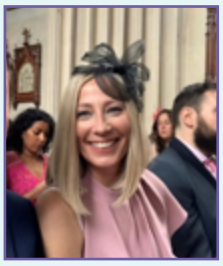
Rose Ilunga joined CLCH on an interim Band 3 contract in HR Services with limited HR experience but quickly established herself as a capable, reliable and professional colleague. After securing a permanent HR Officer role, she began her CIPD Level 3 qualification, applying her learning to practice and delivering high-quality, customer-focused support. Her initiative included helping develop pre-departure briefings for staff taking extended family leave, improving their preparation and confidence.

Rose demonstrated a strong commitment to personal development, actively seeking feedback, stretch opportunities and ways to apply her learning. Her dedication led to progression into a substantive Band 6 HR Advisor role, where she now supports complex employee relations cases, including disciplinary, grievance, attendance and organisational change matters.

A collaborative and approachable colleague, Rose builds strong relationships with managers, HR Business Partners and trade union representatives. She shares knowledge, supports colleagues and contributes to consistent, compassionate and fair outcomes. Her progression from Band 3 to Band 6 reflects her determination, early promise and potential as a future leader within the people profession.

FINALISTS

ENGLAND



Jo Third, Talent Development and Retention Lead

Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Jo has demonstrated an exceptional achievement in completing the L7 Senior People professional apprenticeship with Chartered MCIPD status, making an outstanding contribution to her own personal and professional development throughout her learning journey as well as through her design of the Trust's career development approach and ongoing strategy. Jo has balanced her learning with a high-pressured job and a busy home life, whilst achieving a distinction in her apprenticeship.



Lucy Brearton, People Performance & Governance Officer

University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust

Lucy has excelled in her role, demonstrating strong initiative, adaptability, and impact despite no prior HR experience, with her apprenticeship representing a springboard for a bright career ahead. She has quickly become the engine room of the People function and epitomises all that is good about our profession, showing a commitment to continuous growth she actively shares learning, champions innovation, and supports colleagues.

Browne Jacobson

Browne Jacobson award for excellence in employee engagement



WINNER

Team-Based Rostering (London North West University Hospital)

London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust

Team-Based Rostering has transformed how Nursing and Midwifery staff influence their working lives, giving almost 3,000 colleagues across 71 units greater choice, flexibility and control over their shifts. Using a self-service rota application, staff can request preferred shifts and protected time off, creating a more collaborative and transparent approach while maintaining safe staffing and fairness.

The programme has shifted rostering from a manager-led process to one where staff have a stronger voice in shaping their working week. Results from the pilot showed that 84% of staff were satisfied, 80% felt more empowered through greater flexibility and choice, and 80% felt their preferences were considered fairly. Approved shift requests increased from 11.6% to 53.9%, while manual rostering reduced by 43.4%.

The programme has also delivered wider workforce and financial benefits, including reductions in sickness absence, bank and agency usage, vacancies and voluntary turnover. It generated £1.5m in savings during 2024/25 through improved rostering efficiency and reduced temporary staffing reliance.

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FINALISTS



Engagement Mode Activated – 73% Hit Start and Had Their Voices Heard

West London NHS Trust

Using quality improvement methods, a staff survey steering group developed creative, inclusive engagement approaches tailored to the workforce. A nostalgic retro-gaming theme encouraged staff to share their views. Continuous improvement helped refine messaging and build trust, achieving a 73% response rate and generating insights that are already improving staff experience and patient care.

Alison.Webster20@nhs.net



Parental Pathways: From Insight to Impact in Supporting Working Parents

South Western Ambulance Service (SWAST)

This is a co-designed, organisation-wide initiative improving support for working parents throughout their parenting journey. Developed in response to staff feedback, it combines practical tools, policy changes and cultural improvements to strengthen inclusion and retention. Its Maternity Planner supports meaningful conversations between staff and managers, improving confidence, preparedness and consistency of support.

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Celebrating Diversity: From Awareness to Action

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

The Trust introduced the multi-year 'Celebrating Diversity' EDI Conferences, creating psychologically safe spaces for open dialogue, reflection and shared accountability. The conferences amplified quieter and underrepresented voices, encouraging colleagues to share experiences and explore how discrimination can occur in everyday working life. Moving beyond awareness-raising, the initiative strengthened staff voice and helped drive meaningful cultural change.

melissa.baptiste@nhs.net



From Staff Voice to Lasting Change: The CTM People Plan

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board

Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB co-created a new People Plan with over 550 staff and insights from 3,560 NHS Wales Staff Survey responses. Using an organisation-wide, adaptive engagement approach, the plan moved beyond traditional consultation to create a deliverable strategy owned across CTM. Within 12 months, staff survey response rates rose by 8.8%, the Engagement Index improved and turnover fell from 11.66% to 8.50%.

hayleigh.jones3@wales.nhs.uk

Bevan Brittan

Award for best use of an ‘Avoidable employee harm’ approach

sponsored by Bevan Brittan



WINNER

Pause and Reflect Panel, Royal London People Team

Barts Health NHS Foundation Trust

Introduced in March 2024 at Royal London and Mile End Hospitals, the Pause and Reflect Panel provides anonymised, senior-led reviews of employee relations cases before formal investigation.

The weekly multidisciplinary panel ensures fair, consistent and evidence-based decisions, determining whether cases require formal action or can be addressed through alternatives such as reflective practice, mediation, occupational health support or local management action. It also coaches managers on alternative approaches, helping them develop more compassionate leadership and make proportionate decisions independently in future.

Over two years, the panel reviewed 201 cases, with 48 (23.9%) resolved informally and 37% prevented from entering formal disciplinary processes. The approach is now embedded at both hospitals, with learning shared across other sites and another North East London Trust. It provides a sustainable model for reducing employee harm while promoting a just, restorative and accountable culture.

peter.spink@nhs.net

HIGHLY COMMENDED



A Restorative Just Culture Approach to Reducing ‘Avoidable Employee Harm’

Homerton Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Over 18 months, the Trust introduced a programme to reduce avoidable harm to staff involved in formal workplace processes, particularly disciplinary investigations and complex employee relations cases. In response to concerns about lengthy investigations, inconsistent practices and the impact on staff wellbeing, it strengthened governance, introduced restorative approaches, improved wellbeing support and developed managers. This has promoted more compassionate, proportionate and learning-focused processes, supporting wider cultural change.

asha.blake2@nhs.net

FINALISTS



Avoiding employee harm during investigations

NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP)

NWSSP challenged the assumption that workplace investigations must be stressful, identifying how poor communication, inconsistent management and unnecessary escalation caused avoidable harm. It introduced a trauma-informed, proportionate approach focused on early resolution, stronger manager capability and improved support. This reduced investigation times, improved outcomes and strengthened perceptions of fairness, demonstrating that reducing harm can deliver faster, fairer and more effective investigations.

michelle.thomas15@wales.nhs.uk

BDCT Embedding the ‘Last Resort’ Approach to Disciplinary Action

Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust

Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust has redesigned its employee relations approach through a new Disciplinary Policy that makes formal action a last resort. A structured framework encourages early resolution, learning and proportionate decision-making before formal investigation is considered, supported by manager training, governance and case oversight. This promotes a fairer, safer and more compassionate approach while maintaining accountability and reducing avoidable harm to staff.

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Social Partnership Forum award for partnership working between employers and trade unions



WINNER

Partnership-led transition of Soft FM colleagues to Agenda for Change (AfC) Terms & Conditions

Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust

The organisation worked in genuine partnership with Unison and GMB to transfer over 400 Soft Facilities Management staff from multiple legacy contracts onto Agenda for Change (AfC), addressing longstanding inequalities in pay and conditions. Through joint consultation, co-designed decision-making and a management–trade union job matching panel, the project established a fair, consistent structure aligned with NHS job evaluation principles.

The transfer delivered standardised pay bands, improved terms and conditions, access to NHS pensions, national pay awards, unsocial hours enhancements and clearer career progression. Staff, many from ethnic minority and female backgrounds, reported greater fairness, transparency and trust, while the organisation benefited from reduced employment inequalities and improved workforce stability.

By embedding staff within the nationally negotiated AfC framework, the initiative provides lasting benefits through future pay uplifts and consistent employment standards. The jointly agreed principles and governance model also offer a sustainable approach to future workforce change.

Thomas.pounds@nhs.net

FINALISTS



Reduced Working Week Implementation

NHS 24

The implementation of the national Reduced Working Week, reducing full-time hours to 36, presented significant challenges in a complex, 24/7 service. Through early and ongoing partnership, colleagues co-designed practical solutions including rotas, night work, pay and enhancements. Open communication, transparency and flexibility avoided formal disputes, building trust, delivering a fair and sustainable outcome for staff, services and patients.

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Working Patterns Programme

North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust

North East Ambulance Service's Working Patterns programme addressed long-standing shift design challenges within its Unscheduled Care teams. Bringing together staff, trade unions and leaders, the programme co-designed safer, more flexible working patterns to improve staff wellbeing, maintain patient care quality and strengthen operational performance. Through genuine collaboration and shared ownership, it delivered sustainable change benefiting both staff and patients.

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UHB Bullying and Harassment Campaign

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

University Hospitals Birmingham introduced an anti-bullying partnership with trade unions to improve staff experience and create a more supportive culture. Through early intervention, improved training and stronger speaking-up routes, the programme reduced bullying, increased staff confidence and improved wellbeing. This also benefited patient care through higher satisfaction and more consistent staffing, supporting the Trust's wider cultural improvement and its journey from an Inadequate to Good CQC rating.

barry.panton@uhb.nhs.uk

Capsticks award for innovation



WINNER

Talent Timebanking
NHS England

Talent Timebanking is a national NHS and social care innovation that improves access to career development through reciprocal skills exchange. Staff earn and spend time credits to access mentoring, coaching, career conversations and practical expertise, removing financial, hierarchical and geographical barriers. Since last year's HPMA high commendation, membership has grown from 570 to 944, with 120 published offers and 174 exchanges, demonstrating sustained demand and engagement.

The model addresses inequalities in career development by making talent a shared resource, rather than relying on seniority, existing networks, manager nominations or proximity to senior leaders. Staff can access a range of support, including mentoring, CV and interview advice, coaching and peer career conversations, helping to create more inclusive development opportunities across professions.

Its impact and transferability are demonstrated by the national Babies, Children and Young People's Nurses Mentoring Network, which uses the platform to deliver peer mentoring and has been endorsed by the Association of British Paediatric Nurses. Following this success, paediatrics resident doctors are developing a dedicated network, while NHS Wales is exploring a hosted pilot. These developments demonstrate how Talent Timebanking has evolved into scalable workforce development infrastructure with the potential to benefit staff across the NHS and social care.

halima.chowe@nhs.net

HIGHLY COMMENDED



"What You Permit, You Promote"
NHS England (North West)

NHS England's North West team tackled incivility across health and social care by turning staff experiences of bullying and harassment into seven powerful video learning scenarios. Developed with multidisciplinary colleagues and a performing arts company, the programme raises awareness, challenges behaviours and supports culture change.

j.hever@nhs.net

FINALISTS



How we used rostering and financial data to drive rostering efficiencies, upskill managers and reduce overspend
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

To address unsafe staffing and high temporary staffing costs, the team introduced efficiency meetings, roster reviews and real-time dashboards. The initiative improved roster quality, reduced agency reliance and delivered £1.05m savings in five months.

matthew.gregory3@wales.nhs.uk



Entry Level Programme (Career Gateway)
West Herts Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

This six-week paid pilot, delivered with West Herts College, prepares local people for NHS entry-level roles through workshops, simulation and placements. The programme builds confidence and job readiness while supporting recruitment, retention and workforce sustainability.

alex.paice@nhs.net



Data-Led Digital Redesign of People Services through End-to-End Automation
Barts Health NHS Trust

Barts Health transformed People Services using Robotic Process Automation to streamline Recruitment, ESR and Payroll processes. Since 2022, the programme has saved time equivalent to 30 FTE, reduced costs and created a scalable model for digital improvement.

chris.hewitt9@nhs.net

NHS Professionals

Award for exemplary systems workforce planning and development

sponsored by NHS Professionals



WINNER

Greater Manchester T Level Health & Care Industry Placement Programme

NHS Greater Manchester

The Greater Manchester T Level Health & Care Industry Placement Programme has transformed industry placements across the region, adopting a whole-system 'one workforce' approach to create sustainable routes into health and care careers. By expanding placements beyond hospitals into primary care, adult social care and the VCSE sector, it has tripled the number of placement hosts and strengthened the future workforce pipeline.

The programme achieved 100% placement coverage for Health T Level students across the 2024/25 and 2025/26 cohorts, created 59 additional placements, with 30 more in development, and engaged 34 new employers. It also introduced Greater Manchester's first T Level midwifery pathway and developed a pilot enabling learners to progress into paid NHS staff bank roles.

Strong partnership-working between NHS Greater Manchester, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, employers and education providers has established a coordinated approach to planning and delivery. A new T Level Stakeholder Network supports shared learning and consistency across the region.

The programme has also secured Department for Education funding until 2028 for a dedicated placement coordinator, ensuring its long-term sustainability. Workforce intelligence is helping align education, training and recruitment with future service needs, supporting wider workforce transformation across Greater Manchester.

sue@suehoward.co.uk

FINALISTS

Planning as one: How integrated thinking transformed our 'Workforce Strategy'

University Hospitals Birmingham

The team has taken a very complicated and fast-moving planning environment and turned the workforce planning into a genuinely system-led, joined-up approach, creating a single space where people, finance and service planning could come together and make shared decisions. Their work has been grounded in a "one workforce" mindset from the start, recognising that patient needs span the NHS, primary care, social care and community and voluntary services.

helen.cant@uhb.nhs.uk



Optimising Integrated Neighbourhood Health Workforce Ecosystems

Leeds Health & Care Academy

The Optimising Integrated Neighbourhood Health Workforce Ecosystems project developed an innovative, evidence-based approach to system workforce planning to support Integrated Neighbourhood Health across Leeds. Adopting a 'one workforce' approach, it brought together NHS providers, primary care, social care and VCSE partners. Through collaboration and co-production, it developed practical guidance and tools to help system and neighbourhood leaders understand, assess and plan integrated workforce needs.

cassie.good@nhs.net



Agency reduction at BCHFT

Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Over the past three years, the team has delivered a sustained and transformational reduction in agency use across inpatient services. Through a whole-system workforce approach, focused on proactive recruitment, strengthening the internal bank workforce, cultural change and improved roster management. They have reduced agency nursing hours from 6,547 in April 2024 to just 90 hours in April 2026, with associated costs falling from £218k to under £3k per month.

michelle.carr8@nhs.net



From Operational Insight to System Transformation: Embedding a Whole-System Workforce Regeneration Framework Across Hywel Dda

Hywel Dda University Health Board

Hywel Dda University Health Board transformed fragmented, reactive workforce planning into a joined-up, system-wide approach. Its People Re-generation Framework aligns workforce, service and financial planning, enabling better-informed decisions and sustainable solutions. This has strengthened workforce sustainability and talent pipelines, reduced temporary staffing reliance and created a scalable model to support population health needs across West Wales.

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ward hadaway

People team of the year

sponsored by Ward Hadaway



WINNER

Workforce Supply Team

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Facing increasing workforce pressures, high agency reliance and significant financial challenge, the Workforce Supply team led a transformational workforce optimisation programme focused on protecting frontline care and improving workforce stability.

Working in partnership with operational, nursing, finance and corporate colleagues, the team delivered an 81% reduction in Urgent Care and Community agency usage, reduced HCSW agency usage from 60 to 14 WTE within three months, lowered vacancies from 18.2% to 8.7%, delivered £12m savings and improved temporary staffing compliance from below 60% to above 90%. Through innovation, collaboration and compassion, the team strengthened staffing, continuity of care and patient experience.

Just as important as the operational results was the culture the team created. Staff at every level were encouraged to contribute ideas and lead improvements. This strong focus on engagement was reflected in the Temporary Staffing service achieving the highest bank worker staff survey response rate, demonstrating the team's strong connection with its workforce. The team also invested in leadership development, CIPD, project management, quality improvement, data literacy and digital capability, strengthening future capacity within the People function.

adele.dsilva1@nhs.net

FINALISTS



Careers and Apprenticeships Team

University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust

A small, highly effective team providing extensive engagement and support to diverse groups, achieving exceptional results in work experience, apprenticeships, T Level placements, and inclusive employment pathways across their NHS Trust. They achieve outstanding results by working collaboratively across People Services, clinical services, education providers and system partners.

iain.hook1@mbht.nhs.uk



People Directorate

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust

The UHCW People Directorate team supports 11,000 colleagues across recruitment, development, wellbeing and engagement, shaping outstanding employee experiences, reduced vacancies, and enhanced inclusion through their People Strategy and continuous improvement approach.

lee.sutcliffe@uhcw.nhs.uk

The CLCH People Team

Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust

The team has delivered a system-leading transformation of temporary staffing, achieving sustained near-zero agency usage and controlled bank expenditure by March 2026. Through strengthened governance, evidence-based workforce planning and deep collaboration across HR, Temporary Staffing, Finance and operational services, the team has embedded lasting cultural change.

stella.pafford@nhs.net



People and Organisational Development

NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP)

The team delivers strategic integrated workforce services combining data-driven insights, compassionate practice and digital innovation to improve staff experience, reduce turnover, and strengthen organisational performance across NHS Wales.

samanthawright8@wales.nhs.uk

Deputy people leader of the year

sponsored by KPMG



WINNER

Hayleigh Jones, Deputy Director of People,
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board

Hayleigh Jones, Deputy Director of People at Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, is an outstanding, values-driven leader who has rapidly established credibility and transformed the organisation's approach to workforce engagement. She led the co-creation of a People Plan shaped by over 550 staff and 3,560 survey responses, rebuilding trust and positioning the People function as a strategic driver of organisational performance and patient care.

Her focus on quality has delivered significant measurable improvements, including a 30% reduction in agency spend, £12.1m in staffing cost reductions and a fall in staff turnover from 11.66% to 8.5%. Staff engagement has also improved, with CTM among only three NHS organisations in Wales to increase its Engagement Index.

As a change agent and innovator, Hayleigh has championed inclusive staff engagement, workforce modernisation, digital innovation and development opportunities. Her leadership has strengthened staff wellbeing, retention and productivity, creating a compelling model for workforce transformation across NHS Wales.

FINALISTS



Liz Rogers, Deputy Director of People
Welsh Ambulance Services University Trust

Liz is a highly respected, values-driven people leader who has strengthened management and Trade Union partnerships through trust, collaboration and shared problem-solving. She influences national workforce policy and champions improvements in staff wellbeing, patient safety and service quality, while developing future leaders. Her innovative and compassionate approach delivers meaningful benefits for staff, patients and the wider NHS.



Jennifer Smith, Deputy Chief People Officer
Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Jen Smith is an outstanding, values-driven Deputy Director whose leadership delivers organisational and regional impact. She has driven improvements in safe staffing, workforce capability, staff wellbeing and productivity, while reducing agency reliance and strengthening patient care. Through regional influence, leadership development and her work on anti-racism, she has championed inclusion and helped create a more compassionate and equitable workplace.



Karen Chummun, Deputy Director of People, Talent and Leadership,
NHS England (South East)

Karen Chummun is an exceptional, values-driven workforce leader transforming inclusive talent management across the NHS. As Deputy Director of People, Talent and Leadership for NHS England South East, she has pioneered digital career development, strengthened succession planning and widened access to leadership opportunities. Through founding Talent Timebanking, she has also created a peer-led development model adopted by national networks, improving opportunity and workforce capability across health and care.

DAC BEACHCROFT

People leader of the year

sponsored by DAC Beachcroft



WINNER

Funmi Onamusi, Chief People Officer

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Funmi Onamusi is widely recognised as an outstanding people leader who combines strategic authority with visible compassion. Since her appointment in April 2023, she has consistently positioned people leadership as core organisational infrastructure, not a support function, and has elevated workforce issues to the heart of executive and Board decision-making.

Her leadership is characterised by clarity, courage and humanity. Board members and executive peers describe her as a trusted advisor who brings intellectual rigour, candour and psychological safety into complex conversations about culture, workforce risk and leadership capability. This has been particularly evident in her Board-level framing of staff culture, where she has helped shift the organisation from passive listening to credible follow-through and shared ownership of staff experience.

Funmi's leadership credibility extends beyond her organisation. She is an active contributor to the wider people profession, facilitating discussions on the future of the NHS people profession, leadership capability and compassionate transformation. Her peers recognise her as a role model for modern people leadership: values-led, evidence-based and delivery-focused.

Her impact has also been recognised publicly, awarded in 2024, Senior Leader of the Year at the National Black Talent Awards, with judges citing her "exceptional leadership, positivity and organisation-wide impact at executive level".

FINALISTS



Donna Griffiths, Chief People Officer
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust
Donna has demonstrated compassionate, values-led leadership during a crisis, supporting her team through loss while her strategic clarity has helped to drive significant improvements in culture, inclusion, workforce transformation, and staff experience at UHCW.



Lisa Ward, Director of People / Deputy Chief Executive
North West Ambulance Service
Lisa champions inclusivity, staff wellbeing, and culture change at NWAS while leading national ambulance sector educational and training development initiatives. She is an advocate for the underrepresented, the voice of reason for her Executive peers and is truly interested in the wellbeing of everyone.



Shajeda Ahmed, Chief People Officer
Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust
Shajeda is an inspiring, values-led NHS people leader who creates compassionate, inclusive cultures where staff feel heard, supported and able to thrive. She has strengthened employee voice, deepened engagement with senior leaders and driven practical action to improve belonging, wellbeing and inclusion.

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