

# Provider Collaboration: Overcoming workforce challenges through provider collaboration

This briefing covers the key messages from our webinar on overcoming workforce challenges through collaboration, featuring presentations from two provider collaboratives made up of providers from the acute, ambulance, community, and mental health, learning disability and autism sectors.

## North East North Cumbria Provider Collaborative (NENC)

Matt Brown, the managing director of the provide collaborative, discussed some of the practical steps the collaborative has taken so far on overcoming workforce issues. This included some key reflections, an overview of their individual context and enablers to challenges they've experienced undertaking this collaborative work.

### Background

The North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Provider Collaborative is a formal partnership of all 11 NHS foundation trusts in the integrated care system (ICS), providing care to 3.2 million people across 8,400 square miles. Together they cover the entire geographical footprint of the ICS and provide most secondary NHS care services, including community care and mental health services, acute hospital services and highly specialist care and ambulance, patient transport and emergency response services. The 11 foundation trusts included within the collaborative are:

- Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust
- South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust
- County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
- North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust
- South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

- North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust
- North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust
- Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust
- Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust

## Key points of learning

- The enduring and longstanding issues the collaborative faces, e.g. financial challenges, workforce sustainability and supply, changing population dynamic and need, estates challenges and the complex digital agenda, all interact with workforce in some capacity and need a collaborative solution.
- However, the challenges within the 'workforce issue' are vast and varied and can't all be thought of in the same way. The collaborative has four work programmes covering clinical staff, clinical support staff and corporate staff, as well as a development programme.
- A collective understanding between trusts on shared values and intent, as well as a clarity of purpose, is key to successfully working together on workforce issues, and their governance aims to support this.
- A portability agreement has now been implemented between the 11 partner trusts which allows any member of staff to work within any of the participating trusts on a temporary but ongoing basis.
- This is simple in principle but complex to embed successfully, which has led to turnaround times from three months to three days in some instances and received positive feedback from staff.
- Early work around seven small but meaningful priorities such as car parking costs for staff and variation in mileage rates allowed them to begin with tangible projects whilst learning about each other's organisations. Progress has been made and there has been some standardisation across trusts which has helped to reduce staff turnover, but this work also highlighted to them the complexities of working in this way and some things have not worked.
- A significant piece of work has also been done around the development of leadership roles. A structured programme will be starting in summer 2024 to support directors, including giving opportunities for exposure to executive spaces across the 11 partner trusts for development and learning.
- Fundamentally, they ask three key open questions on an ongoing basis - do they have the right staff, are they supporting them to be as valued and productive as they can be for patients, and are they in the right place?

## Challenges and enablers

- After recognising the joint challenges around workforce across corporate workstreams there are now monthly informal meetings of the chairs of the corporate programmes across the 11 trusts, including HR, finance, digital, estates, people and digital, which has been a key enabler in helping progress.
- Experiencing together some initial failures, as well as successes on early priorities has allowed them to build confidence across the 11 trust teams and has given them an understanding of the nuances between organisations and their individual cultures.
- A distinctive challenge for the collaborative is around creating an understanding of their own workforce concerns which can differ from the narrative that pervades the national picture, e.g. they have high staffing levels in many areas, but there are still challenges re: service configuration.

**“Sometimes the work is the conversation, not the output. Letting teams work through the problem gets you to a central place of understanding.” – Matt Brown, managing director, NENC**

## East Midlands Alliance for Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Autism

David Williams, group director of strategy & partnerships Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust and Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, and Craig de Sousa, director of workforce supply, NHS England, shared their reflections on the work they have done to address a specialist clinical workforce challenge.

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust and Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust were selected as one of NHS England’s nine collaboratives to take part in its national innovator scheme in 2023/24. One of their key areas of work included developing a new workforce model in the East Midlands Alliance (an alliance of NHS Mental Health Trusts and St Andrews Healthcare in the East Midlands).

The East Midlands Alliance for Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Autism (EMA) was established in 2019 and brings together the six largest providers of mental health, learning disability and autism services in the region. The trusts involved are:

- Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust
- Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

- Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
- St Andrew's Healthcare

## Key points of learning

- They brought the EMA HR directors together to develop and confirm a challenge statement which was to find easy, simple solutions to retain sufficient and specifically skilled child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) clinicians across organisations.
- The collaborative recognised that their current employment model limited their ability to develop specialist CAMHS skills. As specialised services support those with complex and rare needs and the numbers of patients requiring this type of support is small, there was opportunity to maximise skills and knowledge across organisations.
- St Andrew's Healthcare, a voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisation, has been included in the new arrangements and this process allowed the collaborative to work through new ways of working and resolve issues around sharing workforce more widely. This can be used moving forward with other VCSE organisations.
- It has been vital to invest time in creating and embedding a shared vision, engaging in dialogue and making sure that all partners understand and are invested in the collective purpose before moving forward with significant work.
- The collaborative has received support in the form of example portability agreements and documents from both NHS England and other provider collaboratives who are making similar changes. Receiving this shared learning has been helpful in making progress and in feeling empowered to move forward.
- Some organisations in the collaborative are requiring additional support around their senior responsible officer (SRO) status and the collaborative is currently exploring how to share existing SRO skills and capacity across organisations.
- Multiple primary care networks have also been involved in the new workforce solutions which has brought up challenges around differing terms and conditions, and ways of working for staff.
- Recognising and highlighting that the community trust is the primary employer for these roles has provided some continuity.

## Enablers to success

- Without a shared vision that everyone supports, success is limited; it's worth testing it.
- Building trust and understanding takes time, investing in that time is important; and you should never stop doing it.
- Individuals across organisations really welcome integrated working, with the right space and

permission they can flourish.

- The conversations and meetings to produce a memorandum of understanding /contract etc are at least as important as the finished product.
- A collaborative creates the space to do something different, you have to be active in the space to 'do different'.

## Further information

The Provider Collaboration programme focuses on sharing good practice and peer learning through a range of events and resources for boards. It covers the full spectrum of collaborative arrangements that providers are forging at scale and aims to support members to maximise the potential of greater provider collaboration to tackle care backlogs, reduce unwarranted variation, address health inequalities, and deliver more efficient and sustainable services.

Visit [www.nhsproviders.org/provider-collaboratives](http://www.nhsproviders.org/provider-collaboratives) for recordings of our webinars, case studies of provider collaboration, details of our forthcoming events and further resources. To find out more, contact: Bobby Ancil, programme development manager - [Bobby.Ancil@nhsproviders.org](mailto:Bobby.Ancil@nhsproviders.org)