

## Race Equality programme peer learning event: How can boards support bank workers?

### Presentation on how boards can support bank workers, Dan Collard and Donna Bisiker

Dan and Donna set out the case for addressing the inequity in experience of bank workers compared to NHS staff, outlining the need for board members to apply both a hearts and minds approach and recognise the business benefits of doing so. There are approximately 171,000 bank workers in the NHS, of which 31% are from an ethnic minority (56% white and 13% unknown).

Dan highlighted the greatest areas of disparity between bank workers and NHS staff including:

- Bank workers are more likely to face discrimination, bullying and harassment from the public than permanent staff (13%), and this is worse for ethnic minority bank workers (25%).
- Almost one in four (23.7%) bank workers has been physically assaulted by patients, service users and their relatives at least once over a 12-month period.
- 59% of bank workers who experienced discrimination at work, felt it was because of their ethnicity in comparison to 49% of NHS staff (2023 bank worker survey).

Dan outlined that one of the barriers to addressing bank worker experience to date has in part been a result of the NHS's homogenous approach to bank and agency workers. Whilst bank and agency workers have provided much needed resource, it is recognised that agency workers are not a cost-effective solution to the NHS's workforce challenges. In 2022/23, [NHS provider organisations spent £3.46 bn on agency workers](#).

Dan shared the following examples of actions that may be taken to address the challenges discussed and help drive improvements in the experience of bank workers. Many of the interventions that are being implemented for NHS staff, particularly in relation to high impact action (HIA) six of the [NHS equality, diversity and inclusion improvement plan](#) are transferrable and a good starting point for trusts looking to improve bank worker experience.

- 1 Review disciplinary processes for bank workers and seek alignment to those afforded to substantive staff (process monitoring and reporting).
- 2 Using the NHS equality, diversity and inclusion improvement plan HIA six as a framework to develop targeted actions that support bank only workers and also apply a race equity lens.
- 3 Review the inclusion and engagement structures in place for NHS substantive staff and ask: 'Can/Do these clearly include bank workers?'
- 4 Demonstrate transparency equality reporting (ie [Workforce Race Equality Standard action plans](#)) by including data and actions taken to support bank workers.

The [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#) (LTWP) plan aims to lower agency spending by making greater use of bank workers to fill vacancies. With the plan setting out the need to reduce the reliance on agency staff to 5% by 2032/33 (currently at 9%), and an ambition for bank workers to fulfil temporary staffing requirements, bank worker experience must be improved to maximise this untapped talent pipeline and deliver efficiencies.

Donna spoke to the following four temporary staffing deliverables, identified through the asks of the LTWP, and reminded delegates that the composition of bank workers means there will be a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority workers.

- 1 Ensure that working in the NHS bank is the most attractive route for temporary workers to secure a working pattern and begin considering how this may be impacted by the recent announcement to end 'exploitative zero-hour contracts' in the [King's Speech, July 2024](#).
- 2 Reduce agency expenditure on community mental health providers.
- 3 Take measures to allow greater mobility of workers via collaborative banks. At present, there are 23 collaborative banks and another 10 in planning, which will collectively cover 50% of trusts. Collaborative banks enable workers to have more flexibility and opportunity at work.
- 4 Take preventative actions to stop staff leaving the NHS workforce and re-entering via an agency contract.

Delegates were encouraged to share their knowledge and insights from locally implemented interventions to improve bank worker experience and reduce agency spend via the [Temporary Staffing Hub – FutureNHS Collaboration Platform](#).

## Breakout discussion key themes

Delegates were invited to join breakout groups to discuss: 'What action(s) has your organisation taken to improve bank worker experience?' and 'What has been the role of the board in progressing this work?'.

Key themes from these discussions are highlighted below:

### **Engage with your bank workers**

Delegates discussed the importance of engaging with and understanding the experience of bank workers to improve the workplace experience. This acts as a sense check of actual versus perceived issues and helps to understand what actions need to be taken, including co-production, and how they should be prioritised. Delegates described how this also increased their awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by bank workers. For example, bank workers often cover unpopular out of hours and weekend shift patterns and make minimal demands on the service.

Examples of engagement activities included: surveys; facilitated conversations and shadowing workers on their shifts. Delegates described a need for investment into resources to help develop effective engagement mechanisms for this cohort.

### **The critical role played by leaders**

Delegates spoke of the crucial role that leaders play in setting out the values and culture across their organisations. Examples of leadership engagement with bank workers included undertaking voluntary shifts to understand the experience of bank workers, and they spoke of their shifts being 'hard work'.

Other tangible actions taken included developing a clear line of oversight on bank worker experience and associated actions via the organisational committee structure for the board; and the funding of specific posts both clinical and non-clinical, to support temporary staff (bank and agency workers).

Trust leaders have also worked across their system to create a collaborative bank and develop resource sharing agreements which provide greater opportunity and flexibility for bank workers to work across a greater footprint.

## Helping bank workers feel valued

Whilst it is important to differentiate between NHS staff and bank workers, trusts need to be conscious of the disparity in the experience of bank workers compared to NHS staff, in particular, their increased sense of being othered. Bank workers are least likely to agree with the statements, 'my immediate manager works together with me to come to an understanding of problems'. Bank workers from ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely than those from white backgrounds to agree they are treated fairly, and more likely to have experienced discrimination ([National bank worker survey, 2023](#)).

Delegates spoke of the need to develop/enhance relevant processes and support frameworks to enable bank workers to feel valued. Specific examples given included: providing bank workers with uniforms; the development of a helpline available from 7am to 10pm daily with on the day responses; reinstating face-to-face inductions undertaken by ward managers; introducing shadow shifts to support onboarding and assist bank workers to familiarise themselves with their role and organisation before going solo; raising awareness of the availability of line managers and their accessibility by email or phone to enable bank workers to feel more supported.

## Access to training and development

Delegates discussed the importance of encouraging and listening to feedback from bank workers about gaps in knowledge/skills and investing in support to address these. For example, one delegate spoke to the increase in patients presenting with mental health issues (post Covid-19), their bank workforce had not been provided with training in this area. As a result, they had to use additional support from trained staff. The trust is looking to work with mental health trusts to explore collaboration in addressing this particular knowledge/skills gap.

Delegates recognised the value of enabling bank workers to convert to becoming NHS staff and shared initiatives that have facilitated this. For example, applying a, 'try before you buy' element for those who do not have a background in health to see if a move to a substantive contract would be of interest.

## Review of workplace processes for bank workers

Delegates shared a number of practical actions that have been taken in response to feedback from bank workers, including stressors and reasons for choosing to remain as bank workers. Examples of actions include:

Action	Impact
Addressing poor practice in how bank workers were allocated shifts which previously resulted in limited opportunities.	Following a review of processes by the HR team, bank workers have increased flexibility to work across wards.
Enabling self-rostering for bank workers against available shifts via the utilisation of a digital platform.	Reducing discontent caused by schedulers allocating shifts based on generalised availability.
Replacing short notice automated cancellation of a bank worker's shift by moving to a person-led approach.	Improves bank worker experience and relationship with the trust, whilst also enabling the trust to provide support in identifying an alternative shift where possible.
Prioritising bank workers with specific interests for roles in these areas.	Facilitates move to a permanent contract.
Reviewing bank worker roles that could be equated to a substantive role.	Facilitates move to a permanent contract.
Reviewing bank worker pay frameworks. One trust took the approach to match bank pay frameworks to Agenda for Change and recognise previous NHS experience within the pay banding whilst another identified that their bank rate enhancements did not match the national rate and addressed this.	Reducing disparities, improving sense of belonging and attract to NHS workforce.

## Make bank work more attractive as a way to reduce agency spend

Delegates shared examples of actions they have taken to reduce agency expenditure and make bank work the more attractive of the two temporary staffing options. One trust has developed and shared communications for agency workers, outlining the benefits of working as either a bank worker or an NHS staff member against a selection of out of hours and weekend shifts along with a fast-track application form. As a result, they have reduced agency costs by more than 50% in 12-months.

Another trust undertook a phased approach to convert agency health care assistants into NHS staff. In phase one, the trust removed health care assistant roles for agency workers and provided fast-track application on to bank worker contracts. This was followed by a second phase to migrate both bank and agency workers onto substantive NHS staff contracts. In the last 18 months 40% of bank workers

have become permanent NHS staff having had the opportunity to gain a comprehensive understanding of how this would work for them before doing so.