

Collaborating for careers in care

A partnership-led, centralised approach to connecting care employers with education, recruitment and training





| | |
|---|-----------|
| The context | 04 |
| About the organisation | 05 |
| The approach | 07 |
| Building blocks | 08 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Planning and preparing■ Digital and technology■ Financing and investment■ Involving key stakeholders■ Governance and implementation■ Pilot, refinement and embedding■ Outcomes, impact and learning | |
| Recommendations | 09 |



Introduction



Workforce shortages, both in terms of quantity of staff and skills mix, are persistent problems in social care. Care providers are often faced with insufficient staffing to meet the demand for care in their area, or staff who lack the skills required to deliver a high level of care.

To address these challenges, North East Lincolnshire Health and Care Partnership (NEL HCP) has created the People and Skills Pledge, delivered as a core initiative within the Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (HNY ICB) Breakthrough Workforce Transformation programme. The Pledge provides a single point of contact for health and social care employers, connecting them with education, employment and training providers. The goal of the Pledge is to foster co-ordinated action around long-term workforce development, recruitment and retention within health and social care, and drive social mobility across the region.

The initial two-year pilot programme demonstrated strong outcomes and clear system impact. The programme was selected as a national delivery partner for NHS England's Widening Access Demonstrator (WAD) programme, a source of funding that aims to support 1,000 economically inactive young people and individuals into pre-employment programmes.



The context



Across England, health and social care faces a well-documented workforce crisis that threatens the sustainability and quality of care provision.

Recruitment remains a significant challenge, with [Skills for Care's latest report on the state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#) showing 111,000 vacant posts in the care sector. Despite this figure being a 7% decrease from 2024, the vacancy rate remains around three times higher than the wider economy. The sector is likely to need around 470,000 new posts by 2040 (an increase of 27%) to keep up with the projected growth in the population.

Nationally, employers are struggling to attract candidates into roles that are often perceived as low-paid, high-pressure and lacking clear progression. The shortage is compounded by poor retention rates, particularly among younger staff, where 38% of care workers under the age of 25 leave their roles each year – as staff frequently cite burnout, limited development opportunities and lack of recognition.

The lack of structured pathways for up skilling and career advancement further exacerbates these issues. Many entry-level roles offer little scope for progression, creating a cycle where talented individuals exit the sector rather than build long-term careers. Pay levels, which often fail to reflect the complexity and responsibility of care roles, remain a major barrier to recruitment and retention, particularly when pay differentials between junior and senior roles remain poor across the sector.

Beyond pay, the importance of comprehensive workforce training cannot be overstated. Proper training ensures staff are equipped with the skills to deliver safe, high-quality care and adapt to evolving needs. Succession planning is equally critical, enabling organisations to prepare future leaders and maintain continuity in service delivery. Alongside technical skills, investment in staff wellbeing is essential; a healthy, supported workforce is more resilient, engaged and committed to providing compassionate care.

Ultimately, building a dedicated, happy and properly skilled workforce is fundamental to meeting local demand for care and sustaining the sector nationally. This requires a co-ordinated approach that prioritises recruitment, retention and professional development, helping to reposition health and social care as a rewarding and respected career.



About the organisation

North East Lincolnshire Health and Care Partnership (NEL HCP) bring together NHS organisations, adult social care, the council, voluntary and community groups and local partners to improve health and wellbeing across their region.

NEL HCP's region includes Grimsby, Cleethorpes, Immingham and surrounding areas, with a resident population of 156,940 mostly coastal and urban communities. It is one of three distinct area health and care partnerships that make up Humber and North Yorkshire (HNY) ICB, which supports a total population of 1.7 million people.

NEL HCP aim to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population by focusing on joined-up care, reducing health inequalities and ensuring that people can access the right support at the right time. They have a strong history of collaboration and are continually striving for more integrated approaches to working.

This collaborative model is a defining feature of the local system, reflecting a long history of integrated working across the area. Through this network, organisations of varying sizes and functions work collectively to address shared priorities and improve outcomes for local people. These organisations range from acute and community healthcare providers to social care teams, public health specialists, mental health services, and grassroots community organisations.

NEL HCP have the following stated objectives:

- improve health outcomes and access to healthcare and reduce health inequalities
- improve outcomes for children, young people and families
- improve mental health outcomes
- strengthen their local health and care workforce
- reduce the number of people in hospital

The NEL HCP People and Skills Pledge was launched with the specific aim of improving the local health and care workforce by providing a single point of contact for employers, connecting them with education, employment and training providers. Employers are able to access opportunities for workforce growth, up skilling and retention through work-based

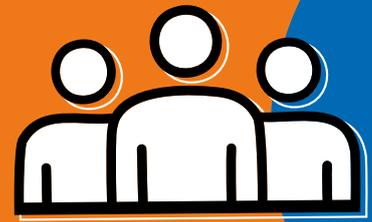


“Due to our experience of working within the health and care system, we saw that there are lots of gaps for opportunities where Employability Services and the People and Skills Pledge could support our local health and care providers and our local people into employment.”

Sharon Stead, Programme Lead, NEL HCP



The approach



The Pledge sought to centralise the resources and support necessary for local care organisations to grow their teams and develop their staff.

What was the challenge?

Health and social care in North East Lincolnshire face workforce challenges that mirror national trends, threatening the sustainability and quality of care delivery. These include:

- **Employers struggle to recruit staff** – Health and social care roles are often perceived as low-paid and high-pressure, making it difficult for regional employers to attract staff. This challenge is heightened by competition from other sectors offering comparatively stronger pay or more predictable working patterns.
- **High turnover rates compound recruitment problems** – Retention is a persistent challenge, with many staff leaving the sector due to workload pressures or limited progression opportunities. High turnover rates increase recruitment costs and risk service instability.
- **Absence of structured career pathways** – Many entry-level roles offer limited progression routes. Employers also struggle to access training and funding, which restricts their ability to up skill staff or offer professional development that would support longer-term careers.
- **The need to future-proof the sector** – Inspiring younger people to consider care as a rewarding and respected profession is vital for future workforce sustainability. Without clear pathways and visible development opportunities, the sector risks being unable to meet rising demand.

Together, these challenges underscore the need for a co-ordinated solution that supports recruitment, retention, development and long-term workforce planning across the system.



Key decisions that secured success

Acting as a single point of contact, the People and Skills Pledge brings together employers, training providers, education establishments, charities and community organisations into a mutually beneficial network. It offers training, work-based learning placements, recruitment support, guidance and funding advice. To make this work in practice, NEL HCP implemented several key system-shaping decisions.

Four interconnected pledges

NEL HCP created four central, interlinked pledges that employers and other partners can sign up to:

| |
|---|
| Grow your own |
| • Supporting local talent pipelines through work experience, volunteering and placement opportunities. |
| Recruitment |
| • Tailored recruitment support, vacancy advertising and attraction strategies for candidates new to the sector, returners, career switchers, apprentices and graduates. |
| Investing in your workforce |
| • Access to funded and part-funded training, development pathways and wellbeing support. |
| Inspire your future workforce |
| • School and college engagement, mentoring, career events and donating time to inspire young people to consider health and social care careers. |

Early stakeholder engagement

NEL HCP co-designed the Pledge model with 12 core NEL HCP Workforce Group members, ensuring credibility, shared ownership and representation across the breadth of health and social care. This shaped a model rooted in local needs and practical delivery considerations.



Mapping existing regional provision

To avoid duplication and maximise value, NEL HCP mapped existing employability and training offers across North East Lincolnshire. This enabled the Pledge to focus on gaps, align with local priorities and complement, rather than compete with, current support.

Embedding workforce needs analysis and identifying funding

NEL HCP made workforce and training needs analysis a core part of the Pledge. Employers complete a structured workforce and training needs assessment to identify vacancies, skills gaps and development priorities. This is paired with a short contextual discussion to understand organisational factors such as culture, working environment and support structures.

Pledge staff then use this information to explore appropriate progression routes and ensure employers consider sustainable workforce solutions rather than only immediate gaps. They also match needs to suitable funding options, helping employers access apprenticeship (Growth & Skills Levy), Learning and Development Support Scheme (LDSS) or other development resources they may not have been aware of.

This approach ensures support is tailored, avoids duplicated or mismatched training, and helps employers plan both for current requirements and future workforce needs.

Clear recruitment and placement standards

The Pledge sets clear standards for recruitment and placement to ensure safe, supportive environments for participants.

- Only organisations rated Good or above by the CQC (where relevant) can host placements or receive recruitment support¹.
- Providers must assign mentors, deliver regular feedback and are supported to create clear trainee job descriptions.
- Partners must demonstrate active delivery of their Pledge commitments (not just sign up for the brand), or risk removal from the programme.

Wraparound workforce support

The Pledge model supports multiple workforce objectives simultaneously – recruitment, up skilling and placement activity – recognising that employers often need help across several areas at once.

Ensuring internal capacity and skills

NEL HCP built a delivery team equipped with the skills required for partner engagement, training navigation, participant support and sector-specific advice. This was essential to maintaining quality and scaling the programme.

¹The People and Skills Pledge does offer informal support and guidance services for those looking to improve their CQC rating in order to become a Pledge participant.



Establishing meaningful key performance indicators (KPIs)

KPIs were designed to be achievable, relevant and tied to real-world workforce needs – such as referrals, job outcomes, employer engagement and progression results. This helped maintain focus and demonstrate impact early.

Key learnings

The journey of delivering the People and Skills Pledge highlighted valuable insights into what drives success in workforce initiatives. These learnings underscore the critical role of collaboration, adaptability and proactive planning in creating a resilient health and social care workforce.

- **Be open to change and broaden scope** – Initially focused on employers, the Pledge quickly attracted interest from schools, colleges, universities and training providers. Expanding participation created new opportunities and strengthened the local talent pipeline.
- **Plan for rapid growth** – Demand for the Pledge grew faster than anticipated. Future programmes should build in flexible resourcing so they can scale up quickly in response to employer needs.
- **Local knowledge is critical** – Understanding the unique needs of North East Lincolnshire enabled the Pledge to design realistic commitments, tailor training offers and build trust across the system.
- **Stakeholder engagement drives success** – Early involvement of NEL HCP Workforce Group members provided breadth of expertise, local insight and connections essential to launching the Pledge effectively and ensured activity was aligned with regional workforce priorities.
- **Funding navigation can be as important as training** – Many employers lack awareness of available funding routes. Supporting them to access these has been crucial to enabling up skilling and career development.
- **Care providers often have greater recruitment support needs** – Unlike NHS organisations, most social care providers do not have centralised recruitment teams. The Pledge fills this gap.
- **Trust accelerates collaboration** – Employers who gained confidence in the Pledge’s delivery became more open to receiving support with recruitment, events, placements and up skilling, enabling deeper and more sustained partnership work.

“Once employers trusted the service delivery and the quality, they were open to us supporting recruitment events and putting the best candidates forward. That takes away all the heavy lifting from providers themselves.”

Sharon Stead, Programme Lead, NEL HCP



Timeline

| Year | Key activity |
|------|---|
| 2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Sharon Stead, NEL HCP Programme Lead, began the planning phase for the Pledge programme. |
| 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Completed initial mapping exercise that looked to identify existing services within the region and ensure a unique offering.■ Funding for the programme confirmed in March 2023.■ In April 2023, the Pledge officially began its two-year pilot programme, funded by HNY ICB Workforce Investment Committee. |
| 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ HNY ICB signed up to the Pledge. The Pledge continued to grow and support local organisations. |
| 2025 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The Pledge started to receive interest from education providers, with requests to formally sign up. The first education partner to become a Pledge partner was Engineering UTC Northern Lincolnshire.■ In April 2025, the Pledge's two-year pilot concluded. The pilot was a success and exceeded its KPIs across the board.■ The Pledge, as part of HNY ICB, applied for additional funding via the WAD scheme. Funding was secured to continue the programme up to 31 March 2026. |

