

Safer workforce, streamlined HR

Streamlining Programme overview



The Streamlining Programme grew out of a complaint from a junior doctor that he was drowning in paperwork. The HR response has been comprehensive and has already saved £15 million in staff time for the NHS in London.

Background

A collaboration between HR for London, NHS Employers and Skills for Health, the Streamlining Programme was set up in response to delays and duplication identified with NHS recruitment, training and junior doctor rotations.

Junior doctor Graham Hay-Smith brought the problems to light in a complaint to his mentor, Ruth Carnall, then CEO of NHS London, explaining how he felt his time was being wasted with endless form filling, repetitive training and laborious checks and inductions. An investigation found that his frustrations were shared not only among other junior doctors, but with a range of professional staff that moved between different NHS organisations. Graham was asked to share his experience with London's HR directors, who took his concerns seriously and committed to doing something about them.

After a great deal of process review and analysis of the issues, the programme set out to address the issues across three main workstreams:

- Streamlining junior doctor changeovers
- Streamlining statutory and mandatory training
- Streamlining pre-employment processes.

Beginning in 2009, it grew to involve 39 NHS trusts, a dedicated programme team and programme management.

Workforce directors and HR directors taking part in the programme found that if they went out of their way to improve life for their staff, they would improve training compliance and patient safety, while also reducing costs.

The programme activities of benchmarking against other trusts, listening to staff and standardising processes have amounted to a culture change among the trusts and their staff. NHS staff are now heavily involved in defining what is best in terms of reducing risks to patients, improving processes and being more efficient. The programme also actively lobbies national policy makers to support the changes.

Results so far have been phenomenal and momentum continues to grow. They include automating the information transfer for 94 per cent of junior doctor changeovers, increasing statutory mandatory training compliance from 58 per cent to approximately 80 per cent and reducing the average number of days from a conditional job offer to new staff starting their job by more than six weeks.

Programme principles

While each workstream operates differently depending on the objectives, people involved and barriers to change, four principles guide the programme's work.

1. Staff have the best answers

The programme involves staff at all levels of the organisations, from board members to frontline staff. Across the 39 trusts on the programme, about 400 staff members are involved. They attend workgroups, seminars and masterclasses where issues and solutions come to the surface. The trusts are then able to select the best and most appropriate ideas for implementation.

2. Good policy, best practice

Good policy is best built from the ground up, taking on board innovative practices from operational staff who have to handle local risks and implement national policies. Often, their ideas can be turned into scalable solutions and the programme takes these to national policymakers to rework existing policies, ensuring they can be safely implemented.

“Doctors love medicine but feel frustrated by NHS bureaucracy”

Graham Hay-Smith, Doctor

3. Do it once, do it well and pass it on

The programme works hard to bring together trusts, policymakers and system suppliers to consider how to standardise data and move it between them. The results may be slow to come but are quickly compounded as more organisations see the benefits and come on board.

4. Overcome obstacles

The size of the NHS means that it can be a long and difficult journey to convince all the individuals and organisations to change their policies and processes. Engagement at the most senior levels and bringing people together from across the NHS to compare performance, share best practice and work collectively is an effective way to chip away at obstacles and drive change.

Workstream results

The streamlining junior doctor changeovers workstream has resulted in the development of an interface between Electronic Staff Record (ESR) and the London Deanery's Empower system. During 2013, 94 per cent of transfers were automated, allowing junior doctors and trusts to access accurate, timely information about their rotation. This provides a foundation for more to be done.

In streamlining statutory and mandatory training, trusts have agreed to ensure their training meets the minimum standards set out in Skills for Health's Core Skills and Training Framework. Significantly reducing duplication, improving compliance reporting and making greater use of e-learning has resulted in a rise in compliance from 58 to 80 per cent and rising.

The streamlining pre-employment processes workstream has worked with NHS Employers to overhaul their Employment Check Standards to make them more robust and to reduce the time to hire. Trusts are reporting more than six weeks reduction in time to hire and there is much more to come.

Cost savings

Individual projects within the Streamlining programme have reaped significant savings for trusts in terms of staff time.

Barnet & Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust has reduced the amount of staff time spent completing statutory and mandatory training, saving £750,000 per year, while increasing staff compliance and the quality of training.

Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust has reduced the time from offering someone a job at the trust to them starting in post from 41 days to 8, saving an estimated £1200 per vacancy on agency spend, worth more than £600,000 per annum.

Overall, the Streamlining programme has identified a total of more than £140 million that could be saved annually for London alone and is on track to deliver the first £15 million in savings.

Next steps

The programme is being driven by the NHS HR directors and will continue to work to improve the experience of staff when they move around the NHS, improving quality and safety while also reducing costs.

The ultimate goal is to standardize what we can, promote best practice and perhaps staff will one day benefit from having some kind of a “skills passport” which would allow employers to easily upload information on a staff member, with their permission instead of endless form filling and data entry.

The challenge in the short term is to streamline policies, processes, systems and data to enable raise standards and identify best practice working closely with lots of staff from across the NHS that inform its development.

Further resources

This programme overview is published alongside a guide for regional programmes and a series of case studies showing how the programme is working for trusts in practice.

Contact details

streamlining@nhsemployers.org
www.nhsemployers.org/streamlining

office@skillsforhealth.org.uk
www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/streamlining