

Streamlining in your regional area

Advice and guidance from the London HR directors



A streamlining programme in London addressing junior doctor changeovers, statutory and mandatory training and pre-employment processes has saved £15 million. Here's how.

Background

The London Streamlining Programme is a collaboration between HR for London, NHS Employers and Skills for Health. It was set up in response to a complaint from a junior doctor about the lengthy delays and frustrating duplication he experienced with NHS recruitment, training and junior doctor rotations.

The problems he identified were found to be systemic and many were the result of over interpretation of policies, poorly worded policies, poor reporting, poor practices or inadequate systems.

While some trusts performed better in some areas, no one trust could claim it had everything right. The London trusts agreed to work together to identify good practice, overcome obstacles and develop solutions.

Recognise the problem

Major delays and duplication, costing staff time and money, were found in the following areas:

- Junior doctor changeovers
- Statutory and mandatory training
- Pre-employment processes

For example, slow or no transfer of employee information during doctor changeovers, refresher training as lengthy over-training with low compliance, and excessive waiting times for new employees to start work due to poor reference management.

Get the right people in the room

At the start of the project a steering group was set up, chaired by the chair of HR for London and including HR directors and deputies from across acute, community, healthcare and specialist trusts. Other key stakeholders included the London Deanery, Electronic Staff Record (ESR) and the London Procurement Programme – who

had been promoting a framework for Statutory and Mandatory Training.

Over two years the steering group successfully established an interface between ESR and the London Deanery's system (Empower) to automatically create junior doctor movements, now covering 94 per cent of junior doctor rotations.

However, after two years this was only one improvement in a problem-ridden system. To tackle the larger systemic issues, they needed more resources than volunteers and commitment. A dedicated programme team was the only way to ensure the detailed work would get done.

The workstreams also needed to bring in the staff who were familiar with how systems worked in practice. The London programme found that releasing junior staff time to work collaboratively on well-defined problems was the most effective way to get them solved and ensure solutions were workable.

Establish a dedicated programme team

A dedicated programme team with specific programme management skills was needed to change the working practice of around 400 people, in a variety of disciplines, across London.

NHS London, Skills for Health, London Procurement Programme, NHS Employers and the London Deanery provided funding and people for the team.

The programme team consists of:

- programme board
- programme sponsor
- programme director
- project managers
- data analyst
- administrative support.

The London programme brought together medical staffing managers, recruitment managers, learning and development managers, occupational health managers and ESR leads.

“You need the people who eat detail for breakfast”

Chair, HR for London

Agree on key principles

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

For the London programme our key principles were:

- staff have the best answers
- good policy, best practice
- do it once, do it well and pass it on
- overcome obstacles

These principles could be adapted for your programme or you could agree to a different set of principles appropriate for your region.

Plan your programme

Participants on the Streamlining Programme in London attended workgroups, seminars and masterclasses. There were also different activities for the different workstreams.

In the first six months of the statutory and mandatory training workstream, the London team baselined and benchmarked performance of almost every trust in the region.

The team then pulled together evidence of best practice in the trusts and used this to measure where each organisation was at the time against best practice overall.

With the help of the programme team, organisations then followed a 5 Point Plan to ensure they had covered, in detail, all aspects of the work needed to transform statutory and mandatory training.

The plan was specific to the statutory and mandatory training workstream and required trusts to:

- deliver training to meet Skills for Health’s Core Skills Training Framework (CSTF) and attach CSTF national competencies in ESR
- optimise e-learning for use where appropriate (with a target of 27 per cent of statutory and mandatory training to be delivered through e-learning)
- report compliance accurately with ‘trusted data’ (with a plan for cleaning up data that was not ‘trusted’)
- achieve a culture where non-compliance was not tolerated (with a vision that staff and local managers would take ownership of compliance)
- redesign induction so that training is not unnecessarily repeated.

The London Streamlining Programme team also worked with trust staff to identify areas where things needed to change nationally and, once this had been discussed and agreed with the HR directors, lobbied for that change.

Through analysis they identified how nearly £20m could be saved in staff time, equivalent to around £500,000 per trust, which led to further funding for the team.

Learn from our mistakes (but be prepared to make your own)

1. In London the programme went up a number of blind alleys before working out where they should be focusing their attention. Spend time getting to understand the true nature of a problem so you can be sure you’re spending time on the right things. This will help you make some quick wins early and reduce the time you spend pushing for changes that will never be implemented.
2. There’s no real success in trying to do things superficially. It will only result in you thinking you’re further ahead than you are. It’s important to have people on your

programme team who love the boring detail and are willing to dig down into the data. HR for London chair Deborah O’Dea says: “You need the people who eat detail for breakfast.”

3. Don’t simply trust that the world is the way you believe it is. When asked how many trusts were using easements in relation to junior doctor CRBs, London HR directors all believed they were. In fact, no-one was. Guidance, policy and practice all needed to be linked into systems to allow this to happen.

Top tips

- Baselining is an incredibly useful process for understanding how far trusts are from being the best they can be.
- Use heat maps or a traffic light system to show each trust how well they are doing on every element of the programme. This creates healthy competition and encourages engagement.
- Be aware of the amount of communication needed to keep everyone up to date with progress and actions needed from them. Try to ensure something is going on each week and report back to every meeting.
- HR directors need to be on board and to have an overview of the project but often aren’t the right people to get the work done. The trick is keeping them engaged without giving them extra work to do.
- Create a culture where it’s recognised that nobody’s perfect but, equally, everyone should be committed to a plan to improve their performance.

Conclusion

More than anything, the Streamlining Programme is about changing behaviour. The London experience shows what it really takes to create culture change.

It requires gaining a very detailed understanding of the problems trusts need to tackle and ensuring there are dedicated resources to help tackle them.

It also requires unfailingly regular communication, step-by-step processes and complete commitment to change from all parties, especially at a senior level.

A dedicated programme team was essential to drive forward the changes needed in London at a trust, regional and sometimes national level.

The programme has identified a total of more than £140 million that could be saved annually.

With the learning from London, it is hoped that regional programmes will identify and achieve even more.

Further resources

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

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