

Pre-Employment Best Practice in the Health Sector

A Framework for Employers



Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Section 1: Introduction | 3 |
| Section 2: Defining Best Practice for Pre-employment Programmes | 4 |
| Section 3: A Pre-Employment Framework for Employers in the Health Sector | 7 |
| Section 4: Where Can Pre-employment Programmes Lead? | 14 |
| Section 5: Additional Information and Resources | 15 |

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Section 1: Introduction

‘Being in good employment is protective of health. Conversely, unemployment contributes to poor health. Getting people into work is therefore of critical importance for reducing health inequalities.’¹

This document provides a framework and guidance for employers to support the delivery of high quality pre-employment programmes for the health sector and is set within the wider context of widening participation in learning and health.

Purpose of the Framework

The purpose of the framework is to help employers to:

- define what is meant by **best practice** and **identify the core characteristics** of organisations that support high quality pre-employment programmes.
- ensure any commissioned pre-employment programmes are consistent with **emerging best practice** and principles.
- promote **effective partnership working** and shared understanding of pre-employment between employers, partner organisations and participants.
- help employers to **identify and demonstrate the impact** of pre-employment programmes on the quality of the service delivered and patient care.



1. Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post 2010 Marmot Review Report, Fair Society, Healthy Lives (2010)

Section 2:

Defining Best Practice for Pre-employment Programmes

What is Best Practice in Pre-employment?

Work previously undertaken by Skills for Health and the Skills Academy for Health (North West) has highlighted the significance of the experience for individuals who participate in pre-employment programmes. It also emphasises the importance of effective partnerships in programme development and delivery. This is significant in defining best practice in pre-employment and informed the core success factors. Together this provides a framework for employers to illustrate what needs to be in place. This framework is described in section 3.

Pre-employment programmes are designed to help people from local communities who are currently unemployed return to sustained employment. In addition, the programmes help employers meet the workforce requirements of the health sector and have the potential to fill skills shortages.

The Career Framework for Health is an overarching resource for NHS and partner organisations, which can aid workforce flexibility locally, regionally and nationally. The Framework describes nine levels at which each functional area can be performed from initial entry level jobs to consultant practitioners and more senior staff. Within the Framework there is scope and encouragement for employers to view entry level jobs as a key part of effective workforce planning.

More recently, Skills for Health has developed an Employability Skills Matrix aligned to the Career Framework for Health, which aims to help staff working in the sector to identify the personal skills, qualities, attributes and behaviours needed for each career level. Employability defines *'the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours required by individuals to seek, obtain and sustain employment at all levels in the labour market.'*²

For individuals, employability skills are key to getting, keeping and doing well in a job. For employers, finding (and retaining) individuals who have employability or job readiness skills that help them fit into and remain in the workplace requires a clear understanding of what these skills are and how they may be developed.

2. Skills for Business Employability Project, 2007

Section 2:

Defining Best Practice for Pre-employment Programmes

Common Features of Pre-Employment Programmes

Pre-employment programmes can provide a specific training package for entry into the health sector. These include work trials or work placements with health sector employers supported by classroom learning. The common features of pre-employment programmes are illustrated in the diagram on the next page.



The characteristics of best practice are based on pre-employment programmes that:

- reflect the expressed needs of health sector organisations and people who use these services ensuring engagement of staff and participants.
- ensure collaborative approaches working in partnership with a range of agencies, for example: Young People's Learning Agency, Job Centre Plus and Local Employment Partnerships. These have specialist knowledge and experience of supporting the development of employability, particularly amongst those with low skills and, or who may be disadvantaged in their local labour market.
- build on the best, evidence based HR practices, for example, the importance of 'recruitment processes' on not only seeking to 'select and recruit' but also 'attract and impress' which can lead to improved recruitment and retention.
- support the development of competence based learning and practice.
- embed literacy, language, numeracy and ICT within all programmes.
- embrace the potential to grow the workforce (paid and volunteer roles) through engagement with local communities.

Diagram 1. Common Features of Pre-Employment Programmes ³

Multi-agency delivery models

Employment programmes depend on funding, in-kind inputs (such as time) and referrals from a number of partners. These include the Skills Academy for Health North West, Job Centre Plus (JCP), training providers such as colleges, Local Authorities and Local Employment Partnerships, NHS and social care employers, Condition Management Programmes (CMP) and voluntary and community sector advice providers.

Clear Information Advice and Guidance

Unemployed participants rely on clear information, advice and guidance at all stages of the engagement and recruitment process. The programmes rely on a phased approach – usually an introduction to the programme by a trusted person such as a JCP adviser, a counsellor or Positive Steps health adviser (in Blackpool) as part of wider confidence building efforts; followed by a face-to-face explanation at an open day or recruitment event.

Support to understand the financial implications

This goes beyond the standard 'better off in work' calculations used by JCP, but includes personal support to participants to allay any fears about changing benefits or moving into work. There are a number of entitlements – for instance travel allowances, one-off grants, in work/return to work bonuses and tax credits which different agencies provide according to various conditions. Some participants may need hand holding in order to help them access these entitlements.

Selection And Interviewing

Interviewing practice varies between the programmes and access to training and work placements may depend on one or more interviews. Interviews are usually informal and structured around measuring participants' motivation, their ability to cope and identifying support needs. Employers have varying degrees of involvement in these. Sometimes (but not always) basic skills assessments (literacy and numeracy) take place.

Portfolio Based Approach to Assessing Learning

All the programmes use a portfolio based approach to training and assessing the development of skills, whether in a college or work-based environment. This includes the use of evidence from employers, and asking participants to describe the practical application of their learning. Generic skills such as communication and confidentiality are explained through their use in their workplace.

Multiple Exit Routes

The programmes do not proscribe a specific exit route. Some participants continue in employment with their placement provider (on temporary contracts or new jobs); others move into job search; further education or training is also considered as a positive outcome for some funders; and they may move into the NHS or other employers (e.g. nursing homes, home care).

Follow up and Ongoing Support

All the delivery models provide varying degrees of personalised support after the end of placement, from follow-up telephone calls, to face to face help (motivation or practical support) in applying for jobs and preparing for interviews.

For further information you may find it helpful to look at: Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009)

3. Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009).

Section 3: A Pre-Employment Framework for Employers in the Health Sector

This section includes a suggested framework to help you support best practice in your role as an employer. It is illustrative of best practice in pre-employment programmes as used in the health sector. Each section of the framework identifies factors which need to be considered for the delivery of successful pre-employment programmes.



It is recommended that this framework is used in conjunction with your wider quality assurance and educational governance arrangements. More detailed descriptions of the core success factors and examples of evidence in practice are shown on the following pages.

Section 3:

A Pre-Employment Framework for Employers in the Health Sector

The Core Success Factors

A number of success factors highlighted through case studies, and evaluation reports are considered critical to the achievement of positive outcomes for participants and employers when developing pre-employment programmes.

These include:

1. Adopting a Whole Organisation Approach

- define a **strategy** within the organisation that is aligned to workforce planning and development to support widening participation in learning and a 'grow your own **culture**'.
- ensure the **alignment** of organisational and individual needs.
- identify the **benefits** to the organisation, participants and patients.
- encourage the development of **a learning culture** and support infrastructure that 'turns people on to learning' and helps them 'learn to learn'.
- ensure any pre-employment programme is **consistent with emerging best practice and principles**.

4. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

5. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

6. Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009)

7. Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009)

Evidence in Practice:

A key lesson learned from the pilots is the importance of the employer identifying a clear strategic reason for their involvement in implementing the Sector Employability Toolkit (SET) model. Having identified this need they then need to buy into it from start to finish.

- The active involvement of all internal partners within the Trust, HR and the departments who will be directly involved in the delivery.
- An appreciation of the SET being a holistic tool enabling both the employer and prospective employee to assess each other.
- An appreciation that this route into employment was designed to attract people who are unlikely to be able to compete through normal recruitment channels.⁴

A unique selling point of the SET overall is that it supports workforce planning which encompasses a structured route into entry level posts, as part of the Career Framework for Health.⁵

Employer Experience:

The most successful participant outcomes were seen in those organisations that had made a firm, high-level commitment to working with pre-employment programmes as a means of recruiting new staff.⁶

North West: case studies around pre employment demonstrate the significance of the learner journey and what needs to be in place – highlighting role of manager/mentor⁷

Section 3:

A Pre-Employment Framework for Employers in the Health Sector

2. Developing Partnerships

- promote **effective partnership** working and ensure a **shared understanding** of pre-employment programmes in the wider context of ‘widening participation’ and ‘engagement in health’ through community engagement and good corporate citizenship.
- develop **links with established programmes** working within the local community, for example Sure Start programmes, Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs) involving Jobcentre Plus, Training Providers, Employers and other key stakeholders such as the Skills Funding Agency.
- establish internal partnerships that demonstrate **senior commitment** and **alignment of systems and processes**, for example HR, Occupational Health, Patient and Public Involvement.
- work internally with Union Learning Representatives (ULRs), where appropriate.
- promote **awareness and understanding** of the programme, including recruitment through facilitated events.

Evidence in Practice:

At one location there was a long standing relationship between the employer and Jobcentre Plus which ensured that Jobcentre Plus had a good understanding of the job roles and the requirements of the employer. This understanding had built up over a period of time.⁸

Employer Experience:

“The Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust was one of the five pilot sites across England and Wales to utilise the Sector Employability Toolkit to assist unemployed individuals to move into sustainable employment within the health sector. A key factor in the success of the initiative was the partnership with Jobcentre Plus and in particular the involvement of the Local Employment Partnership (LEP) Account Manager. The LEP Account Manager was central to the success of the pilot and showed the dedication and commitment to ensure that we benefited from having the most focused individuals on the programme”.

MOHAMMED RAWAT, FROM MID YORKSHIRE HOSPITALS NHS TRUST

“Medway Community Healthcare have a local area agreement with the local Jobcentre Plus, and through attending a joint Careers Fair, we were able to talk to local long term unemployed young people. This has resulted in receiving 30 additional applications to our Apprenticeship programme”.

KAREN HARDY, HEAD OF WORKFORCE PLANNING, MEDWAY COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE.

8. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)



Section 3:

A Pre-Employment Framework for Employers in the Health Sector

3. Ensuring Effective Programme Planning and Preparation

- clearly **identify a lead** for pre-employment at sufficiently high level within the organisation to take the lead role in liaising internally and with external partners - Jobcentre Plus, training provider/s and other key partners.
- identify, prioritize and manage **funding opportunities** effectively.
- ensure planning processes using collaborative approaches that **engage individuals** in the local community who are unemployed and existing staff through **raising aspirations** and ensuring **shared decisions** that will support progression.
- ensure the right metrics are used to enable the **measurement of impact** on productivity and return on investment.
- work with partners to develop recruitment and selection processes.
- utilise existing resources, tools and programmes building on **examples of best practice** (evidence based), for example the Sector Employability Toolkit.
- adopt **collaborative approaches** to engage and consult with others.

Evidence in Practice:

The most effective pilots were those where there was strong partnership working. This was characterised not by everyone 'doing their own thing' but where partners sought to work in a truly collaborative way.⁹

"The importance of training providers offering flexible delivery models should be emphasised, and steps taken to increase flexibility as practicable".¹⁰

Employer Experience:

"Through working closely with the various organisations involved in a pre-employment programme, the coordinator is able to understand the needs of all parties involved and ensure that the most suitable participants are taken onto the programme and also help to manage the expectations of the participants. Through organisations having a lead, this enables a smooth and consistent approach to programmes thus maximising the potential success of a programme."

LIZ HULME, FROM SKILLS ACADEMY FOR HEALTH NORTH WEST

9. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

10. Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participant (April 2009)



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NEXT

Section 3:

A Pre-Employment Framework for Employers in the Health Sector

4. Achieving High Quality Programme Delivery

- ensure a **suitable programme lead is recruited** with the knowledge and skills to appropriately support participant needs.
- provide flexible and well supported **work based practice** opportunities, demonstrating a high quality infrastructure, for example work placements, work trials, volunteering.
- ensure use of recognized **training and qualifications** to support individual progression, for example NVQs, Apprenticeships, First Aid, Basic Food Hygiene.
- Participants development is supported through **flexible progression** pathways, moving design of education to small packages of learning, based on need, in a step wise progression towards fuller awards.
- identify the key **benefit regulations** and potential restrictions for participants before commencement of the programme.
- manage participant **expectations** in relation to the programme, potential development and outcomes.
- ensure that the content and **delivery of programmes is developed and agreed** by all partners.

Evidence in Practice:

The line managers felt that the three weeks work trial was the right length of time to be able to decide whether the individual candidates had ability for the work, were diligent and whether they might face any difficulties.¹¹

It was generally felt that the flexibility of the SET was a benefit. This provided the opportunity for employer and partner organisations to include processes and materials that they were familiar with using and that they believed to be effective. It also provided the opportunity to include some certificated training.¹²

Employer Experience:

The work placement experience was a learning curve for the line manager as well as the participant. The most successful instances of line management in placement occurred where the managers were aware of support needs, and prepared to provide learning opportunities in a phased and structure manner.¹³

11. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

12. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

13. Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009)

Section 3:

A Pre-Employment Framework for Employers in the Health Sector

5. Supporting Participants

- **early engagement** with potential participants through the use of informal initial interviews and events which ensures readiness for engagement in the programme, in learning and in employment within the health sector.
- **assessment** of additional support required e.g. literacy, language and numeracy requirements.
- emphasis upon **'unlocking potential'** rather than on 'skills deficit' based on an understanding of participants prior experiences and motivations.
- delivery of key activities that include **employability skills** (see Skills for Health's Employability Skills Matrix for Health) aligned to the Career Framework for Health and **Information, Advice and Guidance** (IAG).
- provide appropriate **employment skills** support during and following completion of the programme, using 'buddies'/learning champions/ Union Learner Representatives to support participants where possible.
- delivery of programmes that are **flexible and fit around individuals' support needs** to maintain engagement in the programme and learning, e.g. for child care, travel, subsistence.

- obtain and provide opportunities for **individual feedback** that honestly reflects the experiences and ability of participants during the programme and supports reflective practice.
- encompass support at pre recruitment, support during the programme and continued support on completion of the programme; **ongoing continuous personal and professional development (CPD)** support if successful/signposting to other agencies for support if not successful in obtaining employment.

Evidence in Practice:

A positive outcome of the range of levels of the candidates meant that they became very supportive of each other. The candidates that were struggling to cope with activities were helped by the ones that were finding activities easier to cope with. This helped with team building throughout the 2 week training programme because they developed a natural bond with each other. ¹⁴

The importance of regular and constructive feedback was highlighted. Where this did not happen candidates felt anxious about how they were doing and where it did they reported higher levels of improvement in confidence and motivation. ¹⁵

Employer Experience:

The ability of all partners to fit in around participants' support needs is important to their continued engagement. ¹⁶

14. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

15. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

16. Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009)



Section 3:

A Pre-Employment Framework for Employers in the Health Sector

6. Identifying the Impact of Pre-employment Programmes on Quality and Productivity

- The **organisation is explicitly supportive** of pre-employment activity and recognises the relationship between employment, health and well-being and its potential to reduce health inequalities.
- Pre-employment activity is **embedded and aligned** to the overall organisational strategy and supported through human resource interventions.
- Learning is **competence based** and applied to the learning and development activity for the whole workforce in Career Framework Levels 1 – 9.
- Activity is **based on workforce planning needs**, which come from national, regional and local level policy and priorities.
- A **variety of learning approaches** are used including both formal structured programmes and informal learning, including self reflection, learning by example, mentoring and supervision.
- There is a **'learning culture'** that supports all staff, learners and the wider public.
- Pre-employment programme activity is **systematically and regularly reviewed**, assessed and reported to demonstrate quality and a return on investment.

Evidence in Practice:

It is believed that people who have come through the programme are ahead, in terms of performance, by a month over those directly recruited. Dropout from the programme is low as opposed to a high dropout from direct recruitment thus saving on recruitment costs. The programme itself is funded as opposed to costs in time and money of direct recruitment involving recruitment advertising, short-listing and so on. ¹⁷

Employer Experience:

“The return on investment is clear because turnover at the Trust has been reduced by 50%. The wider community has also benefited through the retention of the crèche. 80% of admin staff recruited via a pre-employment programme 18 months ago are still working for the Trust.”

PATRICK RILEY, HR MANAGER, CWM TAF NHS TRUST. ¹⁸

17. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

18. Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)

Section 4:

Where Can Pre-employment Programmes Lead?

Pre-Employment programmes provide stepping-stones to opportunities that lead towards both employment in the health sector, and continuous personal and professional development for all staff in Career Framework Levels 1-9. This highlights the significance of community engagement in realising the potential for pre-employment programmes.

*'Success in education brings many advantages. If we are serious about reducing both social and health inequalities, we must maintain our focus on improving educational outcomes across the gradient.'*¹⁹

To do this we need to create the 'learning foundations' through pre-employment programmes as well as direct entry to roles in the health sector. This requires a culture that is inclusive, 'turns staff on to learning' and helps to give people the confidence to learn.

*'The UK can take the lead in demonstrating how learning can be properly integrated into this new mosaic of time, enabling individuals and communities to take greater control of their lives.'*²⁰

This guide provides a framework and information that helps employers to provide local communities with opportunities to access pre-employment programmes - creating stepping stones to employment in the health sector - supporting local people to fulfil their potential - and help to grow the workforce for the future.



19. Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post 2010 Marmot Review Report, Fair Society, Healthy Lives (2010)

20. Making a difference for adult learners NIACE policy impact report (2009)

Section 5:

Additional Information and Resources

Skills for Health produces a range of guidance and tools that can help you:

- Career Framework
www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/workforce-design-development/workforce-design-and-planning/tools-and-methodologies/career-frameworks.aspx
- Competence Application Tools, Skills for Health provides guidance on how to find and use competences (National Occupational Standards (NOS) and (National Workforce Competences) relevant to your need: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/competences/tools.aspx
- Skills for Health Guidance and Framework on Commissioning High Quality Education and Training (March 2010)
- Employability Skills Matrix for the Health Sector <http://ln.skillsforhealth.org.uk/page/employability>
- Growing Your Own: A Practical Guide to Growing Your Own Professionals for the New NHS, Skills for Health www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/resource-library/gateway-reports.aspx
- Health Sector Labour Market Intelligence www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/workforce-design-development/workforce-strategy/skills-labour-market-intelligence.aspx
- Learning Design Principles, Skills for Health www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/~media/Resource-Library/PDF/learn_design_principles.ashx
- Matrix Quality Standard for IAG Services: what it means to the health sector www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/careers-individual-skills-development/~media/Resource-Library/PDF/Matrix-What-it-means.ashx
- Pre-Employment programmes help release potential, NHS North West Academy and Partners <http://careersiag.skillsforhealth.org.uk/page/case-studies/pre-employment-programme-helps-release-potential>
- Pre-employment Programmes within the North West Health Sector: evaluation of the outcomes for participants (April 2009)
- Skills for Health Sector Employability Toolkit for Health (October 2009) www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/careers-individual-skills-development/developing-my-skills/literacy-language-and-numeracy/Employability/Sector-Employability-Toolkit.aspx
- Sector Employability Toolkit: a best practice study and evaluation report, Skills for Health (2009)
- Skills Pledge www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/workforce-design-development/workforce-strategy/national-regional-context/skills-pledge.aspx
- Skills for Health: Hard to reach Case studies about access to employment (2008) <http://careersiag.skillsforhealth.org.uk/page/case-studies/hard-to-reach-success>

Section 5:

Additional Information and Resources

Further Information:

- Learning and Skills Improvement Services, Improving Employer Responsiveness: Policy, consultation and research: the key messages (2009).
- Learning and Skills Network, Skills for Life Support Programme: Employability Toolkit for Development Advisors www.lsnlearning.org.uk (September 2009).
- Learning Through Life: Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning Tom Schuller and David Watson © 2009 National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) (England and Wales).
- Local Employment Partnerships http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging_employers/local_employer_partnerships
- Making a difference for adult learners NIACE policy impact report 2009 www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/policy/NIACE%20Policy%20Report%2028pg.pdf
- PEO Toolkit Pre-Employment Provision information by providers to providers (2009) www.peptoolkit.co.uk/ www.peptoolkit.co.uk/learner-journeys/1-pippa-howell.html.
- Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post 2010 Marmot Review Report, Fair Society, Healthy Lives (2010).



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