

International Recruits Review: Executive Summary

Increasingly the NHS has seen an increase in the number of internationally recruited staff making the decision to leave the NHS, with key factors including: discrimination from colleagues and patients, unmanageable workloads, unequal opportunities, financial strains and difficulties adjusting to living in the UK.

To understand experiences locally, Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) commissioned Healthwatch Hertfordshire to conduct an independent review of internationally recruited staff across the three acute Trusts in the area. Through an online survey, one-to-one interviews and focus groups, **349** international recruited staff shared their views.

Key Findings

Despite some very positive experiences, **49%** said they were seeking employment opportunities elsewhere, indicating that there is significant work to be done to retain internationally recruited staff, with our findings also highlighting key areas for improvement.



Recruitment Process: Most had a positive experience, receiving regular communication and support during each stage of the recruitment process. However there were clear inconsistencies between HR departments and recruitment agencies, with suggestions for improvements including more practical support, assigning a main point of contact, and meeting staff at the airport.



Roles and Expectations: Many were not aware of their role and responsibilities prior to arrival, and **57%** were not assigned to a clinical area - with many allocated to wards in which they had no or little experience. International recruits also received little clinical and technical support when working on the wards, despite the operations of the NHS being very different to their home country.



Support during Induction: Many had a positive experience of induction, commenting that the process was smooth and informative. Suggestions for improvement included providing practical support and information to help international recruits settle and adjust, as well as more one-to-one support and pastoral care.



Working for the NHS: Many enjoy working for the NHS, describing the culture as “supportive” and “welcoming” and shared positive examples of good teamwork and collaboration, and caring colleagues and management. However key concerns included staffing pressures, unmanageable workloads, difficulties maintaining a work-life balance, feeling undervalued and lack of diversity in leadership.



Unequal Treatment: Over **50%** have faced negative experiences at work, including cases of bullying, racism, discrimination and harassment from both patients and staff. Some felt unsafe to speak up and did not feel confident that their Trust would address their concerns - emphasising the importance of ensuring there is zero tolerance and improving mechanisms to ensure international recruits feel able to raise concerns.



Career Progression: **77%** felt they had access to training and learning opportunities. However, many raised concerns about the lack of equal opportunities for career progression and progression and clear indications of favouritism and bias.



Living in the Community: Most were satisfied with the area they live in and felt they had settled into the community, having built strong relationships and networks. Concerns focused on the cost of accommodation, safety, and feeling lonely and isolated.

Recommendations

Recommendations were made to the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) and have been categorised into issues of importance requiring action, and suggestions for implementing good practice.

Recommendations requiring action:



Working to eradicate **unequal treatment** from staff and negative behaviour from patients



Working to eradicate **unequal opportunities** in career progression and development



Ensuring **openness and transparency** with international recruits about their clinical area and expectations of the role



Improving the **clinical and technical** support international recruits receive to enable effective clinical practice



Supporting international recruits and helping them to maintain a **healthy work-life balance**



Improving initiatives that **appreciate, value and recognise** international recruits

Suggestions for implementing good practice:



Improving **communication, information and support** during the recruitment process



Improving the **support** provided during induction to help international recruits prepare for the role



Ensuring **practical support** is available upon arrival to the UK and during the induction process



Improving the quality of **peer support** offered to international recruits



Protecting the **health and wellbeing** of international recruits and improving the support they receive from management



Supporting international recruits with their **career progression and development**