

## Improving staff retention – case studies

# Improving retention of AHPs

## West London NHS Trust

### What was the problem?

West London NHS Trust had a vacancy rate of 28% for allied health professionals (AHPs) in January 2016, and in some services it was as high as 50%.

The aim was to reduce AHP vacancies in the trust by 10% by March 2018. Expected outcomes included:

- better retention of AHPs
- more responsive recruitment processes tailored to AHPs' needs
- less spending on AHP agency staff.

### What was the solution?

To better understand the problem and identify tailored solutions, the trust introduced an anonymised exit survey to find out why staff were leaving. To assess the impact of the initiative it measured:

- the vacancy percentage for AHPs
- the turnover percentage for AHPs
- staff experience, using a satisfaction survey.

Interventions and their impact were carefully assessed using a plan-do-study-act (PDSA) approach, enabling the trust to judge the project's viability and decide whether to scale up or continue. Initiatives tested through the PDSA cycles included:

- understanding why AHPs stay or leave
- using the AHP strategy launch to raise confidence in articulating its content and role
- a dedicated programme to help retain Band 6 AHPs.

This dedicated AHP retention programme involved content derived from questionnaire responses, where staff were asked whether they would be interested in in-house development. This content was based on what staff felt needed support. It was important for the programme to be AHP-specific: while generic retention measures help at a high level, for smaller and less well-known professions, more tailored retention measures are necessary to clarify ambiguous career pathways, for example.

## What were the challenges?

- The logistics of finding willing participants.
- Administrative issues – for example, facilitators sometimes needed to be reminded to attend.
- Chasing evaluation forms so they could be analysed in a timely manner.
- Keeping the programme moving – this required sustained engagement and commitment.
- Making plans to sustain the programme was a key challenge.

## What were the results?

- A reduced vacancy rate improved service quality by reducing reliance on high cost agency staff and/or ensuring the trust has the right staff for the assessments and interventions service users need.
- The trust saved £2,000 a week by encouraging existing AHP agency staff to consider working directly with the trust. This was partly achieved by the AHP lead writing personally to these staff.

- Reduced cost from reducing the need for agency staff and time spent on recruitment as more posts were filled.

## What were the learning points?

- **‘There is no such thing as a bad idea’** – This project encouraged staff to try new ideas and to think differently.
- **‘Data is a very powerful tool’** – Before the project, data had not been used to its full potential and there was scepticism about its use. However, data proved useful in motivating the project team to understand the impact of its work, and it has improved engagement.
- **‘Ringfence time!’** Be disciplined in carving out adequate time in your diary to support initiatives.
- **‘No one thing works in isolation’** – The trust’s significant success with this project is a result of combining efforts, skills and profile-raising.

## Next steps and sustainability

Feedback from staff has been overwhelmingly positive, so the trust intends to continue the programme and:

- monitor the measures to ensure the improvement is sustained
- test change ideas through PDSA cycles
- focus more on retention initiatives and consider implementing ideas from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement’s Joy in Work programme<sup>1</sup>
- monitor any cost savings to help strengthen the business case.

## Want to know more?

Helen Lycett, Strategic Trust Lead for Allied Health Professionals, West London NHS Trust:  
[Helen.lycett@westlondon.nhs.uk](mailto:Helen.lycett@westlondon.nhs.uk)

**To see the other case studies in this series:** visit the NHS Improvement website at:  
<https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/improving-staff-retention/>

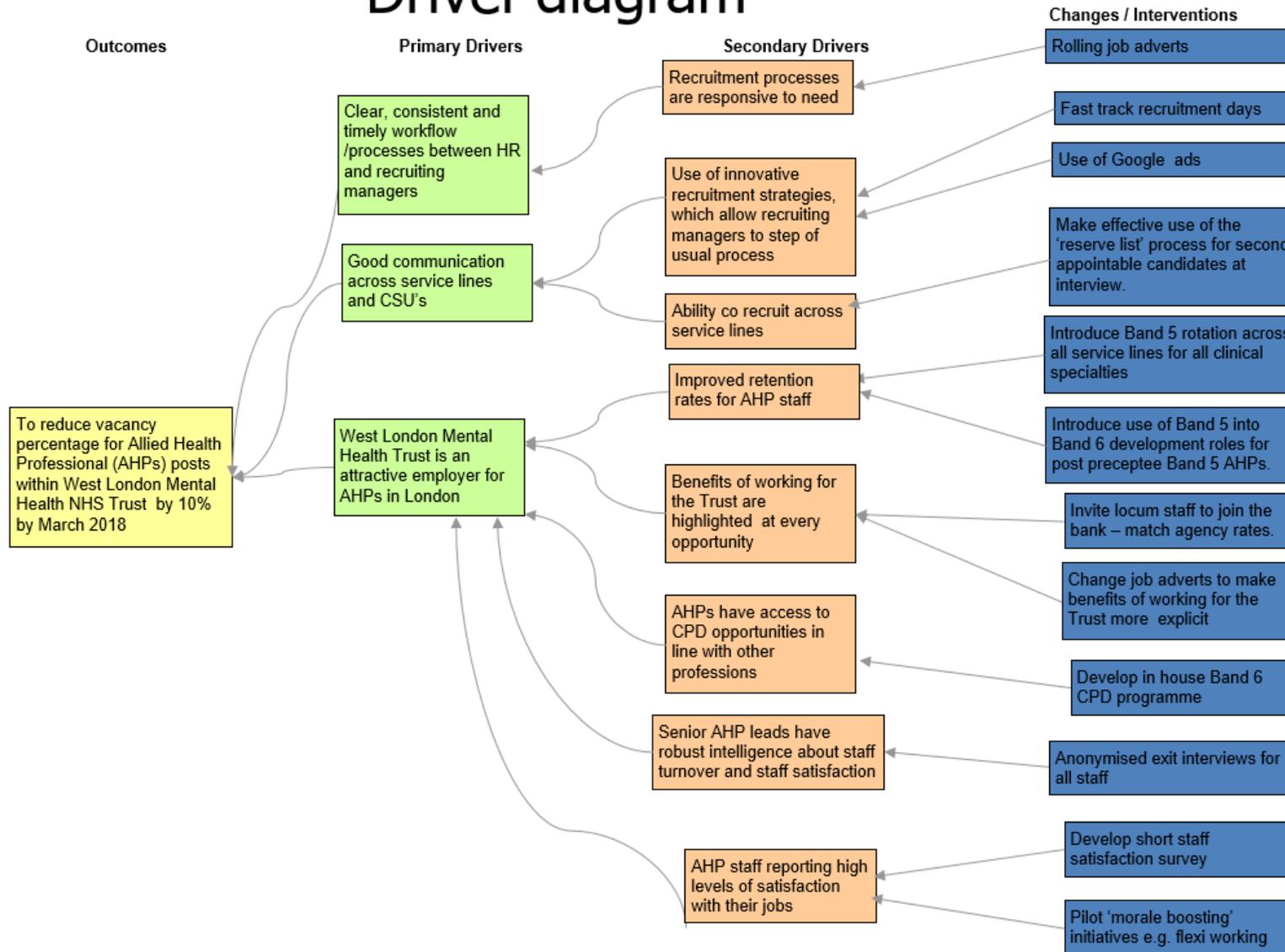
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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ihl.org/Topics/Joy-In-Work/Pages/default.aspx>

# Appendix 1

## Driver diagram

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## Appendix 2



Almost Hidden Professionals

[\*Almost hidden professionals\*](#) – a five-minute film developed by West London NHS Trust, involving AHPs and service users talking about how AHPs can have a huge impact on people's lives.

Contact us: **0300 123 2257** | [enquiries@improvement.nhs.uk](mailto:enquiries@improvement.nhs.uk) | [improvement.nhs.uk](http://improvement.nhs.uk)  
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