



**NHS**

Professionals

SPOTLIGHT REPORT

Profiling Healthcare  
Support Workers and the  
Healthcare Support Worker  
Development programme

PUTTING PEOPLE IN PLACES TO *care*

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# FOREWORD

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At NHS Professionals, we put people in places to care. Running England's largest NHS flexible staff Bank, we have more than 190,000 workers who provide the highest standard of patient care in over 100 Trusts.

In the last year, our Bank Members have worked to deliver more than 39 million hours' worth of care directly into the NHS<sup>1</sup>.

During 2022, we saw our workforce of Healthcare Support Workers (HCSW) increase by 48%, supporting the delivery of over 14 million Bank hours<sup>2</sup> to NHS Professionals' client Trusts. Our Healthcare Support Worker Development programme (HCSWD) has been developed to meet the ever-growing demand for more HCSWs across our Trusts. Last year, we recruited 1,018 people onto the HCSWD programme which saw a 124% increase on the number recruited in the year prior, 2020-21<sup>3</sup>. This year, 2022/2023, we are on track to exceed this figure again, with over 1,500 HCSWD candidates already recruited onto the programme<sup>4</sup>.

This in-depth report uses innovative 'persona' research to give us greater insight into the role and motivations of HCSWs and those who have been accepted onto the NHS Professionals HCSWD programme. It suggests that although both groups have similarities, which we would expect to see due to their shared job role, what motivates HCSWs versus HCSWD programme candidates does differ. This data can help us, and our client Trusts, communicate and engage effectively with healthcare support staff and maximise their contribution to high-quality patient care.

**Oliva Hawkins,**

Director of HCSWD, NHS Professionals

1 Figures taken from NHS Professionals Annual Review 2021 - 2022

2 Figures provided from internal NHS Professionals data, February, 2023

3 All HCSWD figures taken from NHS Professionals Annual Review 2021 - 2022

4 Figures provided from internal NHS Professionals data, March, 2023

# INTRODUCTION

This Spotlight Report summarises the size and organisation of NHS Healthcare Support Workers and those who are enrolled in the Healthcare Support Workers Development programme. It presents a set of role-specific 'personas' which explore the main motivators for each group.

The personas are fictional and are presented for illustrative purposes only. However, they are based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered from 1,620 NHS HCSWs and 192 candidates enrolled in the HCSWD programme.

The report also outlines the range of support NHS Professionals provides to HCSWs and HCSWD candidates, along with brief comments from some of our current workforce and client NHS Trusts.

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## WHO ARE HEALTHCARE SUPPORT WORKERS?

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Healthcare Support Worker (HCSW) is an umbrella term that covers a variety of health and care support roles, including Healthcare Assistant, Nursing Assistant, Theatre Support Worker, Maternity Support Worker, and more. Healthcare Support Workers play a vital role in providing high quality and compassionate care to patients across all NHS settings.

HCSWs work as a core pillar of wider health and social care teams, under the supervision of registered healthcare professionals, to help patients on their journey back to full health. This staff group is made up of approximately 48,523 dedicated Bank Members<sup>5</sup>, making up over 25% of our NHS Professionals Bank Member workforce.

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## WHAT IS THE HEALTHCARE SUPPORT WORKERS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME?

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The Healthcare Support Workers Development (HCSWD) programme originally launched 15 years ago as the CSWD programme. Although the programme rebranded in 2019 to what it is today, the aim has remained consistent. The programme further supports Trusts with their need to recruit and retain HCSWs.

It offers a three-month or six-month training course option to candidates, which when paired with 30 hours per week on work placements across our Trusts and a mix of classroom and online training, gives those with no prior healthcare experience a unique opportunity to learn the practical skills required to join the NHS.

Each candidate can develop these key skills while simultaneously working towards a care certificate. Once graduated, candidates can work flexibly at one of our partner Trusts, further supporting our Trusts by providing staff who can deliver high-quality care.

<sup>5</sup> Figures provided from internal NHS Professionals data, February, 2023



## OUR RESEARCH

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In 2021, we asked Blackbridge Communications to research the different ways our Healthcare Support Workers work flexibly with NHS Professionals and their motivations behind this. Over several weeks, Blackbridge consulted 1,620 HCSW Bank Members through five focus groups, one survey, and six stakeholder interviews.

During this period, Blackbridge also conducted a separate study into our Healthcare Support Worker Development programme candidates by consulting 192 HCSWD candidates, through five focus groups, one survey, and seven stakeholder interviews. The overall aim was to improve our insight into their motivations so we can better support trainees and work towards increasing our overall graduation rate.

Using this data, Blackbridge identified a range of fictional personas to help profile HCSWs and HCSWD candidates. As might be expected, many of these profiles have identified overlaps.

The report offers eight persona types for HCSWs and six persona types for our HCSWD candidates, which can help us and our partner Trusts to engage each group in a way sensitive to their unique needs and motivations. In this way we can maximise the key contribution Bank-based HCSWs and HCSWD candidates make to the NHS as we move into the era of integrated care.



**HEALTHCARE SUPPORT WORKERS  
STAFF 'PERSONAS'**

## THOSE AGED UNDER 35: THE DEDICATED HELPERS

There is a significant female bias to this cohort. As this cohort is younger, they have less exposure to Bank work than their more experienced colleagues. More than a third of this group chose their career as a HCSW when they were at either Further or Higher Education. They make up 21% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Laura...** she has been working as a HCSW for three years since leaving university. She is emotionally invested in her career and is dedicated to her patients. She believes that she can continue to learn and grow in her current role and has a positive view of NHS Professionals. She finds value in being recognised and would appreciate more recognition for the work that she does.

### Things this group told us:

- They are emotionally connected to the NHS and their work
- They feel as if they are doing something worthwhile
- They feel motivated by the stability this role provides
- Word of mouth communication is one of the most effective ways to circulate information with this cohort

## THOSE AGED 36-45: THE DECISION MAKERS

As a slightly older cohort, more than two thirds of this group have been in role for at least six years. They have continued in this role for a long period of time, as it enables them to have a job that fits in around their ongoing commitments. A work-life balance and job security are an important motivator for this group, as is the emotional connection to helping people. They make up 22% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Denise...** she is in her second career and has worked as a HCSW for more than eight years. She is a single mum which means that job security is important to her. Due to her family commitments, she does not want to commute for more than 30 minutes but luckily lives in an area offering access to several Trusts, so is happy to work where she feels welcomed. She is less keen on working within a different specialisation than she used to, but she still puts in over 90 hours every six months in terms of Bank shifts.

### Things this group told us:

- Their career choices are motivated by what they need outside of work
- These people have been in this career for at least six years so could do with a refresh on the benefits available to them

## THOSE AGED OVER 46: THE DEDICATED HELPERS

Two thirds of this group have been in the job for ten or more years. They are very loyal to NHS Professionals and enjoy the benefits which they receive through them. Some 81% are inspired by an environment in which they can improve a patient's health, but both job security and wanting to do something worthwhile are also motivators. It is worth noting that many of this group will opt for shifts on wards they are already familiar with. They make up 49% of the total survey sample.



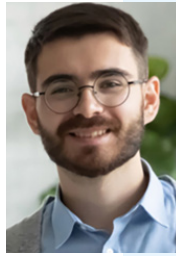
**Meet Marcus...** He has 15 years of experience as a HCSW. Marcus is happy to put in over 90 hours of Bank work in a six-month period but prefers the familiarity of working at a Trust he knows and that is within 30 minutes of home. He enjoys the benefits that NHS Professionals provides and would benefit from a easy point of contact when he has questions regarding his shifts.

### Things this group told us:

- They are motivated by helping people
- They are loyal to NHS Professionals

## THOSE NEW TO BANK SHIFTS: THE EARLY LOYALISTS

A relatively small cohort, comprised of HCSWs at various stages of their career – 39% have been doing this job for no more than three years, yet 31% have been in role for 10 plus years. They are predominantly female and are motivated by their desire to make people better. Although they are new to Bank exclusive work, more than half of this group have done shifts in Trusts other than their own. They will choose a shift in a ward they have enjoyed before, that fits around other commitments, and can broaden their knowledge. They make up 18% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Craig**... with two years of HCSW experience, he has joined the NHS Professionals Bank to gain further professional experience. Learning from a shift and developing his knowledge is important so he does not mind working at different Trusts to do this. However, the culture and familiarity of a particular ward does influence where he wants to work. Living on his own, job security is also important to Craig, as is the importance of doing something worthwhile. As Craig is new to working on the Bank exclusively through NHS Professionals, he values great communication to ease his nerves around working on new wards.

### Things this group told us:

- They are exclusive users of NHS Professionals
- They value clear communication about the Trusts and shifts they will be working
- They are highly motivated by their contribution to making patients better

## THOSE WITH BETWEEN ONE AND UP TO FIVE YEARS BANK EXPERIENCE: THE CONVENIENCE SEEKERS

Predominantly female, this group has commitments outside of work and is seeking flexible ways to make more money. Many of them have equal earning power as their partners so tend to pick up a lot of shifts on the Bank. Given their commitments, a lot of them are willing (53%) to work at Trusts that are not their regular place of work. However, they prefer Trusts within a 30 minute commute of their home. They enjoy the benefits that NHS Professionals offers and would like to see access to some further additional training. They make up 25% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Monique**...she is in her late twenties and lives in rented accommodation with her partner. She has been a HCSW for two years and she enjoys the money she can earn in this career. For this reason, she is happy to work over 90 Bank hours every six months which she feels is possible, as there is no shortage of shifts available to her through NHS Professionals. These flexible shifts fit in around her busy lifestyle which is one of the main reasons she rates NHS Professionals so highly. Playing a role in improving people's health is a key driver for Monique and developing her skills via Bank work keeps her motivated.

### Things this group told us:

- They want work that is flexible around their other commitments
- They want their work to be close to home
- If Bank work is available that fulfils these criteria, they don't mind which Trust they go to and don't mind putting in significant amount of shifts

## THOSE WITH MORE THAN FIVE YEARS' BANK EXPERIENCE: THE FAMILIARITY SEEKERS

These HCSWs have five plus years' worth of Bank experience and represent the largest cohort. Most of this group came to the role following a career change and have stayed due to the job security and added NHS Professionals benefits. Whilst two thirds will travel no more than 30 minutes for work, another quarter would put up with an hour's commute. This group feels that NHS Professionals give them much of what they are looking for but feel that they could benefit from clearer information about each Trust. They make up 57% of the survey sample.



**Meet Charlie**...she became a HCSW after having a career break to start a family. Now, the sole earner in her household, she values the job security provided by her role and the benefits that NHS Professionals offers. She is proud to be a professional in a respected career and enjoys her role. She has been around for long enough to understand which wards and Trusts she likes to work with versus those she does not. This is about convenience for her, working with people that she knows, in a place she understands.

### Things this group told us:

- This group is unlikely to want to work in a Trust that they have not worked in before
- This group values the job security that this role provides

## THOSE DOING LIGHT TO MODEST BANK HOURS: LIGHT USER OF THE BANK

This group has done anything between 0 and 90 Bank hours in the previous six months. Heavily female-led, this is a typically highly experienced group, with nearly half of them having 10+ years of experience. More than half of this cohort have worked Bank shifts for more than five years. They make up 51% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Safiyah**...she has been a HCSW for more than 10 years, five of which she has been working NHS Professionals shifts. Living with her partner and older children, Safiyah enjoys the choice of shifts available to her through NHS Professionals so would not use an agency. At this stage in her career, the culture she comes across and the contribution she makes within a worthwhile job, are more important than development.

### Things this group told us:

- Just 7% work with an agency instead of NHS Professionals
- Supporting their team is a major influencer of whether they will take another shift or not

## THOSE DOING EXTENSIVE HOURS: HEAVY USERS OF THE BANK

This group is fundamentally motivated by the opportunity to make their patients better which is why they are more likely to do shifts away from their own Trust. Comprising of mainly females, this group is also more likely to want to develop their knowledge through Bank work. With 44% being the sole earners in their household, these HCSWs like the flexibility that NHS Professionals provides, the ease of the app, the volume of shifts they can access, and the variety and the training. They make up 49% of the total survey total.



**Meet Michelle**...she came late to the role of a HCSW after a career change. The sole earner within her rented home, she feels well paid for what she does but adds on over 90 Bank hours every six months. She enjoys being a recognised professional within the NHS and will only return to wards where she feels welcomed.

### Things this group told us:

- Nearly half are the sole household earner
- They feel respected working for the NHS
- They feel motivated by the chance to develop in their role



**HEALTHCARE SUPPORT WORKERS  
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME  
CANDIDATE 'PERSONAS'**

## INFORMED RESPECT-SEEKERS

Largely female and concentrated around the 26–45-year age range, most of this cohort are on the six-month programme. Their motivation for applying for the programme was for a long-term career and getting into the NHS. They feel well respected, are generally positive about the course and cannot wait to complete it. They typically balance the programme with either childcare or other care responsibilities so would feel uncomfortable travelling for more than 30 minutes. They make up 34% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Jasmine...**she is in her late 30s and has two children. She had worked previously in a care setting but did not always feel respected or challenged. She was attracted onto the programme by the reputation of the NHS and the desire to have a long-term career. She feels this programme is a great pathway to doing this and is excited to complete the course.

### Things this group told us:

- Their route into the programme was smooth and they feel well communicated with
- Ease of commute and a work-life balance is important
- They are keen on a long-term career with the NHS

## THE SPRING-BOARDERS

This group was a younger group, with the majority under 35 and still living with parents. They see the programme as a chance to start a long-term career and are inspired by the chance to do worthwhile work. They are enthusiastic about starting work after the programme and the ability to gain a recognised qualification is a real driver. They would like to see additional communication from NHS Professionals and a simpler application process, and more clarity around what happens after their programme finishes. They make up 11% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Israel...**he is really excited to start his professional career through the HCSWD programme. He has worked in care for a few years but has been frustrated by the lack of opportunities to progress. He balances his time on the programme with a part time job and still lives at home with his parents. He would find it beneficial to have an easier point of contact when he has queries regarding the programme.

### Things this group told us:

- This is a younger cohort often living with their parents
- Willing to travel up to an hour
- They are looking for a recognised qualification and a proper start to their career

## THE CHOICE SEEKERS

This group comes from a range of previous professional backgrounds, although care features regularly. This group was motivated to apply to the programme because they felt it would open a range of career options. They balance their involvement on the programme often with childcare or other commitments. There is a concentration within the 26-45 age group and most of them are on the six-month programme. They make up 65% of the total survey sample.



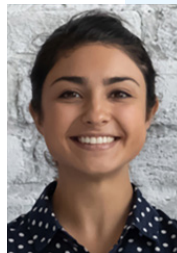
**Meet Janet...** She has had several jobs during her career, usually ones that work around her childcare or other commitments. With her kids becoming more independent, she is now looking for an employer that can provide a range of options. She is inspired because the NHS can provide opportunities that she can take advantage of. She has thoroughly enjoyed her time on the programme and senses respect from those around her. She has a positive opinion of NHS Professionals and would like to know more about the opportunities available to her when the programme finishes.

### Things this group told us:

- They come with a real range of previous jobs
- The reputation of the NHS and what opportunities it can provide is of real importance
- Balancing work with their other demands is a significant driver

## THE LEARNERS, THE GROWERS

This group was motivated to apply for the HCWD programme as they were seeking a long term-career and the opportunity to continuously learn. This is a major cohort, again with a significant female bias. They are typically aged 26-45 and have either a young or slightly older family. They value the job security that the NHS provides and have a positive and professional view of NHS Professionals. They felt the application process was straightforward. They make up 68% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Devi...** She has two children who have recently started secondary school. She has had several roles, often care based, in support of her family, but nothing that provides training, development and a career pathway. She is excited about gaining a recognised qualification and about getting started with both the NHS and NHS Professionals. She likes the programme in that it provides the opportunity for someone with no healthcare experience to get into the NHS.

### Things this group told us:

- They are seeking the opportunity to continuously learn
- They are motivated by the opportunity to have a long-term career that provides ongoing training
- They value the job security that the NHS provides

## THE RESPONSIBLE SECURITY SEEKERS

This is one of the smaller cohorts within this study, again largely comprising female programme participants. Their key motivations through the programme are to set up a long-term career, to have stability and security, and to have a good work-life balance. Being part of the NHS was a key driver in their application. They have family responsibilities with either young or slightly older children. This group is looking for job security. Their experience of NHS Professionals has been broadly positive. This group makes up 23% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Alice**...she has had a variety of short-term jobs, often within the care sector. She rents with her family and is seeking to achieve greater stability for herself and her family. She has had a positive time on the programme and is genuinely looking forward to taking her career forward and feels there is a real pathway opening for her. She has no problems with the application process and has liked the regular communications. She does find that balancing her studies and the practical side of her course can sometimes be tough to manage.

### Things this group told us:

- Beginning a secure career and long-term career is of real importance
- They would not have expected to be given an opportunity to start such a career at their age
- They are split between continuing to work with NHS Professionals or or taking a permanent position through the NHS

## THE PATHWAY HUNTERS

This group wants a clear career path. A smaller cohort with a high proportion of female participants, this group is slightly younger than other cohorts. They have been working in either junior care roles or trying to get a start in terms of a career. They were more inclined to consider a commute of an hour and more. This group would find it beneficial if the different speeds in which people learn could be reflected more in the programme. There was a positive attitude towards NHS Professionals. They make up 27% of the survey.



**Meet Claire**...she left school around five years ago but has been frustrated with her career to date. Her jobs have paid the bills but have not provided her with development and progression opportunities. She is enthusiastic about gaining a recognised qualification and would tend to recommend the programme on the basis that it is a wonderful opportunity for someone with little or no healthcare exposure to get into the NHS. She intends on continuing to work flexibly through NHS Professionals.

### Things this group told us:

- A slightly younger cohort
- They want to stay working flexibly
- Getting a recognised qualification is a key driver

# NHS PROFESSIONALS SUPPORT FOR HEALTHCARE SUPPORT WORKERS AND HEALTHCARE SUPPORT WORKER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME CANDIDATES

## EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

Since 2001, NHS Professionals have provided Trusts with dedicated Healthcare Support Workers. This remains the same today, with our growing network of 48,500 HCSW Bank Members<sup>6</sup> able to work across 100 Trusts<sup>7</sup>.

Following on from the pandemic, NHS Professionals directly responded to our client Trusts' need for more Healthcare Support Workers by bringing a significant focus on the Healthcare Support Worker Development programme. This has produced a talent pool of candidates who are working on the frontline, learning the skills required to deliver high-quality patient care across the NHS.

This research allows us to better understand and support HCSWs and HCSWD candidates at each stage in their career, keeping our Bank Members happy, shifts filled, and Trusts supported as they face operational pressures.

We are also focusing on developing our offer as a sustainable career solution for our existing HCSW Bank Members, rather than simply offering opportunities to take up shifts.

- Are you a Healthcare Support Worker looking to working flexibly? Learn more about our Bank Member opportunities by visiting <https://www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/nhs-staffing-pool-hub/careers-in-healthcare/healthcare-support-worker-or-healthcare-assistant>
- Are you interested in becoming a Healthcare Support Worker? Find out more about our Healthcare Support Worker Development programme by visiting [www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/campaigns/hcswd](http://www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/campaigns/hcswd)
- For Trusts, visit [www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/partners](http://www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/partners) to find out more about how we can recruit and retain your flexible staff through our Managed Service Provider partnerships and modular workforce services.



<sup>6</sup> Figures provided from internal NHS Professionals data, February, 2023

<sup>7</sup> Figure taken from NHS Professionals Annual Review 2021 - 2022

# TESTIMONIALS

Here we present a small selection of recent comments from one of our Trusts and some of our Healthcare Support Workers and Healthcare Support Worker Development programme candidates.



As Ward Manager, I have found the HCSWD course to be really beneficial to the ward. The whole team welcomes this programme and encourages the individual to grow within their role whilst working within a team. It enables my HCAs to share best practise and education, whilst providing support and guidance. Whilst the individual learns a new set of skills and increases their knowledge, the ward gains an extra person to assist them which helps to ease some demands within the workplace.

**Angela Gould**, Ward Manager,  
Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



Balancing work and family routine is very difficult for everyone, but it helps a lot if you can pick and choose your working hours.

**Jacqui Cunliffe**, Healthcare Support Worker,  
Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust



I choose to work through NHS Professionals because of the flexibility, additional holiday and the ease of picking up shifts last minute.

**Rebecca Lympny**, Healthcare Support Worker,  
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust



Without any reservation, I will recommend the NHS Professionals training to anyone who is interested in pursuing a career in healthcare, as this programme is certain to provide the knowledge and tools required to have a successful career.

**Lynda Akpan**, Healthcare Support Worker,  
Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust



The HCSWD programme provides the first step into healthcare, opening doors to lots of career paths, where you get to decide how you want to progress.

**Letitia Taylor**, Healthcare Support Worker,  
Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust



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