

WORKFORCE

NHS Youth Forum report on promoting
recruitment amongst young people



Esther Gbadebo
Karam Johal
Nishika Aggarwal
Rahma Alhaj Naima
Victor Agbontean

2024/25



Introduction



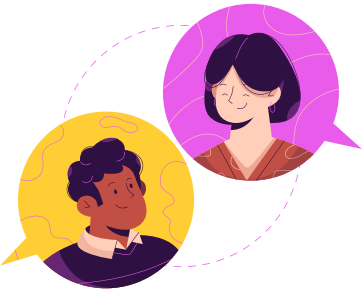
The NHS Youth Forum, supported by Barnardo's, are a group of young people who are passionate about improving and influencing change within the health services provided for young people. This report focuses on changes that can be implemented surrounding recruitment to the NHS workforce.

In 2022, only 6% of NHS staff were young people under 25. Our report focuses on identifying and breaking down the barriers that inhibit young people from applying to NHS roles as well as recommendations from young people surrounding promotion and changing the profile of the NHS. In order to get an accurate depiction of the opinions and views of young people we conducted a survey in November 2024.

Our survey is not just a set of numbers—it's a clear signal about what the next generation of healthcare professionals wants, values, and needs. The NHS is working towards the goals set out in the Long-Term Workforce Plan (LTWP), a plan to ensure the NHS workforce meets anticipated demand in the future by promoting entry career routes into the NHS. Understanding the voices of young people is essential for shaping a future workforce that is diverse, motivated, and equipped to meet evolving healthcare needs.

The survey included a diverse nature of the respondents, with 41 women and 4 men participating, along with a mix of ethnic backgrounds, including White British (22 responses), Black African (5 responses), and Asian Indian (4 responses). Recognising this diversity is crucial for the NHS as it works to ensure that all young people, regardless of background, feel welcomed and supported. Tailoring outreach efforts to meet the needs of different demographic groups—whether based on ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status—will ensure a more inclusive recruitment process.

Our Aim



Aim:

This report aims to identify the barriers preventing young people from pursuing careers in the NHS and provide their recommendations on improving the promotion and profile of NHS career opportunities.

Methodology:

We used a survey to gather the views of young people on three key areas:

- Perspectives of young people
- Profile of the NHS
- Communication channels

The survey was aimed at 15-25 year old age group and consisted of 16 questions, mostly multiple-choice to make it quick and easy to complete while allowing us to compare responses effectively. We also included free-text options so participants could share their personal thoughts and experiences in more detail. To see the questions asked, see the appendix on page 11.

Once the survey was completed, we examined the responses to identify trends and commonalities, understand the main challenges young people face when considering NHS careers, and gather their ideas on how the NHS can improve its outreach and appeal to the next generation of healthcare professionals.

Perspectives of young people

Young people and NHS values

When asked about what matters most to them in life, many young people echoed values closely aligned with the NHS's core mission which is to provide high-quality care for all people, while reducing health inequalities. They do this by working together to improve the skills, values, and behaviours of the healthcare workforce.

A strong majority—37 respondents (78%)—highlighted equality, health and wellbeing, and making a difference in society as key personal values. These are at the heart of the NHS's work, showing that many young people feel a deep resonance with the NHS's mission. This connection offers a solid foundation for recruitment, as young people seem drawn to careers that align with their desire to make a meaningful impact.

However, a few respondents felt that the NHS's values didn't align with their own, pointing to a potential gap in communication or experience. The NHS can use this feedback to better highlight its commitment to inclusivity, health equity, and personal well-being—values that many young people hold dear.

Reaching Young People: Communication and Awareness:

A key finding from the survey was the importance of digital channels in reaching young people. 32 respondents (68%) said they know how to find NHS jobs, but this awareness is largely shaped by where they spend time online. The survey revealed that young people are most likely to turn to Google (41 responses), Instagram (20 responses), TikTok (23 responses), and YouTube (17 responses) for information about job opportunities.

These insights offer a clear roadmap for the NHS to improve its outreach. By strengthening its presence on these platforms, the NHS can connect with young people in places where they're already engaging. For example, social media campaigns showcasing the diversity of NHS careers, as well as the impact of the work done by NHS staff, could help dispel misconceptions and spark interest. Young people are particularly drawn to engaging content, so using these platforms for behind-the-scenes stories, day-in-the-life features, or live Q&A sessions with NHS staff could also be highly effective. In addition to digital media, marketing campaigns (24 responses) and community engagement events (29 responses) were highlighted as helpful strategies for raising the NHS's profile. These face-to-face interactions—such as career fairs or school visits—can help humanise the NHS and make it feel more accessible to young people.

Perspectives of young people

What Attracts Young People to NHS Careers?

Despite strong alignment with NHS values, young people identified several barriers preventing them from considering careers in the NHS. Pay (24 responses), work hours (20 responses), and shift patterns (22 responses) were the most commonly cited challenges. These findings highlight that, while young people are eager to contribute to the NHS, concerns about compensation and working conditions are significant hurdles.

When asked about what would attract them to entry-level roles in the NHS, career progression and flexible working (both 30 responses) stood out as top priorities. These factors speak to the desire for a sustainable and fulfilling career in the NHS, one that offers growth opportunities and a healthy work-life balance. The NHS Long-Term Workforce Plan aligns well with these expectations, as it focuses on creating clear career pathways and offering more flexible working conditions to meet the needs of the next generation of healthcare professionals.

Additionally, training (22 responses) was identified as another important factor. This suggests that young people are looking for structured development and support as they begin their careers, something that is in line with the NHS's push to expand training and apprenticeships. Emphasising these opportunities in recruitment messaging will help the NHS attract more young people who are looking for growth and long-term career development.

This is where the LTWP can make a real difference. Improving pay structures, offering more flexible working hours, and providing better support for shift workers could help alleviate these concerns and attract more young talent. Making these improvements could also boost retention rates, helping the NHS hold on to young professionals once they join.

Improving the Recruitment Process:

Many survey respondents also shared their thoughts on the NHS recruitment process. 15 respondents felt the application form could be streamlined, and 10 respondents suggested improvements to the interview process. This feedback underscores a need for the NHS to modernise and simplify recruitment pathways, making it easier for young people to apply for jobs. The NHS could consider creating a more transparent and user-friendly recruitment system, with clear instructions and support for applicants. Offering more information about apprenticeship options and the range of roles within the NHS could also help young people make more informed decisions about where they want to start their careers.

Profile of the NHS

When focusing on the profile of the NHS, the results of our survey showed that more could be done to highlight the benefits of a career in the NHS alongside changing the narrative surrounding the NHS. For example, a large proportion of respondents stated that the news and ‘word of mouth’ had affected their view of the NHS overtime.



Community Outreach Career Progression Recruitment Uptake

Interestingly, a number of young people also discussed pay and career progression as factors that lessened the appeal of a career in the NHS. To target this, the idea of hosting community engagement events with a focus on young people was a popular idea.

29 respondents stated that they believed community outreach would aid the NHS in raising its profile to attract more young people. Speaking within our groups and to other young people, we’ve noted that ‘human connection’ works and allows young people to see themselves in that career rather than trying to develop an understanding of (what may be) a niche career from a paragraph on the NHS website.

With this suggestion and the NHS’ Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP) in mind, we believe it’s essential for the NHS to trial an increase in marketing campaigns that are more focused in local communities and bridge the gap between the work various staff members at the NHS complete and young people who are considering applying. This style of campaigning also serves as a beneficial strategy for raising awareness about the multitude of various support worker roles and can achieve the goal of recruiting a diverse range of support workers by tackling this barrier.

Communication channels

A vital strategy to help encourage young people to enter the NHS workforce is to understand their preferred resources for career information, where they get their views on the NHS and how to improve its perception.

When asked which resources would be most helpful in understanding NHS careers, 25 respondents indicated that work experience was their top choice, highlighting the value of experiential learning in clarifying what specific roles involve and whether they are a good personal fit. This preference may also suggest that many people currently lack a clear understanding of the diverse roles the NHS has available. Meanwhile, careers fairs were close behind with 24 respondents, highlighting the importance of the NHS having a strong presence at these events and representing a variety of fields—not just the most obvious career paths. The third most popular option was school careers advisors, with 22 respondents pointing to the perhaps underestimated influence of advisors in shaping career decisions. There may be an opportunity for the NHS to partner more closely with schools and provide tailored resources (particularly related to the wide spectrum of roles, in particular entry roles in the NHS) to help advisors encourage young people to enter the NHS more. 21 respondents also selected the job app, emphasising the importance of an effective and easy to use centralised service.

We also asked young people their thoughts on the most effective way to raise their profile, the results were fairly even with 24 saying marketing campaigns and 29 saying community engagement events. These results highlight the importance of both strategic marketing campaigns and community engagement events in raising the NHS's profile, while also suggesting that we should not neglect community engagement despite being in an increasingly digital world.

Individuals use a variety of online platforms to find information. Google is the most commonly used outlet, with 41 respondents using it as their primary source for information. Social media platforms such as Instagram (20) and TikTok (23) also play a significant role, particularly among younger users who turn to these sites for both entertainment and news. However, more needs to be done to identify the best ways of utilising these platforms to effectively communicate important information to younger audiences.



Communication channels

Perceptions of the NHS are shaped by a wide variety of things. The responses to this question allude to the fact that the majority of people's perception of the NHS derives from traditional sources of information. With 22 respondents identifying the news and 14 saying other people were key for affecting their views. While these external influences shape public opinion, it likely means change can only occur with broader improvements to the NHS itself, such as better funding, staffing, and infrastructure. Without addressing these core issues, it will be difficult to shift the public perception in any substantial way. However using social media to highlight positive stories may help to counteract these negative views.

When it comes to promoting entry-level career opportunities to young people, social media is by far the most effective communication channel, with 31 respondents choosing it as their preferred platform. This aligns with current trends, as social media is widely used by younger generations to stay informed about job openings, internships, and career advice. Websites come in second place with 11 of the responses, suggesting that career-specific platforms or job boards also play a key role. Newspapers received 0 responses appear to be less relevant for reaching the younger audience.

Overall It is essential that individuals understand the breadth of jobs and possibilities a career within the NHS entails. This awareness can help shape more informed perceptions of the NHS, reducing misunderstandings. Social media plays a key role in spreading information, and needs to be utilised effectively to communicate important messages particularly about the NHS, although how best to do this is still unclear. While changing public perceptions is vital, it will continue to be a challenging task, as it not only requires effective communication, but also meaningful improvements within the NHS. Without addressing core issues, such as funding and staffing, public perception will likely remain unchanged.



Recommendations

Our recommendations that can be implemented to tackle this issue include:

- The NHS highlighting its commitment to inclusivity, health equity and personal well being when promoting roles.
- Social media campaigns showcasing the diversity of NHS careers, provide 'day in the life' insights, and highlighting their impact. It is also important to highlight positive stories within the NHS to counteract many negative perspectives. Combining these efforts with local campaigns can enhance awareness and make entry into an NHS career more accessible.
- Establishing clear career pathways that can lead to senior roles while providing more flexible working conditions to support career progression and work-life balance.
- Highlighting the training programmes and support available to individuals pursuing careers within the NHS.
- Improving both the application and interview process during recruitment.
- More collaboration with schools and careers advisors to highlight the opportunities and positives of working in the NHS. This could be done by providing tailored resources to help advisors encourage young people into the NHS
- Ensuring the NHS has a strong presence at careers fairs and that they represent a variety of roles.
- Increasing the opportunities for work experience in the NHS and not just in the more traditional roles such as shadowing doctors.



Conclusion

The findings from this report emphasise that many things need to be put in place and developed to encourage young people to enter the NHS. Work experience, career fairs, and careers advisors were highlighted as key influences, demonstrating the importance of strong partnerships between the NHS and educational institutions. Strengthening these partnerships in the future could become a vital asset to ensure the sustainability of the NHS workforce. Furthermore the report also showed that many people tend to have a negative perception of the NHS, it is important we use the aforementioned in person resources in combination with digital communication to ensure young people are fully understanding of roles within the NHS and improve perceptions. Nevertheless whilst these important steps to addressing the Long Term Workforce Plan, broader improvements such as funding and infrastructure will be key to attracting new members of the workforce.

By empowering and encouraging young people to join the NHS workforce, the NHS addresses the Long Term Workforce Plan by growing the healthcare staff to meet the demand required from care as well as putting the NHS on a sustainable footing for the future. We hope that by reading this report, some of our recommendations can be implemented to tackle this issue.



Working together to make a difference in patient lives

Appendix

Questions from survey conducted:

What is important to you in life in terms of values?

What are the barriers preventing you from considering a career in the NHS?

What factors would attract you into an entry careers job in the NHS?

Do you know about the long-term career prospects within the NHS?

If you have had experience applying for jobs in the NHS, are there any changes you would make to the recruitment process?

What do you currently know about NHS and the jobs on offer?

Do you know that there are apprenticeship options for multiple roles?

What information/ resources would help you better understand what a career in the NHS entails?

How can the NHS raise it's profile to attract more young people?

Would you know how to find out about jobs in the NHS?

What 'outlets' do you currently use in your day to day life to find information?

What has affected your view on the NHS most and how?

Why/why not could you see yourself working for the NHS?

How could the NHS appeal more to young people?

Thank you!



For more information about the NHS Youth Forum and Young Researchers, visit <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/nhs-youth-forum> or email us at NHSYouthForum@Barnardos.org.uk

This project was supported by Bronte Edwards and Daisy West from the Barnardo's Voice and Influence Team

