



NHS

Professionals



SPOTLIGHT REPORT

Hidden Heroes: Profiling the NHS Professionals Non-Clinical Workforce

PUTTING PEOPLE IN PLACES TO *care*

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FOREWORD

Ask a sample of NHS leaders for their opinion on what creates great patient outcomes and most will probably give the same answer: teamwork. In the best-performing healthcare teams, you will always see a healthy mix of clinical and non-clinical staff working together in a truly multi-disciplinary culture. Everyone on the team is valued for their contribution to patient care - scrubs or no scrubs.

It's therefore good to see that multi-professional teams have become commonplace in the NHS. Indeed, they proved their worth many times over during the pandemic, where all staff came together with energy to fight a single cause. The shift to integration means we can expect to see more of these forward-thinking collaborations across healthcare systems in the years to come.

Despite this, we should also acknowledge that non-clinical staff have felt undervalued at times. Inevitably, attention will tend to focus on clinical staff because their front line roles have such a direct, far-reaching impact on safety and outcomes. Many see them, and only them, as the heroes of the NHS. Given their extraordinary skills and prime place in the NHS workforce, it's easy to see why.

But this focus can unintentionally eclipse the role non-clinical staff play in high-quality care. That is also pivotal. Remove or disrupt even just one or two non-clinical functions at any time and the impact on front line care will be immediate.

Thankfully, that is a well-known fact in today's NHS and at NHS Professionals, we are proud to recognise every member of the NHS family. It's true that we've built our reputation on providing clinical staff to the NHS and this remains a major part of our business. But we've also seen our non-clinical Bank Member base grow in recent years. It's now a significant part of what we do and we expect it to increase.

In the 2020-21 period, for example, we saw our non-clinical Bank Member base jump from 12,900 to 15,000. They filled more than 5.5 million Bank hours with an average saving to the NHS of £11 per hour on external agency fees. To keep pace with this growth, we're reshaping and expanding our non-clinical teams to strengthen our core services and build new ones to meet demand.

This timely report uses innovative 'persona' research to shine a light on the non-clinical workforce – especially the growing number who choose to work flexibly with NHS Professionals. It suggests there are subtle differences in the characteristics and motivations within each group and across different roles within the same group. Using this data can help us and our client Trusts maximise the talent within non-clinical and deliver consistently high-quality services.



Nicola McQueen,
Chief Executive Officer, NHS Professionals



INTRODUCTION

This Spotlight Report summarises the size and organisation of the NHS non-clinical workforce and presents a set of role-specific ‘personas’ for staff working flexibly as NHS Professionals non-clinical Bank Members. The personas are fictional and presented for illustrative purposes only, but they are based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered from more than 1,000 NHS Professionals non-clinical Bank Members.

WHO ARE NON-CLINICAL?

Doctors, nurses and other clinically-trained staff are often the first thing people will think of when they think of the NHS – and for good reason. Not only do they have life-saving skills, they also comprise the majority of the NHS’s 1.5 million total headcount¹.

But brilliant as these teams are, they would struggle to function effectively without the NHS’s team of around 228,000 non-clinical staff². This largely hidden workforce surrounds and supports direct patient care in thousands of ways.

The range of non-clinical roles is wide, but the NHS officially groups them into three broad categories²:

- **Central functions:** administrative and clerical roles within departments such as finance, communications, information management and technology, human resources, operations, governance, research and procurement. Approximately 115,000 staff
- **Hotel, property and estates:** property and grounds management including carpenters, electricians, plumbers and gardeners; support staff including drivers, porters, security and stores; and domestic staff including cleaners, catering, ward housekeepers and linen services. Approximately 75,000 staff
- **Management:** management roles can include budget control, team leadership, strategic oversight and project management. They exist in both clinical and non-clinical departments and include senior management such as chief executives and finance directors. Approximately 37,000 staff

At NHS Professionals, we group our non-clinical services slightly differently as follows:

- **Administration and clerical:** general and specialist administrators and clerical workers, medical secretaries, receptionists, procurement and ward clerks
- **Corporate functions:** finance and human resources
- **Estates and facilities:** cleaners, drivers, porters, trades, catering and security
- **Information management and technology (IM&T):** general and specialist IM&T workers

¹ The NHS workforce in numbers, October 2022, The Nuffield Trust

²All non-clinical staff figures taken from NHS Workforce Statistics - England and Organisation, August 2022, NHS Digital



OUR RESEARCH

In 2022, we asked Blackbridge Communications to research the different ways our non-clinical Bank Members work flexibly and their motivations behind this. Over several weeks, Blackbridge consulted 1,015 non-clinical Bank Members through three focus groups, one survey and six stakeholder interviews.

Using this data, Blackbridge identified a range of fictional personas to help profile specific types of non-clinical staff and categorise their different motivations for working flexibly. The report offers personas across two levels: first, broad functions covered by NHS Professionals non-clinical including administration and clerical, corporate functions, estates and facilities, and information management and technology; and second, some of the more specific roles within these four groups.

Gathering deeper insights into non-clinical helps us and our client Trusts engage with Bank Members in ways sensitive to their unique needs and motivations. In this way we can maximise the key contribution Bank-based non-clinical staff make to the NHS, especially in the era of integrated care.

NON-CLINICAL STAFF 'PERSONAS'

ADMINISTRATION AND CLERICAL

The NHS is a complex system handling millions of patients a year and it needs high-quality administrative support to function smoothly. This group of staff maintains the many paper and digital-based systems within hospital and community services. A few examples, among many, are accurately updating patient records and ensuring patients receive the correct information before treatment. Procurement, meanwhile, handles thousands of product lines to keep hospitals and community services fully supplied with essential equipment large and small. However, there are countless more tasks this group handles each day to help organise the NHS data mountain.

PERSONA SUMMARY

Mostly women, this cohort represents 62% of the total survey sample. Their responses suggest they want a job rather than a career. They look for a good salary and a workplace close to home – mostly within a 30-minute drive. Ultimately, work is a function that allows them to have a life outside. However, they aren't robots. They like the pride of working for a respected institution like the NHS and love the fact they are part of something that makes a difference to people's lives. They feel part of something bigger, even if their initial career triggers are around practical concerns.

ROLE-SPECIFIC PERSONAS

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION: 'WORK TO LIVE'

Covering a wide age range, this sub-group is motivated by practical concerns such as salary, travel times and work-life balance. Flexibility is key for them but they enjoy the respect and pride they feel working in a national institution. 40% of the total survey sample.



Meet Annie...she's middle-aged and wants a stable, regular or full-time job that pays well. For the right job, she is willing to travel a little further than others. However, that doesn't mean she thinks of her job as a career; 'careers' are for other people. She likes her job because it gives her flexibility in her work/life balance. She also likes helping people and her friends and family respect the NHS as a national treasure.

PROCUREMENT: 'PROUD AND EMOTIONALLY INVESTED'

Most in this group are middle-aged men. They are strongly motivated by respect, helping people and being part of a team working with others, all of which the NHS provides. Willing to commute further than some, they are driven by the emotional satisfaction of supporting others. 0.5% of the total survey sample.



Meet James...he has the skills and experience to work at a range of major organisations, but there is nothing quite like the NHS to provide that sense of worth. Procurement is interesting but applying it to something that helps people makes him feel good. He travels a little further than he'd like but that's ok, given what he's contributing to.

CLERICAL: 'EMOTIONALLY INVESTED'

Our research showed that this group is predominantly middle-aged or older, and feels that they are on the front line supporting patients. Helping people and doing important work at a respected institution are key drivers. 6% of the total survey sample.



Meet Sally...she's middle-aged or more and takes great pride in her job. Getting up and doing something to help people is in her nature. She loves working for the NHS because she knows she's doing good work and her friends and family can see she is 'contributing' to society.

MEDICAL SECRETARY: 'EVALUATOR'

The research shows this group is predominantly female, with the majority middle-aged and older. They are looking for jobs, not careers, and salary, travel times and work-life balance are all important motivations. They are more likely to take shorter posts with 75% typically having roles for less than two months. 5% of the total survey sample.



Meet Janet...she wants a job that's close to home and pays well. Flexibility and a decent commute are two of the most important things to her. She tends to take on fairly short-term contracts because she wants to evaluate how a job might impact on her life outside work. She loves helping people but what she really wants is good work-life balance, money and the ability to re-evaluate and change things should she need to.

SPECIALIST ADMINISTRATION: 'NEW AND DISCONNECTED WORK TO LIVE'

This group is similar to the 'work to live' persona above except that half are new to the profession. They are motivated by money, travel times and respect, all of which the NHS provides, but may lack a strong affinity with NHS Professionals, hence the 'disconnected' reference. 6% of the total survey sample.



Meet Charlie...He works to live and seeks out a good salary within a decent commute of his house. He does connect to the emotional purpose of the NHS and likes the idea of working for a respected organisation. However, he has a very practical approach to things and will look for work opportunities matching his skillset at NHS Professionals and elsewhere.

RECEPTIONIST: 'NEW LOYALIST'

Mostly middle-aged, this group are quite new to the profession and only started using NHS Professionals to find work in the last two years. They like working where they can be respected and feel like they are helping people. They look for work close to home. 3% of the total survey sample.



Meet Ellen...she's new to NHS Professionals but she's already happy and feeling loyal to it and the NHS. As a result, she enjoys regular opportunities to work with a respected organisation helping people and within easy commuting distance.

SPECIALIST CLERICAL: 'EMOTIONALLY INVESTED LOYALIST'

A small sub-group with a more balanced gender profile, more than three-quarters want a job where they can help people and make a difference – and the NHS meets that need. They use NHS Professionals exclusively and give it a strong approval rating, hence the 'loyalist' tag. 1% of the total survey sample.



Meet David...he feels privileged to work at the NHS and likes being able to use his skills to help people and work at a respected institution. He is motivated by the emotional benefit of working for the NHS and likes NHS Professionals because it pays on time and offers work close to home.

WARD CLERK: 'EMOTIONAL PERFECTION SEEKER'

This group has a broad mix of ages. Most are strongly motivated by salary, flexibility and respect and want the job to deliver these, but it is emotional satisfaction and helping people that keeps them in the NHS. Travel times are important to this group, with almost three quarters only wanting to commute up to 30 minutes. 5% of the total survey sample.



Meet Alicia...she wants a lot from a job: salary, helping people, close to home, learning and development, respect – a full package that makes her feel like she has opportunities and a future. But working for the NHS has made her place even greater value on helping people. It's the thing that shines through for her and so while she does always want 'better', the emotional satisfaction she gains at the NHS is her biggest motivation.



CORPORATE FUNCTIONS

Our corporate functions group includes NHS Trust staff working in human resources and finance teams. These teams handle some of the most critical and complex non-clinical services in the NHS. Human resources focuses on effective staff recruitment and retention and wider people management issues, while finance manages multi-million-pound budgets.

While statistically small by comparison to other staff groups involved in our research (2% of the overall sample), we can still detect some interesting themes. The group includes more women than men (61%), with more than half having worked in these roles before. Roles within finance, procurement and human resources can lead to long and diverse careers, which may explain why those we spoke to were willing to travel further than other staff groups and why more of them work full-time.

With most aged over 45 years old, they are emotionally motivated to help people and believe they are doing this through their work in the NHS. They want to feel respected and they are keen to maintain an acceptable work-life balance.

PERSONA SUMMARY

ROLE-SPECIFIC PERSONAS

FINANCE: 'PERFECTION SEEKER'

A mix of men and women and age groups, this group 'want it all'. Although a small sample, those responding thought it was either important or vital to have a good salary, flexibility, good colleagues, learning and development, regular work and a short commute. They are attracted to the NHS because it helps people, but they enjoy the flexibility it offers more and remain open to other attractive work opportunities that meet their needs. 0.9% of the total survey sample.



Meet Deepa...she has come to the NHS with experience and at first, she liked the idea of working for an organisation that was helping people. She still does but it's the flexibility it affords her that means more now. That said, ideally, she seeks greater rewards such as enhanced learning prospects and a higher salary and therefore keeps a look out for other opportunities.

HUMAN RESOURCES: 'EMOTIONALLY INVESTED'

This research showed the majority of this group are women aged over 46 years old who have worked in the industry before. They believe their work helps others and they like the respect it offers. Unlike finance, they are willing to travel a little further for work. 0.8% of the total survey sample.



Meet Grace...she feels she could work anywhere but working in the NHS is one of the only places where she has felt truly part of something. She's quite happy to get in the car in the morning and drive over an hour to work. Like anyone, money and flexibility are important, but it's the difference she makes that really counts for her.

ESTATES AND FACILITIES

In a very real sense, this group can be described as the oil in the NHS machine.

Estates and trades staff such as builders, electricians, plumbers, grounds staff, carpenters and engineers maintain essential infrastructure in and around hospital sites and will be there to fix faults routine and urgent, round the clock. Cleaners and sterile support workers help to maintain strict hygiene standards, while housekeepers play a key leadership role on wards by supervising mealtimes and domestic duties so they don't disrupt clinical care. Linen services also maintain hygiene and quality standards by cleaning tens of thousands of sheets, towels, robes and other essential items each day.

Catering teams make sure patients, staff and visitors are well-fed and watered – a Herculean task that plays a key part in clinical care. Also in this group are the drivers, porters and security

teams that move people and goods from A to B and keep hospital sites as safe as possible.

It's worth remembering, too, that many of these staff see patients daily and will have excellent communication skills as a result.

PERSONA SUMMARY

At 29% of the total survey sample, the estates and facilities group is a big player within the NHS Professionals non-clinical workforce.

It's evenly split between men and women, with just over half aged 46 or more and half having worked in the industry before. Our research suggests this group responds to emotional drivers to gain satisfaction, such as working for a respected organisation and making a direct or indirect positive impact on people using the NHS. They place a high value on flexibility and regular work.

ROLE-SPECIFIC PERSONAS

CLEANER: 'EMOTIONALLY INVESTED'

This large group comprises of a mix of ages, many of whom have worked in similar roles before. They want to feel respected and help people, but most won't travel longer than 30 minutes to work. 14% of the total survey sample.

DRIVER: 'WORK TO LIVE'

A small sample, these were mostly men aged over 46 years old, with two-thirds new to this line of work. They are looking for a good salary with flexibility and a role close to home to reflect the fact their job already involves travelling. Like many staff groups, they also appreciate being respected for working in the NHS. 2% of the total survey sample.

PORTER: 'EMOTIONALLY INVESTED AND SEEKING FLEXIBILITY'

This research showed these were mostly over 46, the majority of those surveyed are new to the work. For them, a good salary is important but flexibility and helping people are the key drivers. 6% of the total survey sample.



Meet Jocelyn...she's a good cleaner and people sometimes forget how important that role can be - but not in the NHS and certainly not after the COVID-19 pandemic. She feels like she contributes and helps people with the work she does. She's worked in other places but there is an emotional satisfaction in the NHS that's hard to replicate. She also likes the job because she can drive to work relatively quickly.



Meet Alex...he looks for an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, but it's definitely a bonus when you are working in a well-known and respected institution like the NHS.



Meet Graham...he likes work but he also likes life outside of work. If the two can be balanced, he's a happy man. He thinks that if you are going to work hard, it may as well be at something worthwhile. He feels his work counts and he's one of the people who keeps the NHS running.

ROLE-SPECIFIC PERSONAS

TRADES: 'CAREERIST'

A small sample overall, most are men and aged over 46 years old. Like other groups, they work for the NHS to help people and because it offers flexible working and a respected career. However, they stand out from other groups because a significant number state they are interested in learning and career development. 1% of the total survey sample.



Meet Michael...he feels his work will be something that supports and defines his CV for years to come. For him, the more he can learn, the more he can demonstrate he has a level of skills and experience and the better it will be for his career prospects. He also likes the respect that working for the NHS brings him.

CATERING: 'EMOTIONALLY INVESTED BUT DISCONNECTED'

This group has a wide spread of ages, albeit many aged over 46 years. They want a good salary, regular but flexible work to balance with lifestyle and they are strongly motivated to help people by working in the NHS. However, most get roles lasting less than two months, with some getting week-to-week placements, which creates a 'disconnect' between their loyalty to the NHS and their desire for flexible working. 15% of the total survey sample.



Meet Charlotte...she has been in catering for a while now and she has always sought regular work, a decent salary and flexibility around her home life. Since working for the NHS, she's had jobs that usually last for up to two months but might regularly be only for a week. Despite this, she likes the NHS because she is helping people.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Information management and technology (IM&T) lies at the core of many non-clinical and clinical procedures and processes. The advent of cloud-based and more personalised technology such as the electronic patient record, coupled with the importance of data security and protection from cyberattack, means this staff group's importance in the NHS can only grow.

PERSONA SUMMARY: 'REACTOR'

Evenly split between men and women, those in our small sample are reactive by nature and motivated by things that impact on their day-to-day lives. For example, travel times and flexibility are more important to them than salary or the regularity of work. Their responses also suggest they work for the NHS because of the positive impact they can have on people, directly or indirectly. 1% of the total survey sample.



Meet Dina...she's always looked at how a job will affect her day-to-day; money, flexibility, length of commute and other practical concerns. She has sought-after specialist skills so she's a woman with choices and feels like she can ask those questions of a role. But having worked in the NHS for a year or two, she enjoys the feeling of helping people.

OUR NON-CLINICAL SERVICE

MORE THAN JUST NURSING

Since 2001, we've built our reputation around the consistent supply of high-quality clinical staff – largely nurses. This remains the case today, but our non-clinical Bank Member base is growing all the time and it's now a key part of our business going forward.

While our administration and clerical function is firmly established, activity within specialisms like finance, HR and IM&T has gathered pace and understanding the range of sub-specialisms within these is now our key focus. Building on our existing knowledge base, we're also delving deeper into the many trades and technical roles within estates and facilities so we can expand our offer to more staff and Trusts.

In the wake of the pandemic, we're seeing more non-clinical professionals choosing flexible working as a full career path, rather than short-term shift fill. As our persona research shows, many choose the NHS because it offers them something more than 'just a job'; it's the opportunity to give something back to society. We expect flexible NHS career opportunities for non-clinical staff to increase in the coming years as the health and social sectors work together to deliver integrated care.

- Are you a non-clinical worker interested in working flexibly? Learn more about our Bank Member opportunities by visiting www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/campaigns/non-clinical
- For Trusts, visit www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/partners to find out more about how we can recruit and retain your flexible non-clinical workforce through a Managed Service Provider partnership

TESTIMONIALS

Here we present a small selection of comments from our non-clinical Bank Members and one of our Managed Service Provider Trusts.

“ In my current NHS Professionals role, I am really enjoying how much I am learning week by week. It's nice to see the Trust in different areas and complete different tasks that I don't usually get to do. I also love that the extra work I'm committing to NHS Professionals is work that will help me train for my future career goals and enable me to gain knowledge on different services, teams, interactive work etc.

I enjoy the flexibility and being free to choose when I can and want to work extra. I have a full-time job within the hospital, it's nice to be able to still get some rest if I need it! I also enjoy being able to branch out and meet new people and discover new ways to work.

Toyah Murray, Administration,
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



A few key benefits of using NHS Professionals are short-term staff that are available with an immediate start, a quick responsive team, and electronic systems that speed up processing. We've been using non-clinical Bank Members to cover current secretarial and administrative vacancies.

Non-clinical staff help and support in our Trust by meeting and greeting patients, answering calls, booking appointments, along with other ad hoc administrative duties. They have positively impacted our Trust by being keen, willing and friendly people who are flexible and adaptable to change.

Nikki Chaplin, Team Leader,
East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust



Having worked in the public sector in an administrative role for Greater Manchester Police for over 22 years, I thought it would be the perfect opportunity to learn new skills in the public sector again. It gave me the flexibility to try different roles and gain knowledge and experience. I had the intention of securing a permanent role for the NHS. Three-and-a-half years later, I am still supporting the podiatry service - a job that I thoroughly enjoy.

Joanne Schofield, Clerical Officer,
Northern Care Alliance NHS Foundation Trust (Salford Royal Hospital)



I always wanted to work at a hospital, but having no experience of this environment it became a little daunting thinking of what type of role I would be suitable to apply for. Coming in as an NHS Professionals worker allowed me to learn on the job and broaden my knowledge and try new things. I am now confident working in any administration role and always willing to learn more.

Nicky Thomas, Administrative Specialist,
University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust



The ability to cover long-term sickness, annual leave and vacancies at short notice is a key benefit of using NHS Professionals. They enable us to support the team that are still in place and reduce the impact vacancies have on the department.

Linzi Willsher, Operational Coordinator,
East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust





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