

Improving the NHS Staff Survey Response Rate:

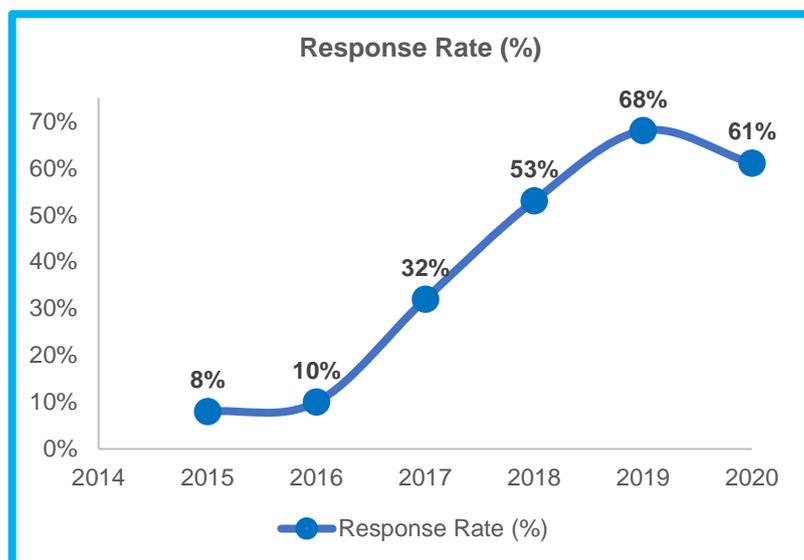
Estates Directorate, Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



Employing around 16,000 staff and with an annual income of over £1 billion, Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is one of the busiest, largest, and most successful teaching NHS foundation trusts in the country. The trust provides acute medical services at Royal Victoria Infirmary and Freeman Hospital, Newcastle Dental Hospital, Newcastle Fertility Centre, and Northern Genetics Service.

In 2018, the trust embarked on a journey to create an engagement plan designed to better utilise the data obtained from their NHS Staff Survey results. The ambition was to shift the trust away from a focus on clinical excellence 'at all costs' and towards a new culture, in which staff felt better supported and more involved in decision-making and improvements. The trust, however, understood that some staff groups would be less engaged in this change than others.

This was reflected in NHS Staff Survey response rates across particular areas of the trust. In 2015, for instance, Newcastle's Estates workforce recorded a low response rate of just 8%. Further exploration concluded that some staff felt ignored and that their views were not being heard in decision-making and improvement actions. The directorate's senior leadership team therefore set out on a sustained campaign to improve communication, involvement, and engagement within the service, understanding that this would be the most effective way of increasing the survey response rate.



The graph illustrates the success of the directorate's efforts. Since 2017, the response rate grew from 32% to a peak of 68% in 2019. Even in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the directorate still managed to score a response rate of 61%. Underscoring the success is the improvement shown by the directorate in nine out of the ten themes measured by the survey.

This change was a result of encouraging and supporting staff to complete the survey, and helping them to see how their feedback was being used to improve upon the issues they had raised. Some of the approaches taken by the directorate include:

**In 2017, the Estates and Facilities directorates were divided into two separate directorates.*

Identifying advocates:



The directorate started by identifying those operational areas with historically low survey response rates. They then nominated named representatives for each area to prompt and encourage their colleagues to complete the survey. Their efforts to raise awareness were reinforced by the Performance Team, who were regularly visible across the directorate to ensure colleagues were provided with dedicated time and computer access to undertake the survey.

Involving managers and leaders:



Staff briefings were used by the directorate's leadership team as a further opportunity to promote the survey and provide updates on how actions for improvement were progressing. Leaders also attended regular 'action plan review' meetings, which in 2021 were developed into a formal improvement plan. The plan encompassed all staff feedback collected through a number of channels including suggestion boxes, emails, face to face conversations and working groups. Actions were then assigned to discipline leads and monitored for progress.

Crucially, the plan will help the senior leadership team to monitor the directorate's progress on staff engagement, and to identify areas which could be further improved. One area which has been prioritised is leadership skills training for managers, with a specific focus appraisal training.



Running a communications campaign:

An effective communications campaign played a key role in both promoting the survey and the improvements that had been made as a result of staff feedback. For example, the directorate made sure that all onsite notice boards were updated with both the previous year's survey results and the current action plan. At the same time, a quarterly newsletter and regular emails were used to update staff on key messages and deliverables. These helped staff to see that the directorate was listening to their feedback.

Technology was also used to support the campaign. Indeed, electronic notifications were sent to all handheld devices encouraging staff to complete the survey. This messaging was echoed by the trust's Chief Executive, Dame Jackie Daniel, who thanked staff for their participation. The positive impact of the thank you message was noticed by the directorate.

For more information on this case study please contact Anna Thompson, Staff Experience & Engagement Officer: Anna.thompson19@nhs.net

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