Our People Strategy

2022 – 2025

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Introduction

The Health Research Authority's vision is that high quality health and social care research today improves people's health and wellbeing tomorrow. We help realise this by making it easy to do research that people can trust, working with partners across the UK.

We recently celebrated the HRA's tenth birthday and we are proud to set out our People Strategy as we move into the next decade of our organisation's evolution.

Purpose and scope

Our People Strategy is the set of practices that will determine how we attract, retain and grow our employees to best accomplish the HRA's mission.

Aligning the People Strategy to our business goals, strategy and priorities will drive organisational performance. An engaged motivated workforce is productive and effective and as an ambitious organisation we know that our people play a vital role in driving performance. While the scope of this strategy is internal, we recognise that the benefits it will realise will have a wider impact for those we serve – ultimately that patients and the public are at the heart of what we do.

Having a clear strategy sets our intention and helps us to stay focused on the initiatives and activities likely to have the most impact for us as a small organisation with finite resources.

The People Strategy is designed to be proportionate for the size of our workforce. Its three year term will enable medium and longer term planning and give us sufficient time to measure success and realise benefits.

Within the context of this strategy, 'People' means our paid workforce – permanent and fixed term staff, bank workers, agency workers and contractors. Our volunteers are separate to this strategy but are recognised and valued greatly in their own right.

Who we are

Our 286* permanent and fixed term employees are based across five offices – Bristol, London, Manchester, Newcastle and Nottingham – as well as at home. In the past year we have seen a significant increase in the numbers of people who are home based – now representing more than 40%* of our workforce, reflecting the way we have worked during the pandemic and recognising the wish for people to work flexibly to support improved work life balance.

*Figures as at 31 March 2021

Our people are very strongly committed to helping the organisation succeed and are happy to be flexible at work when needed*. Levels of staff engagement have been consistently high for a number of years – our 2022 employee engagement index measures 82%, which is 15% above our staff survey provider's benchmark.

Background and context

Our people strategy has been developed in the context of our organisational guiding objective to be a knowledgeable well-run organisation that's true to its values, further described below:

'supporting, developing and enabling our staff to do well and working to ensure that we have a diverse workforce who are able to enjoy a healthy work culture…. we aim to use public funds wisely and focus resources on work which is most likely to achieve our strategy and benefit the nation.'

Our core values are hardwired into the strategy:

- **inspiring leadership:** enabling people and teams to develop and deliver dynamic, innovative and transformative services and systems
- **integrity:** being fair, ethical and honest in everything we do
- **trusted:** being respected for delivering to consistently high standards
- **transparent:** being accountable and open about all aspects of our work
- **collaborative:** listening to and working with others to identify and make improvements to the health research environment
- **empowering:** supporting independent thinking and decision-making

We are starting strong, with good foundations built in the ten years since the HRA was established. The HRA is a very flexible organisation and our future ways of working model and flexible working policies are ahead of some comparable organisations. Through the pandemic we've been compassionate as far as possible to support staff, to communicate regularly with and listen to our staff's concerns and worries and to ensure open lines of communication. There are structural means of listening to our employees' voice – through our Staff Forum, Joint Negotiating Committee, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Special Interest Groups and the Green Team. In the past two years there has been an increased focus on staff wellbeing and we have introduced a mental health framework and trained Mental Health First Aiders. Our range of people policies has been expanded to support our increased organisational focus on Equality Diversity and Inclusion, including menopause and disability leave policies, both of which are firsts for the arm's length body community.

Our strategy builds on these grass roots and foundations. It also fits well with the ambitions of the wider NHS. The People Plan, People Promise and recently published 10 Year Human Resources and Organisational Development Strategy are clear about building a positive and compassionate staff experience, growing the workforce, enabling new ways of working and making better use of digital technology, ensuring inclusion and belonging for all and leading improvement, change and innovation. The NHS's aim to develop a just and learning culture which is intended to promote openness and honesty, for people to speak up freely and drive employee experience and organisational performance, is also relevant.

The HRA's people professionals – Human Resources, Learning and Development, Organisational Development and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - actively participate in ALB and professional people networks. People related research, such as that produced by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, NHS Employers and other sources of information, have been used in our thinking and provide the evidence base for what is set out in this strategy.

How we developed the strategy

Early work began when we presented an outline strategy framework discussion at Workforce Board (now People Group) in March 2021 following which the themes were refined and discussed through the Supporting our People Programme Board. With six strategic themes agreed, we embarked on a planned series of mini workshops to consider each theme in turn and used the output to define the ambition, areas of focus and key activities, and success factors.

Six mini workshops were held during 2021:

- June 2021 - Inclusion and Belonging
- July 2021 - Strategic Workforce Planning
- August 2021 - Innovation and Agility
- October 2021 - Wellbeing and Reward
- November 2021- Building skills and capabilities for excellent performance; Inspirational effective leaders and managers at all levels

Since then we have been refining the strategy and prioritising activities across the next three years.

Our people strategy links to and complements other organisational people related strategies and interventions: our Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy, the Learning and Development and Mental Health Frameworks and our Estates strategy. It links to the Communications strategy also to reflect the work the Communications team does to support people initiatives.

Our vision

We are proud to share our vision for our people ambitions for the next three years:

A diverse and inclusive organisation where everyone is supported to be their best, is valued, and is proud to be part of the team.

The HRA will become even more inclusive, and attractive for potential employees. We will be known as an organisation that lives its values, where staff are supported and empowered to make their best contributions, and where everyone works together to achieve our strategic aims.

Our strategic themes

We are proud to introduce our six strategic themes which complement each other to support the full employee lifecycle: people planning, bringing new members of the team into the organisation, building and developing skills, inspirational and compassionate leadership and management at all levels, the key theme of innovation and agility as we look to the future to support our refreshed organisational strategy, and inclusion and belonging – a theme that very much wraps around and embraces all parts of the strategy.

For each theme, we've developed an ambition, identified areas of activity and focus and prioritised the work. Each theme has defined measures to assess success and impact.

Strategic people planning

Ambition

Forward thinking people planning ensures that people with the right skills, knowledge, capabilities and capacity are in place at the right time to achieve our business goals and priorities. Our customers and stakeholders recognise the high quality service we offer.

By planning ahead, we can anticipate and be ready to meet changes in our customers' needs and demands for our services, working within our budget constraints.

Areas of activity and focus

- Long term people planning to support key business goals and priorities over the next 1 – 3 years

- Refresh and modernise our overall approach to recruitment and resourcing

- Develop apprenticeships as a source of workforce supply

- Improve real time people analytics, MI reports and workforce modelling to support people related decisions

- Review our organisational capabilities to identify any gaps and what we need across the organisation

- Maintain good retention rates and scan for potential issues

- Clear link to our ED&I strategy and interventions to ensure inclusion and transparency are considered throughout

Year 1

- Develop a strategic comprehensive and flexible people plan to include capacity and capability

- Identify hard to recruit roles and stand alone roles identified as succession planning risks

- Review the recruitment process to make it more transparent, responsive and easier to hire and onboard people

- Embed apprenticeships in the Digital team and identify areas of the business to expand our range of apprenticeships

- Develop enhanced people MI reports

- Maintain good retention rates, scanning for potential issues

- Monitor leavers data, promote use of exit interview service, develop actions in response to any issues identified

- Review planned organisational changes from organisation design perspective

Plans for years 2 and 3

- Refresh people plan at least annually to align with changing business priorities

- Develop succession planning framework - career development pathways, growing our own and reducing reliance on unnecessary contingent labour

- Expand apprenticeships to other areas of the business, supporting diversity and the levelling up agenda

Measuring success

- Workforce plans in place which address changing demands and needs, resolve shortages, enable succession planning, support ED&I objectives and consider different scenarios

- Succession plans for leadership roles and hard to recruit to roles in place and actively managed

- Manage our headcount and pay bill to work within Comprehensive Spending Review / budgetary constraints

- Track our workforce composition, looking at numbers of substantive staff compared to use of bank, agency workers and contractors

- Short and medium term recruitment KPIs and user satisfaction with recruitment process

Building skills and capabilities for excellent performance

Ambition

Ensuring our people have the skills and capabilities so that our organisation succeeds and thrives. We're able to give that excellent customer service to our research community to help ensure the best outcomes possible.

Our learning solutions are innovative, create curiosity and embed learning to enhance our people's skills and capabilities thereby building a workforce for the future. We foster a culture of continuous improvement through carefully thought out professional development programmes of learning.

Our learning culture is understood and learning opportunities are meaningful and linked to supporting our organisational mission. Our staff will have a growth mindset and take responsibility for their individual learning journey.

Areas of activity and focus

- Work collaboratively with the Digital Directorate to ensure that digital standards are adhered to in line with the Digital Strategy in the creation and implementation of digital focused learning solutions

- Enhance people's development by creating a safe and inclusive learning environment with learning opportunities to facilitate professional development, progression, innovation and growth

- Promote a consistent blended approach to learning to enable each staff member to become a responsible self-directed learner

- Provide a comprehensive workforce development programme for all levels to enable each staff member to flourish within an inclusive learning culture by ensuring transparency of opportunities

- Ensure we source the learning from internal and external stakeholders and subject matter experts to provide rich content and best practice is used to inform the content of our learning and development programmes

- Promote alternative ways of learning such as shadowing colleagues, observing meetings, taking part in external visits, assisting on cross departmental projects and secondment opportunities

- Provide an end to end learning and knowledge management service of consultation, design, development, delivery and evaluation to the highest standard

Year 1

- Provide a range of learning resources ensuring these are accessible to all and cater for differing learning needs and preferences

- Training for senior managers on Kirkpatrick/Philips/Return on Investment (ROI) for all learning opportunities to ensure we fully understand the lifecycle of every training opportunity and the ROI attached to this

- Take our decision about the future Learning Management System (LMS) – what's it going to look like, report and recommendations. Completion of report and recommendations and how this infrastructure would be built

- Deliver programmes of learning to support our BAME colleagues and those with protected characteristics

- Partnership working with MHRA and NIHR and across the wider ALB, NHS and research network to ensure cross collaboration, sharing of good learning practice and resources

Plans for years 2 and 3

- Further development of content and design and delivery of a digital library of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes and introduction of CPD into appraisal documentation and personalisation

- Move to a suitable LMS platform to support a more learner led approach fostering curiosity and responsibility for CPD and progression

- Creation of infrastructure for a talent management program linked to CPD/Appraisals and to support the life-cycle of each employee

- Introduction of mid career conversations and CPD assistance

Measuring success

- Positive feedback in staff surveys

- Following the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation, ensure each learner has an accountability package where return on investment and growth can be tracked up to 12 months following programmes of formal learning

- An increase in interest and applications for learning programmes

- Feedback gathering following 360 degree feedback of colleagues 6 and 12 months post leadership or management programmes of learning

- Review data around internal job applications and promotions to look for significant trends and higher conversion rates

- Evidence the impact of training on operational performance and individual growth

Inspirational and effective leaders at all levels

Ambition

We want our leaders and managers to understand the impact of positive leadership behaviours in influencing a healthy work culture. Our leaders embody compassionate, inclusive and inspirational leadership to enable our people to thrive and succeed at work.

The HRA's ability to accomplish its goals will be met by empowering and equipping our managers and leaders to understand leadership culture, as defined by the collective actions of formal and informal leaders acting together to influence organisational success.

Areas of activity and focus

- We will deliver development programmes and tools to equip our managers and leaders to model a compassionate inclusive inspirational way of working

- Our leaders and managers understand the impact of positive behaviours in influencing a healthy work culture, supported through emotional intelligence programmes of learning

- We will celebrate and nurture difference in management styles, recognising both introverted and extrovert management styles whilst building capabilities and confidence to lead with positivity and compassion through carefully delivered learning interventions

- We will work with staff and senior leaders across the HRA to agree an explicit set of competencies, values and behaviours required in different leadership roles to ensure that we have consistent expectations of our leaders, and that we are able to develop and support them effectively

Year 1

- Development of Management and Leadership Framework

- Development and design of Management Foundations programme material – individual modules to be piloted during this year

- Development and design of Stepping into Leadership programme material

- Design delivery and implementation of Stepping into Leadership programme to support our BAME colleagues

- Promote and secure additional ways of acting up through shadowing and 'role stretch' to enhance on the job training in line with Lombardo's 70:20:10 method.

Plans for years 2 and 3

- Evaluate pilot modules of the Management Foundations programme to inform delivery of the full programme during year 2

- Delivery of Management Foundations programme

- Delivery of Stepping into Leadership programme

- Develop competency values and behaviour framework to support 360 feedback and annual appraisal review

Measuring success

- Evaluation of evidence of leadership and management effectiveness, compassion and inspiration

- Positive staff survey results where staff report feeling supported and able to thrive

- Reduced attrition in areas where highest churn is happening

- ROI via Accountability packages and Kirkpatrick evaluation tracked

Wellbeing and reward

Ambition

People are proud to work at the HRA and enjoy their time at work. Staff feel valued, engaged and supported in their roles and morale is good. Each and every one of us has a sustainable work life balance. Wellbeing and healthy working practices and initiatives are central to our culture and we work in an environment where health and wellbeing are actively promoted. Transparent fair pay and reward frameworks contribute to our feeling of wellbeing.

We feel valued and want to excel in the services we give to our customers.

Areas of activity and focus

- Develop and expand existing health and wellbeing provisions into a coherent workplace wellness programme

- Build on healthy working practices developed to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic and communicate out to the organisation - embed good meetings culture, workstation set up/DSE use, breaks

- Embed our Future Ways of Working programme to enhance wellbeing and support provisions

- Continue to offer a wide range of flexible working options to all of our people, underpinned by clear straightforward HR policies

- Reward people fairly within national NHS and Arms Length Body pay frameworks - communicate information about pay structures, pay progression processes and terms of employment

- Develop and communicate transparent pay and reward statements

- Regularly communicate information about the value of the NHS pension scheme and promoting Total Reward Statements so people understand their whole reward package

- Promote our range of health and wellbeing related staff benefits

Year 1

- Appoint a Non Executive Director as our Wellbeing guardian

- Move our Mental Health First Aider pilot to a long term sustainable arrangement with trained MHFA volunteers increasing in number and diversity

- Work with Staff Forum and EDI staff led interest groups in developing wellbeing initiatives

- Work with the Communications team to develop a campaign around wellbeing and store all of our wellbeing resources in a central place

- Review and evaluate our wellbeing provision

- Develop and rollout wellbeing related learning such as personal resilience and building resilience in your team, building assertiveness, personal effectiveness, new starter pack

- Develop materials to support managers and staff in leading, managing and working effectively as remote and geographically spread teams

- Work with our staff to develop work-related social interactions and cohesiveness

- Create the environment for staff to develop opportunities for cohesiveness

- Explore with staff groups new and evolving flexible working practices that work well in our organisation

- Update our policies to give transparency to our job re-evaluation processes and additional responsibilities payments

Plans for years 2 and 3

- Refresh our existing organisational mental health framework

- Investigate and implement further provision where needed

- Build staff learning to support the development of positive practices and cultures (for example, building self confidence and self esteem)

Measuring success

- Annual staff survey results show sustained levels of high staff engagement, pride in working for the organisation and a year on year increase in staff morale

- Review of exit data to analyse reasons for leaving and themes identified through exit interviews

- Monitor and reporting of rates of sickness absence and usage of employee assistance programme and Occupational Health services to identify trends and pro-actively take remedial actions if needed

- Annual review of numbers of people working flexibly across the organisation and the range of flexible options being used

- Numbers of people accessing staff benefits – free eye tests, buying and selling of annual leave, cycle to work and lease car schemes

- People's wellbeing measured through mini pulse surveys

Innovation and agility

Ambition

We adapt to do things differently and do different things to produce effective and sustainable outcomes for the evolving needs of our customers and the organisation. Our staff feel empowered to put forward ideas and solutions to enable us to adapt at pace as circumstances change. Digital solutions support us to transform and innovate on our processes.

We value diversity of thought and experience. Our people are curious, collaborative and inclusive in developing new ways of working. Our teams are resilient, flexible, agile, high performing and customer focused.

Areas of activity and focus

- Build and sustain a culture of innovation, resilience and responsiveness to enable our people and teams to work effectively in a changing environment

- Promote networking to learn and collaborate with others, leading to improvements in our processes

- Promote the use of digital solutions to support our people and provide excellent opportunities for collaboration and networking

- Our organisation structure, systems and leadership work together to develop and build innovation and agility

- Create and build an environment where different ways of thinking and looking at things are valued and we can be open when things don't go so well so that we learn and improve

- Create and sustain connections with other organisations to help us benchmark our performance, identify new practices and trends, exchange information and deliver our key projects and programmes

Year 1

- Scope and set up an Idea and Innovation Hive to encourage and capture our people's ideas for innovation and change

- Have a named Non Executive Director or Director as our Innovation Champion

- Support people to create and run staff led groups around areas like sustainability and corporate social responsibility, such as the Green Team

- Revise People Group's Terms of Reference to have innovation as standing agenda item

- Expand Directors' performance assessment to include progress and delivery with innovation and agility

- Identify areas suitable for benchmarking and continue as active participants in ALB / professional People networks

Plans for years 2 and 3

- Include an overarching organisational objective of innovation and change in appraisal scheme for all staff

- Review job descriptions to include opportunity for all roles to play a part in innovation

- Evaluate success of Innovation Hive

Measuring success

- Positive external reputation and recognition by our customers and stakeholders

- Positive findings for staff engagement and managing change from annual staff survey

- Evaluate success of Ideas and Innovation Hive by reviewing the ideas flowing through the Hive and out into the business, review contribution of ideas across all groups of people

Inclusion and belonging

Ambition

We want our people feel able to 'bring their authentic self' to work, knowing their unique perspective and experiences are valued as essential to the organisation, and are part of our shared organisational identity.

Having a diverse and engaged workforce will mean we better understand the needs of our stakeholders and communities we represent and help us achieve our mission to protect and promote the interests of patients and the public in health and social care research.

Areas of activity and focus

- ED&I strategic delivery

    o Inclusive culture

- o Diversifying the workforce
- o Inclusive leadership

- Maintain and grow systematic and organic opportunities to engage the employee voice:

  - o Special Interest Groups (SIGs), Joint Negotiating Committee, Staff Forum, Staff Survey
  - o Opportunities for participation in projects and working groups

- Increase and amplify staff-led and value-add opportunities and initiatives (Green Team, Mental Health First Aiders, Communications Champions and so on) to ensure diverse representation and participation

Year 1

- Fairness and inclusion in HRA recruitment

- Building organisational confidence to have inclusive conversations

- Embedding ED&I considerations into policy and project design

- Develop a supportive infrastructure to ensure SIGs can thrive

- Increasing confidence and open channels for staff to discuss their employee experience

Plans for years 2 and 3

- Develop our talent management offering for staff with protected characteristics

- Develop inclusive leadership capabilities

- Evaluate progress and agree new areas of focus for ED&I work

Measuring success

- Increased disclosure rates of our people's protected characteristics held on ESR and in annual staff survey findings

- Results from our annual staff survey indicate an increased sense of inclusivity and opportunity at the HRA year on year

- Achieve Disability Confidence Employer level 2