



## How Colleges can Support the NHS Long Term Plan

The NHS Long Term Plan is a comprehensive and ambitious blueprint, aiming to secure the future of the NHS by focusing on prevention, personalised care, and growing and developing the workforce. Within this context, colleges in England have an instrumental role to play, especially in underpinning the workforce initiatives.

### The Growing Need for a Skilled Workforce in the NHS

As outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan, one of its key pillars is future-proofing the workforce.

The Plan emphasises increasing the NHS workforce by training and recruiting more professionals. It mentions creating thousands of additional clinical placements for undergraduate nurses, hundreds of new medical school places, and promoting alternate routes into the NHS, like apprenticeships.

The Plan further commits to making the NHS a preferred place of employment, with measures to retain more staff and ensure they utilise their skills optimally for patient care.

tailored to the needs of the NHS. With its innovative health and social care courses, Calderdale College not only prepares learners for the world of work but also helps to integrate them into the NHS ecosystem.

Their curriculum ensures learners understand the significance of their role, thereby reducing the risk of early job departures – a challenge the NHS has grappled with for years.

Calderdale College also recognises the importance of adaptability. Their courses, evolving in response to the NHS's requirements, produce learners with skills that are immediately applicable in a healthcare setting. By liaising closely with local NHS trusts, Calderdale guarantees its curriculum remains relevant, ensuring learners are job ready.

Calderdale College recognises the evolving demands of the healthcare sector and has shown a proactive approach. By engaging with employers, they've ensured curriculum relevancy and improved the employability of their learners. Their flexibility in delivery, with options like evening and weekend classes, accommodates the needs of shift workers, a crucial segment in healthcare.

**Calderdale College:  
Spearheading Innovations  
in Healthcare Training**



Calderdale College, a leader in healthcare training, showcases the transformative power of college curriculums

## Weston College: A Model for Integration and Engagement



Meanwhile, in Somerset, Weston College has been dynamic in its collaborative efforts with local NHS trusts.

The origins of this collaboration lay in the mutual recognition of a need. The NHS has seen immense strain, especially during the pandemic. The NHS needed staff, and there were unemployed individuals looking to contribute, to make a difference. In came the SWAP (Sector-based Work Academy Programmes) courses, bridging the gap between these unemployed individuals and the NHS's staffing needs.

Since the programme started in April 2021 Weston College has trained 470 learners as part of the NHS SWAP programme, of which 384 progressed to the NHS induction programme.

Behind each statistic lies a life transformed, an individual now employed, now contributing to society, and in turn, helping the NHS deliver its indispensable services. The success rate? 47% of these individuals have had positive job outcomes.

To put a monetary perspective to it, the SWAP courses, on average, save the public purse over £15,000 for each unemployed individual who secures work. This savings calculation takes into account the average public costs over a year and equates to £3.9m 'Social Return on Investment.'

The qualifications these learners receive are also tailored to ensure they are job-ready. They include an Award in Health and Care, an Award in Mental Health Awareness, and a Certificate in Vocational Studies from Gateway Qualifications.



## The Challenges and Opportunities: Gearing Up for the Future

The pathway to integrating colleges into the NHS's Long Term Plan isn't without challenges. Lucy Hunte, National Programme Manager – Apprenticeships at NHS England, shared her insights which highlight issues such as the lack of standardisation across apprenticeship programmes, posing considerable risks, especially in clinical programmes where lives are at stake.

However, these challenges also present opportunities. With the introduction of T Levels and industry placements, colleges have the chance to offer more vocationally-focused training. The accessibility to NHS employers of all sizes to the Adult Education Budget (AEB) for English and maths and the emphasis on digital literacy, especially with the shift to electronic patient record systems, are pivotal.

Additionally, night classes and weekend offerings for shift workers, signposts to Skills Bootcamps, and access to ESOL, among others, pave the way for a more inclusive and comprehensive training model.

Employer engagement, as highlighted by Lucy, remains key. It's essential that colleges and the NHS foster closer ties, ensuring training programmes align with the real needs of the healthcare sector. By building a range of learning, from Levels 2 and 3, right up to Level 7 Career Pathways, colleges can ensure their learners navigate a clear and productive career trajectory within the NHS.

### In summary:

- **T Levels and Industry Placements:** These provide a structured pathway into healthcare roles.
- **Access to AEB for English and Maths:** Ensuring all healthcare workers have the foundational skills necessary for their roles.
- **Digital Literacy:** As the NHS pivots towards electronic patient record systems, Digital Functional Skills Qualifications and Essential Digital Skills Qualifications to support digital literacy become paramount.
- **Flexible Delivery for Shift Workers:** Catering to the schedules of those who work unconventional hours.
- **Access to ESOL, Skills Bootcamps, and Access to HE Courses:** Providing additional training and upskilling avenues.
- **LSIP:** Most, if not all, local skills plans include healthcare.
- **L2 – L7 Career Pathways:** Offering clear vocational and technical progression routes for those looking to enter and advance in their healthcare careers.

Employer engagement is vital. It ensures that the training and qualifications provided by colleges align seamlessly with the needs of the NHS.



## Future Directions

As the NHS continues its march towards the goals set out in the Long Term Plan, colleges can amplify their support in various ways:

- **Strengthening Partnerships:** Colleges can foster closer ties with local NHS trusts, ensuring curriculum alignment with real-world demands.
- **Promoting Apprenticeships:** These serve as a bridge, enabling learners to transition from academic settings into the NHS, fully equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.
- **Expanding Clinical Placements:** By working with local employers to offer more hands-on experiences for undergraduate nurses, colleges can ensure a steady stream of well-trained professionals entering the NHS.

England's further education and skills sectors, by virtue of their flexibility and adaptability, are in a unique position to offer real solutions to the NHS's workforce challenges. Their role is not just restricted to churning out qualified professionals but extends to recruitment, continuous professional development, offering re-skilling opportunities, and adjusting curricula in real time, based on the ever-evolving needs of the healthcare sector.

## A Collaborative Future

The symbiotic relationship between colleges, ITPs and the NHS is evident. As the NHS moves towards a more integrated care system, the need for interdisciplinary training becomes

even more Important. Here, colleges can step in by offering courses that blend elements from various pathways, ensuring that graduates are equipped to work in multifunctional teams, seamlessly.

And, with the increasing emphasis on preventive healthcare in the NHS Long Term Plan, there's a burgeoning demand for professionals trained in community health, public health, and wellness. Colleges can tap into this by launching specialised courses, workshops, and training sessions tailored for these niche sectors.

## Embracing Technology

The rapid digitisation of the NHS, especially with the shift to electronic patient record systems, necessitates a tech-savvy workforce. Colleges can play a pivotal role by integrating digital literacy modules in their courses, ensuring that learners are not just familiar but proficient in using contemporary health tech tools. Beyond just EPR systems, training in telehealth platforms, virtual reality-based patient care simulations, and even basic data analytics can give learners an edge, preparing them for a future where healthcare and technology are deeply intertwined.

## The Way Forward

For the NHS to realise its ambitious Long Term Plan, it needs a resilient, skilled, and adaptive workforce. Colleges, with their diverse offerings and close ties to local communities, are poised to be invaluable allies in this journey.

At Gateway Qualifications, we believe that the time is ripe for the FE and Skills sectors to reflect on their achievements and set the stage for future collaborations.

Through continued dialogue, shared best practices, and a real commitment to excellence, the synergy between colleges, ITPs and the NHS promises to usher in a new era of healthcare in England – one that's patient-centric, efficient, and sustainable.

If you'd like a free of charge, no obligation meeting to discuss your particular needs and how you can tackle your specific challenges, call our Business Development team on **01206 911 211** to arrange a suitable time.



Find out how we can help meet your learners' needs

[www.gatewayqualifications.org.uk](http://www.gatewayqualifications.org.uk)

**Tel: 01206 911 211**

[enquiries@gatewayqualifications.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@gatewayqualifications.org.uk)