



**NHS Ambassadors Evaluation**

**Report by Rocket Science for Health Education England**

December 2022

**Foreword**

This report, created by Rocket Science and published by NHS England, follows five years of Health Education England’s partnership with the charity Education and Employers to run the ‘Inspiring the Future’ programme. The programme brings together NHS staff volunteers (NHS Ambassadors), school leads and young people, to enable Ambassadors to tell the story of their career with the aim of informing young people of the different careers available within health and social care and their rewarding nature, helping them with decisions around their future career.

In June 2021 a previous report ‘NHS Ambassadors: how you’ve helped 400,000 young people’, showed that Ambassadors helped young people to understand the sorts of careers available in health and care and raising aspirations. The report also highlighted the benefits of being an ambassador to NHS staff, for example, such as providing the opportunity to develop communication and influencing skills.

This project was commissioned in August 2022, which would include the collection of qualitative data, to explore the experiences of Ambassadors and school leaders The aim was to understand what works well and share best practice, helping Ambassadors to engage with the young people to discuss career ideas with them as effectively as possible. This report has used desktop research and structured interviews to find common themes, and makes a series of recommendations for NHS England, Education and Employers, and NHS provider organisations to improve the service for the Ambassadors and schools.

We are delighted to report that a network of Ambassadors is being piloted in the East of England. The network offers peer support and a space where Ambassadors share their experiences and awareness events are being held to highlight the diversity of careers.

NHS England and Education and Employers, would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers and school leaders, firstly for the work they do as part of the NHS Ambassador programme but also for sharing their experiences for the purposes of this report; without their time and consideration this project would not have been possible. We welcome the recommendations of this report to further develop and enhance the programme and look forward to continuing to have an impact on the lives of young people, and implementing further improvements to the scheme over the coming months and years.

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# 1. Executive Summary

The NHS Ambassadors scheme encourages people working or studying in the NHS to volunteer their time (from one hour per year) to engage with local schools and speak about their role, their career paths and their experience of working in the NHS. NHS Ambassadors volunteer their time to speak in schools performing activities including mentoring, supporting and hosting mock interviews for students and take part in careers fairs.

Inspiring the Future, run by the Education and Employers charity, organises and coordinates the delivery of the scheme. NHS Ambassadors and education providers are connected online, and volunteering takes place virtually or in-person at local events.

Rocket Science was commissioned by Health Education England to evaluate the NHS Ambassadors scheme between August and December 2022. The evaluation sought to understand how the programme was used and understood by schools who used the services of NHS Ambassadors and the views and perspectives of NHS staff who volunteered their time to the programme.

We interviewed 30 NHS Ambassadors and 6 school leaders and conducted a desk review of participation data. Recruitment for the evaluation was challenging and required several phases of recruitment to encourage participation. Further work could be done to capture the experiences of Ambassadors and Schools to ensure the continued development of the programme using the online portal and a requirement made on Ambassadors and Schools to take part in monitoring and evaluation when signing up.

The findings from the interviews covered three main areas; experiences of NHS Ambassadors; experiences of school leads and analysis from the data provided by Education and Employers.

Findings from NHS Ambassadors experiences:

* All reported being motivated by their passion for the NHS and concern about recruitment and retention in the NHS.
* All reported wanting to help young people in career choices.
* All wanted to share the breadth of roles available in the NHS.
* Some ambassadors felt ‘lonely’ in their ambassador role.
* Some reported a lack of support around physical materials to use at in-person events.
* Many reported never being used in their Ambassador role.

Findings from Schools

* School Leads that participated in the research reported positive experiences.
* Leads reported that the visits had a positive impact on their students.
* Leads reported being more reactive in focusing on a particular pathway when booking an NHS Ambassador visit i.e. clinical specialism based on a pupil’s interest.

Findings from data analysis

* Although the programme covers a range of roles and disciplines it is not possible to distinguish between clinician and non-clinician roles from current data. This is important to better understand the split and take up of opportunities across the breadth of the NHS Workforce.
* Current data does not capture the levels of seniority of Ambassadors within their profession and therefore it is difficult to understand the profile of Ambassadors and opportunities to support marketing and take-up,

**Recommendations for Education and Employers**

| Finding | Recommendation | Who? |
| --- | --- | --- |
| NHS Ambassadors report feeling isolated and lonely when performing NHSA duties. Often, they think they are the only NHSA in their Trust; some report making their own posters and leaflets for in-person events and using their own money to buy resources. They asked for ways in which they could connect with peers and colleagues within and across trusts. | Set up network of NHS Ambassadors across Trusts – this could be achieved through a dedicated area on the platform, establishment of WhatsApp groups or connecting Ambassadors to each other (gaining consent) where they are working in the same Trust. | Education & Employers platform (Inspiring Futures). |
| NHS Ambassadors reported needing to use Annual Leave to perform their role, which is not a requirement of the programme. | Awareness raising among all managers about how to support staff who have volunteered to become an NHS Ambassador, including making time for them to perform NHS Ambassador  duties and build activities into personal development plans. | NHS Trust notified by Inspiring Futures platform and guide supplied by Education and  Employers for line managers. |

**Recommendations for NHS Trusts**

| Finding | Recommendation | Who? |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Support NHS Ambassadors in career development. Most reported that their NHSA activities were not considered in any formal appraisal as part of their career development. | Incorporate NHSA activities into personal development planning and into annual appraisal. | Toolkits and guides to be developed to support line managers by Health Education England and  Education and Employers. |
| Support NHSA in post. Some  NHSAs reported performing  NHSA activities in their annual leave and/or their manager being unaware of them doing it. | Awareness raising among all managers about how to support staff who have volunteered to become an NHS Ambassador, including making time for them to perform NHS Ambassador  duties and build activities into personal development plans. | As above. |

**Recommendations targeted at working with schools**

| Finding | Recommendation | Who? |
| --- | --- | --- |
| NHS Ambassadors report not being used by local schools. Several NHSAs in our research reported having completed their training and never being used by local schools. They were left feeling confused and that they had done something wrong. | Awareness raising campaign for schools about programme. Awareness work with NHSAs about the school year calendar and which points of the year to expect requests – such as post exams. | Education & Employers |
| NHS Ambassadors feel that schools are unaware of the breadth of roles in NHS. Several NHSAs reported a belief that they were not used because their role was not an easy-to-understand clinical role. | Awareness raising campaign for schools about diversity of careers in NHS. | Education & Employers |
| School Leads use NHSA programme reactively. One school lead confirmed that they request a visit when a student expresses a desire to follow a particular career in the NHS. This is usually a clinical role, so a clinician is booked. This does not facilitate a broadening of knowledge among students of the diversity of roles available in the NHS. | Awareness raising campaign for schools about diversity of careers in NHS and to encourage them to use the  NHSA scheme proactively. | Education & Employers |

**Recommendations to improve data collection and measure uptake of NHSA**

| Finding | Recommendation | Who? |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Lack of detail on seniority of NHS Ambassadors. Lack of this data means that it is not possible to understand the reach of the recruitment of NHS Ambassadors. | Amend data collection to record Band. | Education & Employers |
| Line managers do not know how to support NHSA staff. | Awareness raising among all managers about how to support staff who have volunteered to become an NHS Ambassador, including making time for them to perform NHS Ambassador  duties and build activities into personal development plans. | Education & Employers |

Finally, we also recommend considering how opportunities could be spread amongst other careers providers and whether there is scope for Education and Employers to build on their current links with Careers Hubs, CEC and Local Authorities ensuring reach and a strategic partnership with STEM Learning.

We would like to thank all the Ambassadors and schools that took part in the evaluation and of the support of Health Education England and of the Education and Employers Charity.

# 2. Introduction and context

## 2.1 NHS Ambassadors programme

The NHS Ambassadors Programme is a UK-wide workplace Ambassador scheme established in 2018. It aims to expose young people to the range of careers available within the NHS and inspire them to pursue them. The primary purpose is to:

* Attract the future healthcare workforce by getting young people interested in different roles and professions within the NHS. Develop the talent pool and to ensure a skilled workforce in the future.
* Ensure the future workforce is representative of the communities it serves and to help young people make informed choices about the range of roles and professions within the NHS and the routes in.

The programme is promoted jointly by Health Education England and Education and Employers.i The primary purpose is to:

* Attract the future healthcare workforce by getting young people interested in different roles and professions within the NHS. Develop the talent pool and ensure a skilled workforce in the future.

Ensure the future workforce is representative of the communities it serves and to help young people make informed choices about the range of roles and professions within the NHS and the routes in. Health Education England are part of the NHS and *“work with partners to plan, recruit, education and train the health workforce”.* Education and Employers is a UK based charity founded in 2019 which aims to *“provide young people with the inspiration, motivation, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to help them achieve their potential”.* The charity believes that every young person in our country, wherever they live, whatever their parents or carers’ circumstances, should have the opportunity to meet a diverse range of volunteers and hear first-hand about jobs and the world of work.ii They run a flagship service called Inspiring the Future which connects secondary schools with volunteers from the world of work to help young people make informed decisions about their futures. Inspiring the Future is the part of Education and Employers that facilitates the NHS Ambassadors Programme.

Health Education England and Education and Employers work together closely to encourage NHS staff to become Ambassadors, and to help them access opportunities to support young people.

The Ambassadors are asked to volunteer at least one hour per year to engage with young people about their jobs, with many committing more time.iii The Ambassadors are primarily engaged with HEE’s Inspiring the Future and Primary Future programmes, which works with young people in secondary and primary schools. Ambassadors are also able to volunteer their time to attend career events outside these programmes. iv

## 2.2 Methodology

###### 2.2.1 Evaluation Aims

Rocket Science was commissioned by Health Education England to evaluate the NHS Ambassadors programme. The evaluation aims are to:

* Assess learning from the areas of benefit captured in the [June 2021 Health Education England and Education and Employers](https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/NHS%20Ambassadors%20Impact%20Report%20-%20June%202021%20%28FINAL%29.pdf) report and potential for adoption and spread.
* Examine potential areas of development, professions or regions where greater engagement or opportunities for promotion is available.

###### 2.2.2 Proposed methodology

We used the following methods

* Desk research: Based on publicly available data, Rocket Science conducted a literature review of the NHS Ambassadors programme to assess learning from the programme, and examine potential areas of development, professions or regions where greater engagement or opportunities for promotion is available. The literature review then compares the NHS programme to other workplace Ambassador schemes to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the NHS Ambassadors programme. The findings from this desk research are included throughout the report.
* Design stage: We agreed a set of priorities to inform the targeting of NHS regions and areas for interviews to achieve best value / impact. We then developed topic guides and interview questions for each stakeholder. This included a description and purpose of the work, an indication of the topics we wanted to cover, and how their information and insights would be used, together with information about the confidentiality of their information.
* Interviews: We planned to carry out interviews with NHS Ambassadors (20) and school staff (20). The interviews took place by telephone, Teams or Zoom. Interviewers recorded the key points and issues in a common format for later analysis, ensuring consent from participants.
* Reflection workshops: In order to refine our findings, we planned to hold two workshops with NHS Ambassadors, key HEE staff and schools to better understand emerging best practice and opportunities which could be used to improve policy development and design of the programme.
* Analysis and reporting: We analysed the findings from our desk research and fieldwork to capture learning about the NHS Ambassadors programme in this report for Health Education England.

**2.2.3 Methodological limitations:**

There were some challenges with the methodology.

The main challenge was the difficulty of getting hold of people to speak to as they had to be approached by Education and Employers as a third party. In a methodology mostly based on interviews this meant we had limited data to work with. We originally planned to use a targeted approach for the interview recruitment to reach out to 40 schools and 40 NHS Ambassadors with a hope of speaking to 20 of each and being representative of the take up of the programme. This was unsuccessful so we doubled our numbers to 80 of each, still using a targeted approach. This still did not give us the numbers needed for the evaluation, so we reached out to all Ambassadors inviting them to interview and Education and Employers reached out to specific schools they thought would engage. We also resorted to using incentives of £15 each to encourage participation which were provided by Rocket Science as there was no budget set aside for incentives.

There was increased engagement from Ambassadors, however still limited engagement from schools. To accommodate this, we adjusted the target numbers from 20 interviews each, to 30 interviews with NHS Ambassadors and 10 with schools. We conducted the 30 NHS Ambassadors interviews but were only able to interview six school staff. We also targeted when we would approach schools, so initial contact emails went out a week before October half term.

Due to the low levels of engagement, we did not conduct the best practice workshops as it seemed that people would not have the time to attend, and therefore it would not be productive to run the sessions. In future, when inviting people to sign up for interview we could have also offered sign up for the best practice workshops. This would have allowed us to book the sessions in earlier and guarantee a higher level of attendance. Given the challenges in engagement we decided not to request further participation in the recommendation workshops.

The impact of this in answering the research questions were that we gathered a rich source of data from Ambassadors. The increased numbers of interviews with Ambassadors allows confidence in the findings as we reached data saturation. Over the course of the Ambassador interviews the same themes were repeated, meaning that we can be confident of their reliability.

Five school-leads were interviewed, we need to consider that we did not speak to as many as we would have liked, therefore we do not have a broad range of opinions. This also means we have not captured the views of the least engaged schools.

# 3. NHS Ambassadors Demographics

There are 3,237 active Ambassadors (as of 30th November 2022).

* Gender: 78% are female, 22% are male, less than 1% are other, and 1% would rather not say.
* Age: 41% are 36-50, 34% and 26-35, 15% are 50+ and 9% are 18-25. Less than 1% are retired, and 1% would rather not say.
* Ethnicity: 77% are White (72% are White British), 11% are Asian/Asian British (5% are Indian), 6% are Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (4% are Black African), 3% are Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, 1% are Other ethnic group, and 2% would rather not say.
* Disability: 13% do have a disability, 84% do not have a disability and 3% would rather not say.
* Region: 22% are based in London, 14% in the South East, 13% in Yorkshire and the Humber,

13% in the North West, 10% in the West Midlands, 8% in the South West, 8% in the East of England, 7% in the North East and 6% in East Midlands. 1% of less of Ambassadors were based in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively.

* University: 9% did not attend university, 80% did attend and 11% are currently attending.

Ambassadors represent over 1,000 organisations and reported 2,742 unique job titles, showing the diversity of the roles that Ambassadors fill.v However, this data should not be used to suggest that at each event there is a wide range of roles represented and it also does not account for slight nominal variations between similar roles. It was also reported that Ambassadors accurately reflected the gender and ethnic makeup of the whole NHS.vi However, it is not reported if there was significant gender and ethnic minority representation across Ambassadors in senior and highly skilled positions. Additionally, the Inspiring Governance project, which aims to get NHS staff involved with school governance committees, reports that there is less representation from those in allied health care professional roles (e.g., physiotherapists and speech therapists) in the programme.vii However, this was the only instance where it was reported that a diverse range of roles were not represented in the Ambassadors programme.

# 4. NHS Ambassadors Activities

## 4.1 Types of activities delivered

NHS Ambassadors deliver many activities including:

* Assemblies: Ambassadors deliver talks in assemblies to teach young people on their roles.
* Career Days: Ambassadors typically are asked to speak for 10 minutes alongside other ambassadors from across the NHS. Ambassadors described either a panel presentation or an event such as a Careers Fair where they were asked to set up a stall and be present to talk to and take questions from pupils.
* Interactive Virtual Sessions: Ambassadors deliver sessions to young people over Teams or Zoom to support them in their learning about careers.
* Mentoring and Coaching/Personalised Sessions: Ambassadors deliver personalised support to young people to help them develop or figure out their career interests and inform them of the NHS as an option.
* Interview Preparation: Ambassadors work with young people to support them for job interviews and/or university interviews.
* Inspiring the Future events: provides first-hand career insights to motivate young people to consider the widest range of future working options by connecting secondary schools with volunteers. This includes NHS specific events. During Covid restrictions this provision has moved online. NHS specific videos, learning materials and online interaction has been deployed and well received.
* Primary Futures events: Education and Employers primary school initiative that focuses on broadening the horizons of primary school children by helping them understand the link between learning and work. As above, during Covid restrictions this provision has moved online. NHS specific videos, learning materials and online interaction has been deployed and well received.

To deliver activities, NHS Ambassadors sign up via the Education and Employers portal; an online system that allows NHS Ambassadors to input information about themselves and gives them options for the types of activities they want to sign up for. Schools then use this same portal to request the support of Ambassadors.

In 2021, the Ambassadors programme included a variety of career events and talks, including both virtual and in-person visits to schools. 4511 Ambassadors accepted approximately 4,000 opportunities to participate in Education and Employers events, and Ambassadors also participated in an additional 1,000 activities delivered separately to Education and Employers.viii

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Ambassadors were able to successfully adapt and offer virtual events for young people. This included making videos and live (virtual) events showcasing various NHS careers.ix In one event over 400 students were able to attend an interactive career event, showing the adaptability of the Ambassador programme.x Additionally, videos were published online, allowing young people access to content and information about a variety of careers outside of dedicated events.xi However, the use of digital content in schools during Covid-19 was higher for secondary schools, perhaps indicating the need for digital materials aimed at younger audiences.xii

These events were limited because the Ambassadors, as key workers, had reduced time to commit to programme activities.xiii As frontline workers, the pandemic highlighted that future planning of the Ambassador programme needs to be adaptable to fit the schedules and time restraints experienced within the NHS.

Our analysis showed regional variation in the number of in-person Ambassador visits. Excluding Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, the North-East and the East Midlands have the lowest number of active Ambassadors (290 and 294 respectively).xiv This is compared to the 920 active Ambassadors in London and 650 in Yorkshire and the Humber.xv Although there is disparity in the number of Ambassadors between regions, due to Covid-19 there is also the increased use of digital events and online content, which may have reduced regional discrepancies. Digital content has the potential to play an important role in increasing both the geographical reach of the NHS Ambassadors programme, as well as allowing access to programme materials even when Ambassadors do not have the time to lead in-person events.

One of the primary aims of the programme is to introduce young people to the variety of careers available within the NHS. The online content made available through the Ambassador programmes includes self-filmed videos of NHS staff talking about their roles, including paramedics, osteopaths, school nurses, midwives, GPs, and more.xvi The videos represent a considerable range of healthcare and allied health professional roles, which require a range of qualifications. There are currently 20 new iCloud videos available on the website. On iCloud there are 105 videos on healthcare spanning more roles.xvii  It is important to ensure that the digital resources reflect a wide range of roles within the NHS and are engaging for young people.

## 4.2 Feedback on activities

School-leads felt that interview preparation has been particularly invaluable support to school leavers who were not planning on going on to sixth form. The insight and advice Ambassadors were able to give, according to school leads, meant that the young people would have an advance on others when going into interviews in NHS careers, and gave them a good ‘foot in the door’ with potential careers.

*“Nothing beats the advice they can give, talking to somebody who’s doing the job they want to do, they give good interview technique advice, advice on what to do in interviews to make them stand out from the*

*crowd. The insider knowledge they can give them that we can’t.” [School-lead]*

Career ‘panels events’ were also popular amongst school-leads, getting Ambassadors together from all different areas of the NHS for a day where the young people would be able to get a taste for a wide range of careers, was beneficial to them. The interactive aspect of the panel was noted by school-leads to be really beneficial to the young people, because they could ask questions and discuss career paths with the Ambassadors.

*“We did a panel with the whole year group and had about five different people from NHS Ambassadors talk about their careers and did a Q&A, the children really responded to the session because it was practical and interactive.” [School-lead]*

One aspect that worked well for a particular school was giving a personalised session to a young person who knew she wanted to have a career within the NHS. By giving tailored sessions young people are able to gain first hand insight of what the career is like, and be given good tips as to the best way they can achieve their career goals:

*“We had a student who was set on being a midwife, we had a midwife Ambassador on the programme, she gave her great advice on training as a nurse first so she could get an extra layer of knowledge. This was not something the student had thought about, she went away and researched it and now plans on training to*

*be a nurse.” [School-lead]*

Other smaller successes include when Ambassadors wore uniforms (such as nurse, doctor or paramedic uniforms) and when they tended not to use PowerPoint presentations. Including an interactive section of the discussion worked better in visits to primary schools.

Ambassadors reported that most of their engagements with schools had been online as a result of the pandemic. Almost all Ambassadors were keen to do more visits and engagements with schools, online and in-person, but reported that many had not received any invites at all since signing up with the programme. They wondered if this was due to the pandemic as they were aware that schools were busy and had a lot of catching up to do. Among Ambassadors there was confusion around why most of them were not receiving invitations from schools. One Ambassador who had previously been a secondary school teacher reported that he was aware that most schools do their careers events at certain times of the year and so was not concerned about this. Others who did not have this knowledge were left wondering if they had done something wrong in their application.

# 5. Motivations for taking part

School-lead motivations for getting involved with Ambassadors stems from wanting to show students some of the other opportunities available to them to work in the NHS, than the stereotypical careers such as a doctor or nurse. School-leads highlighted that young people were usually shocked when they heard about the range of offers and opportunities available within the NHS, and the

Ambassadors programme had really *“opened their eyes to the wide range of offers available.” – [Schoollead]*

They also wanted to show young people different routes through further education, to *“inspire young people to keep going past 16-18”.* The Ambassadors programme allowed the young people to gain insight into a range of different careers and sectors, and school-leads felt the Ambassadors *“had meaningful interaction”* with their students.

Ambassadors identified a range of motivations for signing up. First and foremost, interviewees spoke about their enthusiasm and pride about working for the NHS.

*“Passionate about NHS. Love talking about the NHS. We need to get as many people into the NHS as possible – everyone thinks it's only for clinicians and as a woman in IT thought I could make a difference.” [Ambassador]*

Second, they all spoke about being acutely conscious of the recruitment crisis facing the NHS and in particular their specific specialties and work areas.

*“It aligns very much to my job, I'm all about workforce. One of the challenges we have is we’re not attracting young people into roles, so we’re well behind. And also I wanted to give something back, support*

*young people into jobs and careers and build awareness of the breadth of career opportunities within the*

*NHS that young people just aren’t aware of.” [Ambassador]*

Third, all spoke about how signing up to the programme was prompted by their personal experiences of being younger and not knowing what they wanted to do.

*“I remember being at school and thinking I would have wanted to have had some proper. structured career advice. I wanted to give some of that back. It’s hard to know what you want to do as a young person. I*

*went through school not really knowing what I wanted to do. Important to highlight options. Help people think about different paths in life. it can make you feel uncomfortable if you don't know what you want to do. Can feel scary if you don’t know what you want to do.” [Ambassador]*

Several mentioned that they wished someone had come to their school and told them that there was a place for them in the NHS.

*“When I was a kid, we never had anyone come round from the NHS – I would have liked that. I wanted to*

*give something back.” [Ambassador]*

*“When I was at school if someone had spoken to me at the time – it would have helped. I probably would have gone into radiography sooner than I did.” [Ambassador]*

Others became an Ambassador because they had received inspiring mentorship when they were younger and wanted to pass on this good experience to young people.

*“I think it was because of – I had really strong mentors when I was younger – later on outside of school – people who worked in hospitals... I wanted to help with young people – I'm an advocate of different people going into careers that you wouldn’t normally think would be involved.” [Ambassador]*

Other interviewees spoke about how their careers were not ones that people typically imagine exist in the NHS. This motivated them to share with young people that the NHS could be an employer for them.

*“One reason is that I’m really passionate about alternative legal careers - because when I was studying to be a lawyer I never would have thought of the NHS. I wanted to advocate for a legal career in the NHS.*

*You can do any kind of job in the NHS.” [Ambassador]*

Many had not followed a traditional route into the NHS and were keen to share this with the next generation. One ambassador spoke about how they came to their nursing career later in life (at age 34) and had never expected to be a senior nurse, 25 years later. They wanted people to understand the work that goes on behind the clinical front of the NHS and understand that there is a role for everyone.

*“People don’t think about the fact that the NHS is one of the biggest institutions in the country, it's all the stuff behind doctors and nurses, the back door stuff – facilitators and estates and admin, not hands on care*

*roles, the machine would grind to a halt if they weren’t there.” [Ambassador]*

# 6. NHS Ambassadors Delivery

This section includes feedback on the delivery of the NHS Ambassadors programme; the implementation, the delivery itself and the follow up.

## 6.1 Selecting opportunities and pre-visit support

School-leads felt that the Education and Employers portal they used to book visits with schools was particularly beneficial for them in terms of making the programme accessible to their pupils. They collectively felt that they were able to pick what they needed from the portal based on their school needs and were able to find tailored Ambassadors for whatever the curriculum needed. For example, if the school was having a careers day and was missing something from the administrative sector, they would be able to find who they needed through the portal and invite them to the day.

*“Absolutely the programme is accessible, we ask students what they’re interested in, and I just go onto a website and do a search and email everyone in that field. It’s a really easy process.” [School-lead]*

In general, Ambassadors reported that they had received good support from schools ahead of visits. Ambassadors spoke about having good communications with schools prior to the visit. When asked about what made a good visit, Ambassadors identified information sharing prior to the visit as being important. When asked what information they would like from schools prior to and post visit, most replied that the more information they are given prior to a visit, the better. Others spoke about how well prepared the children were for the visit, mentioning that all students had questions for them which made the event go well.

*“Events that work best are classroom sessions: especially when we get more information from school – how many students etc. If there is a particular theme – we modify what we do dependent on age group” [Ambassador]*

## 6.2 Delivering the NHS Ambassadors programme in schools

Ambassadors who participated in the research interviews had engaged in a range of activities with schools and had worked across the age range from primary through to sixth form colleges. Events attended included Q&A sessions at a school assembly; classroom visits where Ambassadors brought equipment with them and performed demonstrations; sixth form café Q&A sessions; being on a panel to judge a poster for the NHS and one Ambassador had engaged in 121 mentoring.

Among Ambassadors, some preferred working with primary school aged children while others found that working with Year 9 and above was most rewarding. One Ambassador had been asked (and agreed) to conduct a mock interview with a Year 12 student who was thinking of a career in the NHS.

Some Ambassadors spoke of very successful visits even when they were held online.

*It was fabulous... really enjoyed it. A virtual - it was to 200 children in their classrooms. They sent their questions to their teachers and the teachers sent them to me in the Chat. I then read them out and answered them. Really loved it. [Ambassador]*

For some Ambassadors, particularly those from a non-clinical role, the visits were not so positive.

*No – very often, when I turn up from a mental health background – they are not really sure what I do or how I do it... so their lack of awareness is why they invite us. I think one reason why I get so little in prep is*

*because people don’t really know what a mental health professional does so they don’t know what to ask me to do etc. [Ambassador]*

This quote illustrates the variation in Ambassador experiences and points to a theme that was repeated throughout the fieldwork. Ambassadors who were not doctors or nurses or paramedics, spoke about how they felt they posed a challenge to schools, who might not understand what they do and subsequently how best to use them. One Ambassador from an IT role explained her experiences with schools was challenging.

*“Different audiences – sometimes it's more tech or sometimes it's more healthcare. Not as successful when it’s a healthcare audience. Sometimes I’ve been booked as someone from the NHS, and they just assume it’s going to be a clinician. I always tell them I’m in IT.” [Ambassador]*

## 6.3 Follow up from school visits

Ambassadors spoke about how they receive feedback after a visit, but it is not in-depth and they are not left with a clear sense of if their visit had any lasting impact on the schools or the students. A sense of frustration about a lack of follow-up with schools emerged from fieldwork interviews.

*“This could be improved. I feel that there is a lot of conversation at the beginning about ‘this is what we need’ and then we do it and you come away and you don’t hear anything about how did it go?” [Ambassador]*

# 7. Challenges and suggestions for improvement

Most Ambassadors had ideas and thoughts about how the programme might be improved.

## 7.1 Awareness of NHS Ambassadors

All those interviewed reported that the programme was not widely known about. Many said that even their managers did not know they were an NHS Ambassador. When asked if any of their colleagues were aware of the programme, every interviewee said that it was not known about or well publicised.

*“I only saw it because of the newsletter I get - I don’t think it's widely publicised, is it just targeting*

*managers in facilities? Non-clinical workforce?” [Ambassador]*

*“No I don’t, when I mention it, people don’t go ‘I know what you mean’ it can just become white noise after a while because there’s so much going on and people are so busy.” [Ambassador]*

Nearly all were surprised by the lack of awareness about the programme among colleagues and wider staff networks.

*“I asked about volunteer opportunities at the relevant department, and I spoke to them about this, and nobody knew about it. I changed jobs in August 2020, and I did the same and people didn’t know about it. It's in the People Plan so you’d expect there would be a buzz about it. NHS People Plan is a national plan for the NHS in its entirety and it's in there so people should know about it” [Ambassador]*

*“NHS staff either know about it and don’t have time, don’t have time, or just ignore the email because it comes from outside the NHS and gets a warning. It’s more community-based practitioners and commissioners. I haven’t seen many people who work in hospital, probably due to lack of time and awareness” [Ambassador]*

This interviewee raised the point that staff may delete the email because it comes from a source external to the NHS. They also noted the disparity in rates of engagement between community and hospital-based staff.

One interviewee noted that among her colleagues not only was awareness of the programme low, but also that many colleagues would not be confident enough to participate. For some of her colleagues this was to do with lack of confidence in their spoken English as well as for those who are not confident at public speaking.

*“None of them do.... I don’t know how comfortable they would feel talking about their jobs, a lot of them... English isn’t their first language, they don’t feel comfortable. surgeon, doctor – maybe more representatives from more senior clinical levels but not really many nurses.” [Ambassador]*

This quote raises the topic of representation among those who participate in the NHS Ambassador programme and if support infrastructure is needed to enable NHS Ambassador’s to come forward from all areas of the NHS. It would be beneficial to actively use the demographic data collected on Ambassadors to monitor uptake across the organisation and identify any gaps.

## 7.2 Support for schools

Nearly all commented that they felt schools should be supported to better understand what was available from the programme and how the Ambassadors could be used to support local schools. One way schools could be supported would be through raising awareness of the programme and of available Ambassadors.

*Schools could be made aware that we are here – I've had teachers who say ‘they have never heard of us’ etc. Everyone is busy but it would be nice if schools could be made more aware of us. Raising the profile of*

*NHSA... More awareness raising with schools that we exist (NHSA). [Ambassador]*

Others felt that there should be a programme aimed at helping schools to understand the breadth and diversity of career roles that the NHS offers. Ambassadors expressed frustration with the belief (they felt was widespread) that the NHS was only relevant to ‘brain boxes’ and those pupils who wanted to be clinicians.

*“It would be good if people could understand how big and diverse the NHS is and how many roles there are within it. People still think it’s only for clinicians.” [Ambassador]*

One interviewee spoke about how the NHS was perceived as an option for the brightest, most academic pupils. Many were passionate about delivering the message that there were several different routes into the NHS – many of which do not require a university degree.

*“...on a personal level my route career wise was unconventional. I didn’t do the full academic route. There’s a lot of pressure on young people to go to university so I’m keen to go out to people and say you don’t need to do that. From a professional perspective I didn’t realise the NHS had half of the roles they have but there*

*is a whole other area around technology and admin side, it’s the biggest employer in the UK. But in schools nobody talks about it” [Ambassador]*

Another Ambassador spoke about how schools only made a request when a pupil expressed an interest in a particular career in the NHS.

*“The NHS is so big – so many different trusts and sectors – it is a massive employer. Schools should take that broader view of the NHS. Some supportive work with NHSE and schools directly to understand the whole context of the NHS. It has gone very quiet since lockdown. I’m currently not being used at all –*

*maybe this is due to a lack of understanding in schools about what the NHS can offer. Schools only request us when they have students who express an interest in being a paramedic for example.” [Ambassador]*

The same interviewee noted the previous theme that coming from a non-traditional NHS background posed challenges for schools in knowing how to use her time and experience.

*“Being a generalist from NHSE, I think schools might be missing a trick on only focussing on certain sector and roles. Worth them thinking outside the box. How can children know what they want to do if they don’t*

*know about it?” [Ambassadors]*

## 7.3 Long term relationships with local schools

Some Ambassadors were happy with a one-off event while some felt that a more long-term relationship with a local school would be more beneficial to the children and the local school landscape. There was some frustration expressed by Ambassadors that they did not know what happened to the children after their visit.

*“I would like to do some follow up with same group – feels like you’re only planting a seed. But schools don’t invite back. Needs to come from schools. Need to do some work with schools on width and breadth of what is available in the NHS. Hard for schools to see how they can use generalists. Only ever get general feedback - would like to do more.” [Ambassador]*

This was echoed by another Ambassador who commented that,

*“I think a one-off snapshot is ok but there is no follow up – would be better to have some kind of follow-up*

*would be better – a way for kids to ask questions/follow up.” [Ambassador]*

## 7.4 Supportive infrastructure around NHS Ambassadors

One interviewee spoke about feeling unsupported when she went to an event.

*“NHSE is not good at promoting itself. We don't have a big Comms team apart from general NHS logo.*

*Other organisations tend to be much better than us – noticed it when I did a Careers Fair – I could not even find some promotional materials… NHSE didn’t even have a poster or even any freebies. I bought chocolates with my own money – made my own posters the night before on my home computer.*

*Difference between NHSE and a NHS Trust... NHSE feels like the poor relation.” [Ambassador]*

Three interviewees from a total of 28, who engaged in NHS Ambassador events reported that they had to use their annual leave to participate. The topic guide did not specifically ask about using annual leave to perform NHS Ambassador duties, the three interviewees who mentioned this, did so unprompted. It raises the possibility that others in the sample may also use their annual leave allowance but did not raise it during the interview. The three ambassadors who voluntarily spoke about using annual leave for their ambassador roles, had different job roles. One was in a senior clinician role; one was in a senior business development role and the remaining one was a staff nurse.

Some were supported by their manager and used their activities to count towards their annual appraisal targets while others had been told not to participate in events due to staffing pressures.

“*I get emails to say someone has booked me. I decide if I can do it and if I do one it has to be out of my annual leave.” [Ambassador]*

Others mentioned that better administration around each event would be useful. For example, one respondent noted that being able to see requests earlier or a few months ahead would help with planning diaries and coordinating time.

*“Having a bit more notice of some of the ones that are coming up, the last one that I did wasn’t that far away from where I live but it’s a pain to get to. After I committed to that the same event turned up 2 miles down the road – if there was more of a schedule you could go through it would help.” {Ambassador}*

## 7.5 Summary

NHS Ambassadors gave thoughtful and reflective suggestions when asked about what improvements could be made to the programme.

First, all noted that they would welcome a support network of NHS Ambassadors. They talked about this being provided at Trust, regional and national level and noted that they might not feel so alone in their NHS Ambassador role. They also thought this would help them in sharing tips, advice and even resources.

Second, they all felt that schools needed an awareness programme with two aims: first at making them aware that the programme exists and second, making them aware of how best to use them. When prompted on this they spoke about schools being proactive, rather than reactive in using them. For example, instead of waiting for a child to express an interest in becoming a doctor or nurse and then booking an NHS Ambassador visit, they suggested bringing them in to speak to children and young people who had never considered a career in the NHS.

Some had never considered the possibility that their NHS Ambassador activities could contribute to their personal career progression. Every interviewee reported that they did it out of love and passion for their job and the NHS. When prompted about how awareness might be raised among colleagues, they agreed that linking it to career development would help, as well as building managerial support for it.

All Ambassadors referenced their concerns about recruitment in the NHS as a reason for getting involved. They saw the NHS Ambassador programme as a tool in the campaign to bring new talent into the NHS. All were frustrated at what they saw as their lack of use. Some had received training but had never been required for an event. When asked how this might be improved, they returned to the topic of a campaign to raise awareness among schools about the programme.

# 8. Impact of NHS Ambassadors

## 8.1 Impact on pupils

All school staff spoken to stated that the young people had more of an interest in NHS careers after they had engaged with the programme, which is a positive result. They said it had increased their awareness of the different careers, and the speakers had *“always been really positive, enthusiastic and we’re seeing more young people going into further education routes that allow NHS careers.”* It also reinforces the decision for those who had already decided they were going into a career in the NHS, which is also an important result.

Ambassadors also felt that the programme had a positive impact on pupils. When asked what they enjoyed about being an Ambassador, interviewees spoke about a sense of making a difference to the NHS and to young people.

*“I think it's got to be that feeling that you have the potential to make a difference and even if it’s just that one person you remember talking to someone 10 years ago and it sticks with you and that’s what you want to achieve – you want to be the spark in the back of somebody’s mind.” [Ambassador]*

*“It’s talking to people about what I do. It’s empowering and motivating and trying to encourage them to think of a bigger picture. I’m a nurse by background but I’ve done a lot more than nursing – HR/counsellor/university lecturer – I want people to think about what they can do – be wider than just*

*NHS – voice for the voiceless. I enjoy talking about my journey to encourage other people to think bigger. [Ambassador]*

*“If I can come away feeling that I ‘ve inspired one person. I’ve chosen admin as a career – often admin doesn’t get the kudos it deserves. If I can show one person that huge organisations need administration to work.” [Ambassador]*

Previous reports on the programme also indicate that the Ambassador programme has been largely successful in its aim of exposing young people to the diversity of NHS careers. After interacting with NHS Ambassadors, three-quarters of Primary Futures participants said that they learned about a new jobxviii. It has played a role in de-bunking gender stereotypes in health careers, as 88% of Primary Futures participants reported that they now believed men and women could have the same job.xix

Additionally, teachers saw positive impacts on the confidence and interest of their students.xx

## 8.2 Impact on schools

One school-lead stated that they had a really high progression route, with a lot of students taking subjects within health and social care when they went on to further education, and one of the main aims of the school was to help the young people make the right decisions to get there.

*“It helps show our young people diverse roles they are able to pursue in the future and getting people in front of them who they can aspire to be like.” [School-lead]*

Another school-lead stated that the programme was helping them to achieve one of the main aims of their school in raising the aspirations of the young people.

*“We have had some go on to medical school or nursing degrees, whereas before they wanted to be midwives [or other less “high level” roles]. So they’re getting more aspirational.” [School-lead]*

The quote demonstrates that for this school lead, the notion that clinical careers are more ‘high level’ than non-clinical careers, remains. This is at odds with the spirit of the NHS Ambassador programme which is designed to emphasise to children and young people that all roles are valid in the NHS and that the modern NHS is made up of many people, not just doctors and nurses.

The wider impact mentioned by school-leads was the increased school staff awareness of careers in the NHS. School-leads stated that the programme had developed their workforce knowledge as well as the students, and they were seeing a long-term *“drip-drip”* effect of teachers being able to inspire some of the younger year groups about the opportunities that could arise through NHS careers.

# 8.3 Impact on Ambassadors

Ambassadors were asked to reflect on whether they had learnt anything from their involvement in the programme. Several mentioned that it helped them with their communications skills. They discussed learning how to *pitch* their presentations to different audiences while keeping them engaged. Others reflected on how they found being made to think about their job and how to explain it to someone who was not from an NHS background, beneficial.

*“Comms skills - confidence increasing - learning how to speak to children - making yourself simplify things is a really good skill. Just being made to think about my role is great.” [Ambassador]*

One respondent spoke about how working with children might be useful in their future career.

*“Learning how to communicate with children is always good - I don't work with children now, but I have*

*done, and I probably will in the future.” [Ambassador]*

Another Ambassador found a more direct link into their day job.

*“I’ve taken it back into my job... my job is about thinking of the future for radiographers. I’ve learnt that young people don’t want to go to Uni and get lots of debt. So we’ve got to think of putting more*

*apprenticeships in place... I take it back into my day job every day – trying to get them to understand – it's good to get those people who don’t know what they really want to do. Really translates into the day job for*

*me.” [Ambassador]*

Most respondents reported that their Ambassador activities did not contribute to their career progression or count towards professional development in a formal way.

*“I get no career recognition for doing it” [Ambassador]*

*“[There is] no career structural development – my managers don’t know about it.” [Ambassador]*

However, one Ambassador went on to explain that it didn’t bother them that their volunteering wasn’t recognised as part of their career progression because they didn’t do it for this reason.  *“I have had to fight for my learning opportunities on my own – I love doing it and that’s enough for me.” [Ambassador]*

This feedback was reflected in the literature review which showed that the NHS staff that commit their time to be an Ambassador are the backbone of the programme. As well as positively impacting the students, evidence from the Ambassador programme shows that both employers and

Ambassadors report positive impacts from participating. For example, participants reported a positive correlation between volunteering time and productivity at work.xxi  Over 60% of Ambassadors who volunteered for more than 15 days a year, said they were more productive at work as a result. xxii For example, an Ambassador highlighted how participating benefitted their work: “*it challenged me to explain things in a much clearer way which will also assist me when working with some of the patients I deal with on a daily basis*.”xxiii

### 9. Learning from other ambassador programmes

Workplace Ambassador schemes are commonly used to engage young people with potential careers, especially in STEM fields.xxiv Common amongst these programmes is an aim to introduce young people to a range of professions in an engaging manner, so that they are more interested in pursuing these careers. This section will look at best practice in this area and what has been successful in similar programmes and where opportunities may exist for learning from other Ambassador programmes. Evidence demonstrates that successful Ambassador programmes involve a sustained or continuous relationship between employer and the educational establishment. It is important to include thinking around how these programmes might be delivered virtually in recognition of constraints on staff time and resources.

#### 9.1 Sustained engagement

Evidence shows that programmes which are the most effective in changing young people’s interest in careers, are those which provide opportunities for long-term engagement instead of one-off events.xxv According to available information about Ambassadors, their engagement with schools usually consists of single events and continuously available online resources, where the onus is on the young person to access and engage. By offering a series of diverse events to schools, compared to one-off sessions, the Ambassador scheme may have more success in building interest and inspiring young people to pursue a career in the NHS.

Inspiring the Future offers one-off single events which allows children and young people to be exposed to a wide range of jobs within the NHS. The model of one-off engagements allows greater flexibility for NHS staff choosing to participate in the programme. Some Ambassadors expressed a wish to engage on a longer-term basis with local schools, while others were content with a one-off engagement model.

#### 9.2 Ease of volunteering

A major barrier in many Ambassador schemes, is the co-ordination between schools and potential Ambassador visits. In terms of engaging with schools, many employers cite that they are prevented from working with the schools because of the bureaucracy, they are not asked, and they do not have the time.xxvi Currently, most Ambassadors sign-up for events via an online platform from Education and Employers, where they can accept invitations from schools or volunteer themselves for events. Reports indicate that on the online platform, events only have a 10% acceptance rate from

Ambassadors.xxvii This rate of invitation acceptance is attributed to staff not having enough time and short notice changes in school and staff schedules.xxviii The online platform for booking and accepting events appears to work for both Ambassadors and schools. Reasons for low numbers of bookings from schools and acceptance of requests by Ambassadors may lie in better understanding of time pressures on both sides as well as a need for longer term planning resulting in both schools and Ambassadors appreciating each other’s timescales and anticipating demand. Increasing the number, geographic dispersion, and availability of NHS Ambassadors is key to expanding its reach.

#### 9.3 Inspiring young people

Ambassador programmes aim to give young people more insight into the day-to-day work of careers, which allows them to make more informed decisions about their future jobs.xxix Evidence on effective Ambassador programmes indicates that to engage people effectively, the workplace Ambassadors need to be effective in building connections between their careers and the personal interests of young people.xxx This could include highlighting links between their careers and real-world problems that young people may see in their lives. The Ambassadors programme could expand beyond explaining the roles of NHS staff and relating it to young people’s lives and local context. This would deepen the experience of the programme as young people could see the impact working in the NHS can have. For example, an Ambassador from public health would demonstrate how careers in these areas can be open to people without a medical background. For young people interested in preventing poor health habits developing, or who are interested in the wider determinants of health such an approach would demonstrate that the NHS has space for many people from different backgrounds.

#### 9.4 Role models

A key result of successful Ambassador programmes is the ability to break down young people’s stereotypes about professions.xxxi Ambassadors have been successful in this, as exemplified in anecdotal evidence. Their 'What’s My Line’ activity, where students ask questions to guess the profession of the Ambassadors, has been used effectively to counter gender stereotypes, for example by having male nurses.xxxii Additionally, it has been shown that the manner in which Ambassadors are presented to young people can change their views on their suitability for a career. For example, not framing the Ambassadors as ‘geniuses’ or also by presenting young Ambassadors can help students visualise themselves in these roles.xxxiii Greater attention to how the programme addresses these wider aims, such as by ensuring Ambassadors and programme materials use gender-neutral language and use diverse Ambassadors from senior positions, is important to achieving the impacts seen in similar Ambassador programmes.

### 10. Conclusion and Learning Points

### Conclusions from desk review

The Ambassador programme clearly plays an important role in introducing young people to the range of careers options within the NHS. Based on the evidence reviewed, there are several key conclusions:

* The Ambassador programme has included a wide range of NHS employees who participated in both in-person and online events.
* There are regional differences in the number of active NHS volunteers.
* It is necessary to ensure that the Ambassadors present at events continue to represent the diversity of employees in the NHS.
* Covid-19 highlighted the importance of digital resources in increasing access to the Ambassador programme. Interactive and engaging digital resources have the potential to expand the reach of the Ambassador programme beyond its current limits set by geography and time restraints faced by volunteers.
* The Ambassador programme has had a positive influence on both young people and ambassadors.
* NHS Ambassadors is aligned with several of the main aims and activities of comparable ambassador programmes.
* The impact of the programme could be improved by focusing on having repeated interactions with young people, following best practice from other similar programmes.
* Connecting the work of the Ambassadors to young people’s daily lives can deepen their interest and understanding of NHS careers.
* Programme activities should be tailored to the audience, ensuring that they help dispel stereotypes and provide relatable role models for young people.

### Conclusions from NHS Ambassador interviews

General themes to emerge from the fieldwork with NHS Ambassadors include the immense enthusiasm interviewees express for the NHS and their role within it. Alongside their passion for the NHS was a theme that was found across all interviews that involved the wish to recruit or encourage the next cohort of talent into the NHS. Respondents were not only interested in recruitment for the sake of the NHS, but they were motivated to help young people at a time in their lives they recognised might be difficult for those who did not know exactly what they wanted to do. Many respondents mentioned that they would have liked someone from the NHS to speak to them about the diversity of careers and alternative pathways into the NHS when they were younger.

All respondents spoke about wanting to ‘give back’ to their local schools and communities. Among all interviewees there was a recognition that the NHS is rooted in its local populace, and they viewed their NHS Ambassador roles as a way of strengthening these ties.

Almost all respondents spoke about how they would find an NHS Ambassador network helpful. Some spoke of feeling ‘lonely’ in their Ambassador role. Particularly for those Ambassadors who did not enjoy the support of their manager, the NHS Ambassador role could feel lonely. Many were keen to participate but said they were never contacted. This led some of them to wonder what they had done wrong. Several spoke about how if a network of Ambassadors existed, it would help not only with morale, but practically as it would enable the sharing of tips for events, promotional materials and ideas for interactive sessions.

All felt that schools should be supported to learn how best to use their time. Others mentioned that better communications between schools and the programme would help. Some noted that they might be contacted for an event and then hear nothing for months. They wondered if this was due to the school calendar but also felt that some advance warning of when requests were more likely to be made would help them in planning their own time.

Ambassadors are a group of self-selecting highly motivated people. They are keen to represent and support the NHS and are passionate about recruiting the next cohort of talent. They sometimes felt underappreciated and underused. They can feel unsupported in their role of Ambassadors and would welcome a network offering support and knowledge sharing being made available to them.

### Conclusions from school staff interviews

School leads collectively thought the Ambassadors programme adapted and met the needs of their school. The activities delivered provided invaluable support to students and gave a great insight into the types of careers on offer through the NHS, especially those they weren’t aware of before. They were also keen for personalised, one-to-one sessions with young people and Ambassadors to be made more widely available, because they saw a great benefit for their students.

They felt that the portal was easily accessible, and there was enough of a range of Ambassadors available from different areas of the NHS to choose from, depending on the activities they were wanting to showcase in their school. They also felt that they worked collectively well with

Ambassadors ahead of the school visit to make sure everything was in place on both ends to ensure the visit would run smoothly.

Finally, school-leads stated that the impact the programme was having on their school could be seen through some of the changes in decision making within the young people in relation to further education, and career paths. This makes the programme a worthwhile aspect of their careers offer.

### Overall

Communication and awareness

* A support network for NHS Ambassadors was identified by interviewees as something they would welcome.
* All ambassador interviewees reported that awareness raising among NHS staff is needed.
* Many reported being underused by local schools and called for an awareness raising campaign targeted at schools.

Planning and delivery

* A timetable of planned local events set for 6 months ahead would be useful to ambassadors to aid their planning.
* Better lead in times.

Review and monitoring

* Monitoring data that allows comparison between take up of the NHS Ambassador programme with the staff profile of the NHS.
* Analysis of data showing activity of Ambassador events would be useful. Several ambassadors spoke about having completed the training but never being used.
* Analysis going beyond numbers of NHS staff that have joined the programme but includes their utilisation rate would enable identification of areas where schools may need some support to understand how to better use them.

Removal of barriers

* Staff should not have to use annual leave to complete ambassador events.
* Lack of awareness among NHS staff of the programme.
* Lack of physical resources when they attend in-person events.
* Ambassador participation could be rewarded through inclusion in career development pathways or annual appraisals.

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