

## **2021/22 “PULSE” SURVEY**

# **Perceptions of HEE from key national stakeholders**

*Report prepared by:*

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## Executive summary

Between December 2021 and February 2022, HEE conducted its own short 'pulse' survey interviews of 19 of its closest partners and stakeholders, to gain an updated view of how they view the organisation, with a particular focus on how HEE has changed over the past year – and since the first survey was conducted in summer 2019. Most of the stakeholders chosen had a national focus, and included representatives from government; health arm's length bodies; regulators; professional standard setting organisations; representatives of health providers; higher education; and trades unions. Most interviewees were from the organisation's top team, where possible at Chair and Chief Executive level.

The interviews used the same set of exploratory questions for each interview to explore how HEE is perceived by stakeholders. This qualitative approach allowed interviewers to explore issues and themes in depth. Responses from the interviews were grouped into themes and, where a consistent message was heard, have been illuminated in the main report by quotes from stakeholders. The key messages from stakeholders are summarised under each of the interview questions:

### 1. Current interaction

#### ***Which parts of HEE are you/your organisation mainly in contact with?***

Several stakeholders interacted with people across HEE at national and regional level but most specified areas of contact, such as strategic interaction with senior leadership and their deputies, as well as interaction relating to medical education and training; education of clinical professions, particularly nursing but also the allied health professions; education commissioning; workforce planning and intelligence; workforce transformation; and global health.

### 2. Working relationships and engagement

#### ***How would you describe your relationship with HEE?***

Most stakeholders were overwhelmingly complimentary about their relationship with HEE, describing their interactions as constructive and positive at all touch points; with many relationships built over a number of years and continuing to get stronger.

Several interviewees felt that relationships had improved with new senior leadership and through joint working through challenging times, over the past couple of years.

A few stakeholders noted areas for improvement. These included HEE giving appropriate weight to the views from organisations with a wider constituency, and working to strengthen some of its local relationships.

#### ***a) What works well in your relationship?***

Many stakeholders spoke about the open and honest communication they had with HEE and how that helped with solving issues in collaboration. Interviewees reported high levels of engagement from HEE, with individuals going out of their way to do this.

In addition to healthy tensions between HEE and their own organisation, a number of stakeholders commented that HEE managed political tensions well.

Stakeholders felt their relationships with HEE were built on a foundation of shared values and mutual respect – they often see themselves as one team and speak well of each other. They felt that this was modelled from the top, with senior leadership taking engagement and collaboration seriously.

Interviewees felt that HEE was strategically aligned in terms of what they wanted to see regarding the impact of training and education on the development of the workforce, and the improvement of care being provided; and they felt that HEE was flexible in how it applied its policies.

#### ***b) What works less well? How could this be improved?***

Stakeholders were keen to see even greater, earlier and more structured engagement and collaboration on issues, with a plea for greater transparency about the challenges HEE itself faces, particularly around money.

A number of stakeholders spoke about inconsistent or slow application of agreements, and messages breaking down when moving from national to the regional level.

It was also felt that HEE could lend its support to managing complex groups of stakeholders, in situations where relationships and collaboration can be negatively affected by third party dynamics.

### ***c) Has the relationship changed in the past year? If it has, how?***

Many stakeholders felt that relationships were more positive than a year ago and significantly better compared to a few years ago, with more regular interactions and shared updates – often due to closer working in response to the pandemic. These strengthened relationships have helped to make difficult conversations easier.

A number of interviewees also felt that relationships had enhanced with a change of senior leadership at HEE, and that these relationships were just continuing to grow and improve with an ever-shifting environment.

A few stakeholders reported no specific change in their relationship over the past year but felt that it was positive prior to that anyway.

Although no stakeholders felt that their relationship with HEE had worsened, there was acknowledgement that meeting virtually hadn't always helped and the prospect of more face-to-face interactions in the future would be beneficial.

### ***d) Do you feel HEE uses your input effectively? Does HEE seek your views at the right time?***

Interviewees, overall, felt that HEE uses their input effectively and engaged them in a timely manner; although some felt it was still variable, particularly at the local level, with stakeholders sometimes being brought into work later than ideal - although it was recognised that this was sometimes outside of HEE's control, with prime responsibility sitting with partner organisations.

Stakeholders suggested a range of areas where HEE could seek their input in the future, namely: support with relationship building and influencing; data sharing across ALBs; workforce planning; and retention and skill mix.

### ***e) HEE has recently published an Annual Review summary document and a 'You said we did' update for stakeholders - have you seen either or both of these and if so, did you find them helpful or have any suggestions on how they could be improved?***

Most interviewees had not seen these documents but those who did felt they were helpful, although suggested the 'You said, we did' update could be shorter and punchier.

## **3. Impact of HEE on stakeholder's organisation**

### ***a) What do you value most about HEE?***

Interviewees' responses to this question brought out three main points:

- HEE is an organisation which is firmly focused on education and training, with levers to pull
- HEE's leadership and convening role
- Personal relationships with HEE's people.

### ***b) Has HEE's impact on your organisation changed over the past year? If so, how?***

Most stakeholders felt their relationships with HEE were already very good, so saw no change. Others commented that they had seen a very positive impact more widely in HEE, with some attributing it to the changes of senior leadership.

A number of people noted HEE's impact on better collaboration (including at system level), with HEE being better at keeping national stakeholders in the loop; although some would still welcome more of this.

Several people noted the impact that HEE had made over the past year around developing the Long-Term Strategic Framework for Health and Social Care and Workforce Planning.

#### **4. Role of HEE within the sector/system**

##### **a) How well does HEE understand the challenges facing the system?**

Interviewees felt that HEE has a generally good understanding of the challenges the system faces, although several expressed concern that this could be weakened by the move to NHS England (NHSE).

##### **b) How clear is HEE's role within the system, and what would you say HEE does and does not have responsibility for?**

Stakeholders felt that HEE's role is generally clear, although several felt that was dependent on who you asked, i.e. it is understood at the national system level but reduces as you move through the regions to the front line.

##### **c) In which areas has HEE had influence or impact?**

Stakeholders felt HEE had demonstrated impact in a number of areas, most notably:

- Responsiveness to Covid; with a huge positive impact on students
- Understanding of the short, medium and long term nature of workforce issues and needs, and the impact of changing models of care.

##### **d) What has changed in these three areas over the past year?**

Stakeholders noted steady positive progress in how HEE operated and was viewed over the past year, noting that they thought both internal and external relationships had improved under the new leadership.

They also felt that HEE had succeeded in supporting alignment across the system and that the organisation had demonstrated better understanding of learners' views and needs through efforts to facilitate trainee progression during the pandemic.

##### **e) Are there any areas where you would like to see HEE have a greater impact or focus?**

Stakeholders would like to see HEE have a greater impact or focus on influencing the system at (Integrated Care System) ICS and place level and to be clear about the specific things it can offer through:

- Ensuring a strong voice for education and training at this level
- Helping to develop workforce planning capacity
- Supporting a learning culture.

They also suggested that HEE could focus on:

- Having and communicating a clear set of priorities – notably around securing and deploying resources
- Developing its understanding of and relationships with social care.

There were also suggestions to improve HEE's focus on skills required for working in the community.

#### **5. Challenges and future directions**

##### **a) What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing HEE at present or in the future?**

Stakeholders named a number of challenges facing HEE, specifically:

- Managing the fallout from the pandemic, especially for training
- Managing relationships up and down, both at UK and local system level

- Specific issues around maintaining a multi professional focus and on nursing and midwifery, with recruitment and retention.

But they also identified significant opportunities, with:

- The development of the long-term strategic framework for workforce
- Workforce development and transformation, especially with the digital agenda
- Contributing to a positive culture in the service, e.g. work on diversity and inclusion and supporting retention
- Developing more strategic relationships with academic partners.

#### **a) *What do you see as the biggest opportunities and challenges of the proposed merger of HEE with NHS England and NHS Improvement?***

Stakeholders specified the following challenges associated with the transition to a new organisation:

- Risk of de-prioritisation of education and training
- Loss of momentum of important HEE initiatives
- Loss of HEE talent and the risk of losing individual relationships with its stakeholders
- A negative impact on HEE's culture and working style.

However, they also saw that the transition presented clear opportunities for HEE, with:

- Better integration of workforce issues (education and training, demand and supply) with services, thereby increasing HEE's profile and standing and potentially simplifying some of the current processes through closer working with service planning
- Streamlining the national and regional landscape for system level bodies
- Stimulating positive reform of NHSE as it becomes a new body.

A number of stakeholders commended HEE's messaging in describing the change as the beginning of a new organisation, as opposed to a takeover, and noted the positive influence that Navina's leadership style had had on the transition to date.

### **6. Key messages for HEE's chief executive**

Headline messages included:

- Keep doing what you're doing
- Continue listening to your stakeholders and working in collaboration
- Use your friends
- Keep strong for the challenges ahead with the transition to the new organisation
- Continue nurturing your people and embedding distributed leadership
- Carry on focusing on relationships
- Champion HEE's unique expertise and focus on a few things to do them really well.

### **7. Areas for future focus**

In addition to the transition to the new organisation, stakeholders suggested a number of priorities for HEE to focus on over the next year:

- Workforce planning – the long-term strategic framework
- Securing investment in workforce
- Post-pandemic planning and recovery, including mental health and wellbeing for all learners
- System focus
- A number of specific initiatives, including: preceptorship; career progression for senior trainees; nursing associates; genomics; digital; recruitment and retention; and return to practice.