



Agency to Bank migration

How the NHS Can Reduce Agency Spend
Through Effective Workforce Migration

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Introduction: The National Picture and the Challenge Ahead

Reducing the cost of the flexible workforce - particularly high-cost agency staff - has been a long-standing objective for NHS organisations across the UK. Over recent years, progress has been made, with many Trusts improving workforce planning, filling substantive vacancies, and expanding their internal staff banks. Despite this, agency usage remains a pressing issue, consuming billions in NHS funding every year.

In 2024 alone, the NHS spent an estimated £3 billion on agency staff. Recognising the unsustainable nature of this trend, the government has issued new operational guidelines mandating a minimum 30% reduction in agency spend by 2025/26. More radically, the Secretary of State has signalled an ambition to work towards full agency eradication.

However, achieving these targets - let alone eliminating agency use altogether - is a complex challenge. Medical staff, particularly doctors, remain the biggest cost driver, representing 50% of agency expenditure, while contributing only 38% of agency hours. This stark discrepancy highlights inflated market rates and agency fees that continue to strain NHS budgets.

NHS Professional's Role in Reducing NHS Agency Spend

Founded with a core mandate to reduce NHS reliance on agency staffing, NHS Professionals (NHSP), operates a range of managed bank and agency migration solutions. The flagship initiative, National Bank, is designed to act as a supplementary workforce pool, converting high-cost agency workers into more cost-effective bank staff.

The National Bank fills any remaining shift gaps not covered by an internal bank, preventing those shifts from being filled by agency. Over time, these bank workers can also be transitioned into permanent substantive roles, creating a long-term, sustainable workforce solution.

NHSP's extensive experience has led to the development of a best practice framework for agency migration. This two-phase approach outlines actionable steps, highlights common challenges, and offers a roadmap to reduce agency usage, without compromising patient care or workforce safety.

Phase One: Adopting the Right Agency Migration Strategy

1. Understand: Analyse Local Workforce Challenges

Every NHS Trust faces unique pressures when it comes to staffing. The reasons for agency dependency can vary - from poor workforce planning and persistent vacancies, to local politics and personal preferences for agency work.

NHSP begins with a full data-driven analysis of a Trust's agency usage. This involves:

- Reviewing workforce plans and vacancy patterns
- Analysing agency booking behaviour
- Speaking directly to internal staff and managers
- Understanding why existing agency workers haven't joined the bank

This deep dive produces a tailored Agency Migration Strategy, co-designed with the Trust. It pinpoints areas of concern, such as departments or roles with high agency usage, and sets out a plan to address each.

Real-World Insight

At many Trusts, "vacancy" is listed as the top reason for agency shift bookings. However, conversations on the ground often reveal otherwise - it's simply the first option on the booking form. This shows the importance of qualitative input alongside data analysis.



2. Commit: Embed the Strategy Organisation-Wide

True success comes when the entire Trust, from senior leadership to frontline staff, commits to the strategy.

- All stakeholders must buy in - from executives to bank teams to ward managers.
- Commitment extends beyond planning: it requires real-time action and behavioural change.
- Enforcement is vital: policies must be upheld, and deviations addressed swiftly.

Without strong internal enforcement, ingrained habits - like last-minute agency bookings - can resurface and derail progress.

3. Communicate: Keep Everyone Informed and Aligned

Effective communication is key. Everyone involved - from agency workers to internal staff - must understand what's changing and why.

NHSP supports Trusts with:

- Internal communications from senior leaders
- Departmental briefings and Q&A sessions
- On-site engagement with agency staff
- Clear guidance for ward managers and booking teams

Timing is crucial: Agency staff must be engaged early before agencies themselves are notified. This prevents agencies from redirecting or poaching staff during transition periods.

4. Administrate: Execute the Plan Efficiently

Agency migration involves a significant amount of administrative effort - but it's worth it. NHSP helps Trusts with the heavy lifting:

- Fast-tracked but compliant onboarding of agency workers to the NHSP bank
- Shift handovers, profile switches, and system updates
- Managing communications with existing agencies
- Coordinating with internal bank teams for smooth integration

The goal is a seamless transition where the agency worker continues their duties with no impact on patient care or staff morale.

5. Enforce: Monitor, Refine and Hold the Line

Behaviour change doesn't happen overnight. Even with the best plan, success requires constant monitoring, analysis, and reinforcement.

- Regular reporting of performance data at ward and staff group level
- Analysis of ongoing agency use and reasons behind it
- Feedback loops between NHSP and the Trust to course-correct as needed

Trusts must commit to enforcing policies. NHSP provides insights and support, but enforcement must come from within.



Phase Two: Overcoming Common Challenges in Agency Migration

Even the best-laid plans will encounter resistance. NHSP has identified six key challenges and developed mitigation strategies to overcome them.

1. Short-Notice Emergency Cover (Within 48 Hours)

Last-minute needs often default to agency. NHSP addresses this by building rapid-response pools within National Bank, offering premium pay for emergency shifts, but still delivering cost savings.

2. Long-Standing Agency Workers

These are the toughest to convert. NHSP uses deep-dive analysis to understand what keeps them in agency roles and creates conditions (e.g. pay matching, hours guarantees) to encourage migration.

3. Ward-Level Reluctance to Change

Cultural resistance can derail migration. NHSP supports Trusts with on-the-ground engagement, data transparency, and top-down enforcement to drive behaviour change.

4. Bank Worker Availability (Especially in Niche Roles)

Where agencies dominate due to specialist skill gaps, NHSP targets recruitment to fill those needs or offers bespoke migration plans for niche agency staff.

5. Agency Worker Reluctance

Agency workers value flexibility, higher pay, and perks like accommodation. NHSP dispels myths (e.g. umbrella company pay), conducts payslip reviews and replicates benefits where possible.

6. Trust Buy-In and Follow-Through

Ultimately, Trusts must lead the charge. NHSP can support, advise, and execute - but without active participation and top-down commitment, progress stalls.

Partnering for Success - Real Case Studies from NHSP

Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BCHFT)

Challenge: High use of off-framework agency staff

Solution: National Bank with phased implementation

Results:

- £8/hour savings for Registered Nurses
- 0% off-framework use by January 2024
- 50% of agency staff migrated, remaining 50% replaced with new bank workers

Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT)

Challenge: High volumes of agency bookings across a large acute Trust

Solution: Strict vetting of agency supply, direct engagement with NHSP

Results:

- £2.9 million savings
- 95,000+ agency hours eliminated
- 69 agency staff migrated to bank over 12 months

These examples underscore that while the journey can be long, the outcomes are both measurable and meaningful.

Conclusion: Building a Future Without Agency Dependency

The NHS faces significant pressure to reduce agency spend and transition to a sustainable, flexible workforce model. The stakes are high, but the solution is clear: **Agency migration.**

NHSP's proven model - delivered through its Managed Service and National Bank solutions - offers a practical, scalable approach that has delivered real-world results.

With the right partner, the right plan and the right commitment, NHS Trusts can not only meet the government's targets, but also create a workforce model that's fit for the future.

Let's work together to build a better, more cost-effective NHS.



