



**NHS**

Professionals



SPOTLIGHT REPORT



**Specialist Support:**  
Profiling NHS Professionals' Allied  
Health Professionals, Healthcare  
Scientists and Social Workers



PUTTING PEOPLE IN PLACES TO *care*

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# FOREWORD

At NHS Professionals, we are proud to recognise every member of the NHS family. We've built our reputation on providing clinical staff to the NHS and seen the number of Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers on our Bank grow in recent years.

A total of 9,346 Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers worked through NHS Professionals as Bank Members in 2021-2022 - a significant achievement and an increase on 2020-2021. Many are Bank Members who work flexibly with us and carry out a full-time job for a Trust. Growing demand for flexible shifts has meant that the number of Bank hours worked by this group in 2021-22 exceeded 1.7 million – an increase of more than 600,000 hours on the previous year.

This timely report uses innovative 'persona' research to shine a light on Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers – especially the growing number who choose to work flexibly on our Bank. Importantly, it suggests there are subtle differences in the characteristics and motivations within each group and across different roles within the same group. Using this data can help us and the Trusts we work with maximise the talent within these specialist staff groups and deliver consistently high-quality services.

**Ana Skerrett,**  
Business Manager, Allied Health Professionals,  
Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers, NHS Professionals

# INTRODUCTION

This Spotlight report summarises the size and organisation of the Allied Health Professional, Healthcare Scientist and Social Worker group in the NHS and presents a set of role-specific 'personas' for staff working flexibly as NHS Professionals Bank Members. The personas are fictional and presented for illustrative purposes only, but they are based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the Bank Members consulted for this research.

## WHO ARE ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS?

Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) are the third largest workforce in the NHS<sup>1</sup>. By implementing a holistic approach, AHPs help people live their lives as fully as possible by treating, rehabilitating, and improving the lives of patients. Their focus is on prevention and improvement of health and wellbeing to help individuals to live full and active lives within their family circles, social networks, educational settings and the workplace.

There are a lot of different professions which are included within the AHP sector. Among them are:

- Mammographer
- Speech and Language Therapist
- Podiatrist
- Dietitian
- Occupational Therapist
- Radiographer

<sup>1</sup> [www.england.nhs.uk/ahp/about](http://www.england.nhs.uk/ahp/about)

<sup>2</sup> [www.hee.nhs.uk/about/how-we-work/your-area/midlands/midlands-news/healthcare-science-week](http://www.hee.nhs.uk/about/how-we-work/your-area/midlands/midlands-news/healthcare-science-week)

## WHO ARE HEALTHCARE SCIENTISTS?

There are over 50,000 Healthcare Scientists working for the NHS and public health services<sup>2</sup>. Together they provide the scientific backbone of the NHS, and their work underpins 80% of all diagnoses. They play a vital role in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of a huge number of medical conditions.

Just some of the many roles which fall under Healthcare Science include:

- Phlebotomist
- Audiologist
- Lab Assistant
- Biomedical Scientist
- Pharmacist

## WHO ARE SOCIAL WORKERS?

Social workers in the NHS support individuals and families requiring their services. Working across a number of different clinical departments and services, they help vulnerable people, protecting them from harm and abuse and assisting them to live independently. Often this involves working with multiple agencies such as the police, probation services, education providers, charities and community organisations. Some social workers work in rapid response teams, based in acute or community settings. Others work with individuals and families who have specific conditions or are engaged with specific providers such as mental health services.



## OUR RESEARCH

Blackbridge Communications undertook research in 2022 to shed light on the different ways and reasons why our Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers work flexibly with NHS Professionals. Over several weeks, Blackbridge consulted 81 Bank Members through seven focus groups, one survey and seven stakeholder interviews.

Using this data, Blackbridge identified a range of fictional personas to help profile specific types of Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers and categorise their different motivations for working flexibly through NHS Professionals.

Gathering deeper insights into this staff group helps us and the Trusts we work with engage with our Bank Members in ways sensitive to their unique needs and motivations. Using this approach we can maximise the key contribution Bank-based Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers make to the NHS, especially in the era of integrated care.



# ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS STAFF 'PERSONAS'

## ROLE-SPECIFIC PERSONAS

### THEATRE PRACTITIONERS AND OPERATING DEPARTMENT PRACTITIONERS: 'FLEXIBLE CAREER-CHANGERS'

Broadly an even gender mix, this group tend to have significant experience in this field and are at Band 5/6. A work-life balance is important to them, as is the culture of the organisation in which they work. 17% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Raphael...** he's now in his second career and has several years' experience as a theatre practitioner. The working culture of the Trust he works at is important to him. Making a real contribution to people's health and quality of life, through the NHS, is also a real driver.

#### Things our Theatre Practitioners and Operating Department Practitioners told us:

- They have eclectic career experience
- They have significant in-role experience
- The NHS is an important part of their life
- Facebook is their go-to social media

### PHYSIOTHERAPISTS: 'EARLY AND CURIOUS DECISION-MAKERS'

This group identified as all female, mostly with less than three years' experience. They are not interested in commuting more than 30 minutes and tend to have their own transport. They like the NHS for the variety and flexibility it offers. They also like the idea of taking their training overseas. 10% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Ellie...** she has wanted to be a physiotherapist since secondary school and joined the profession 18 months ago. She is keen on learning and wants a variety of working environments to broaden her experiences. She is proud to be part of the NHS. However, she is also considering taking her trade and her learning abroad.

#### Things our Physiotherapists told us:

- They have a lot of opportunities
- They love the variety that this career opens, including working overseas

### SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPISTS: 'LOYAL AND COLLECTIVE EXPLORERS'

This group predominantly identified as female, and they operate at Band 7/8. They are very loyal to the NHS and feel that it is supported and respected. They are inspired by helping their patients, but a work-life balance is important to them. They typically choose this career while in secondary school. They make extensive use of Bank shifts and tend to prefer longer-term placements. 5% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Aisha...** being part of the NHS is important to her. Aisha is happy to travel between 60 and 90 minutes to work and prefers longer-term placements. The specifics of her role and responsibilities are important to her when she is considering employment options. The worth and value that she and her profession can deliver to patients is a source of real pride.

#### Things our Speech and Language Therapists told us:

- They make good use of Bank work, putting in over 90 hours in a six-month period
- They use NHS Professionals as their exclusive flexible staff Bank
- The shifts they work tend to be longer-term

### RADIOGRAPHERS: 'THE TRAVELLING IMPACT SEEKERS'

Around three-quarters of this group identified as female, and they are typically Band 5-7. They are motivated by how valuable their expertise are and, as a result, their income is also important to them. They take on Bank work for a variety of reasons, including flexibility, additional pay, to help their team and because of their loyalty to the NHS. 5% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Jasmine...** the people around her and the culture they create together is a major part of why she works. The work she does is important and that motivates her. She's happy to travel up to an hour if the people she works with reflect her dedication. Jasmine likes the flexibility that Bank work provides. However, she is aware her profession also opens opportunities overseas.

#### Things our Radiographers told us:

- They are driven by doing something worthwhile and respected and doing it in a supportive team
- They put in significant Bank hours

### OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS: 'THE DIFFERENCE MAKERS'

This group mostly identified as female. They want to make a clear difference to people's lives. Occupational therapists are proud and passionate about their careers and see themselves as attentive listeners, delivering holistic results. 6% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Anita...** she loves working closely with patients, listening to them and being able to come up with creative activities that produce real benefits. She drives to work which is no more than 60 minutes away, and she feels the site or hospital she works at should be impressive. She wants a positive working culture and an environment that is modern and well-equipped. She is proud that her profession is well-regarded, full of variety and one in which she can progress. She can access great placements through NHS Professionals.

#### Things our Occupational Therapists told us:

- Their profession and what it enables is of real importance to them
- They like that shifts are always available



## HEALTHCARE SCIENCE STAFF 'PERSONAS'

### ROLE-SPECIFIC PERSONAS

#### BIOMEDICAL SCIENTISTS: 'THE PROUD PROBLEM SOLVERS'

This group predominantly identified as female, and tends to be at Band 6/7 level. They are proud to be part of a profession they feel has a clear link between science and care. Travel times are important, with the majority not willing to commute more than 30 minutes. 6% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Charlotte...**she has been working in the role for the last ten years. She values her life outside of work and her commuting drive must be no more than 30 minutes. Her role and the contribution that it makes to her patients are of huge importance to her, and so is the fact she is doing it within the NHS. Charlotte works a lot of Bank hours to fit around her schedule and help her team.

#### Things our Biomedical Scientists told us:

- They are proud about their profession and the contribution it makes
- Being part of the NHS is key to them

#### PHARMACISTS: 'SOUGHT AFTER AND EMPOWERED'

The entirety of this group identified as female. Pharmacists are motivated by short commute times and a positive working culture. They take real pride in their profession and enjoy the respect associated within the NHS. 7% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Julia...**she has a straightforward commute of no more than 30 minutes and uses her own car. She works to live, and flexibility is a must; her work and shifts have to fit around her life. She feels in demand and wants control over her work-life balance and uses NHS Professionals exclusively for ad hoc shifts. She is also very protective and proud of the NHS.

#### Things our Pharmacists told us:

- They take pride in their career and profession
- They are looking for an easy commute
- They want respect and to work in a positive culture
- They tend to use professional journals, NHS Jobs, LinkedIn and Google to search for their next job



## SOCIAL WORKER STAFF 'PERSONAS'

### ROLE-SPECIFIC PERSONAS

#### SOCIAL WORKERS: 'PROGRESS SEEKING, PEOPLE PROFESSIONALS'

This group largely identified as female, and they are at Band 6/7 level, usually with family commitments. They have some free time but not a huge amount. They are proud to work for the NHS. Playing a direct role in patient care is a key driver. They like the stability and security of their working environment and want to gain as broad an experience as possible. 5% of the total survey sample.



**Meet Faiza...**she's driven by the difference she can make to her patients and loves the variety and security her role provides. She is a natural people person, and her job is an extension of who she is. She is proud to be a part of the NHS but worries about a potential disconnect between her profession and those leading the organisation.

#### Things our Social Workers told us:

- They want to know they are progressing and developing
- A variety of shifts is important to them
- The NHS is an important part of their life

# OUR SERVICE FOR ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, HEALTHCARE SCIENTISTS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

## EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

Since 2001 we've built our reputation around the consistent supply of high-quality clinical staff – largely nurses. This remains the case today, but our Bank Member base of Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers is growing all the time and it's now a key part of our business as the NHS seeks to fill gaps in its workforce.

This research allows us to emphasise how important Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists and Social Workers are, and understand them better as they differ to nurses significantly. We're seeing more professionals from these staff groups choosing longer-term placements rather than short-term shift fill. During 2021-2022, we've been growing a talent pool of candidates and focusing on developing

our offer as a sustainable career solution for our Bank Members, rather than just a shift fill service. To keep pace with demand, we have a new applicant tracking system, helping us to find the best people to fill vacancies.

- Are you an Allied Health Professional, Healthcare Scientist or Social Worker interested in working flexibly? Learn more about our Bank Member opportunities by visiting [www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/en/campaigns/ahp-hub](http://www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/en/campaigns/ahp-hub)

- For Trusts, visit [www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/partners](http://www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/partners) to find out more about how we can recruit and retain your flexible specialist staff through our Managed Service Provider partnerships and modular workforce services.

## TESTIMONIALS

Here we present a small selection of recent comments from some of our Allied Health Professional, Healthcare Scientist and Social Worker Bank Members.



I like working with NHS Professionals because of the flexibility. I can choose my shifts to suit my workload and bank up more hours during the holidays to save up. I also get relevant experience for my career, which helps my studies as well.

**Emma Curran**, Occupational Therapist,  
Kent & Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust



I love having a positive impact on a patient's operative journey and being able to reassure and comfort patients post-surgery when they are most vulnerable. I work through NHS Professionals to be able to help my department. By doing extra shifts I am also giving myself more time and opportunity to develop skills.

**Alice Biggs**, Operating Department Practitioner,  
Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust



I love being able to keep my laboratory skills up to date, as my substantive role has taken me away from this setting. I also enjoy being able to train and mentor new and established colleagues in multiple aspects of laboratory work. NHS Professionals gives me the opportunity to earn extra.

**Carl Nicholas Webb**, Associate Practitioner Microbiology and Virology,  
University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust



I enjoy helping others and working with people through their recovery. I work through NHS Professionals because of the flexibility; it gives me the chance to work across different sites.

**Nicola Francalanza**, Social Worker,  
Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust





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