Trust Board (in Public)
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Report Title	People and Organisational Development (OD) Directorate Highlight Report
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Previous committees/groups	N/A
Recommended action(s) (assurance, approval, information)	Information/Assurance
Purpose of the paper	The report provides a brief overview of the highlights, lowlights, and risks within the People and OD Directorate.

Executive Summary

The People and Organisational Development Directorate continues to deliver a broad programme of work to address the Trust's principal workforce risks relating to culture, staff wellbeing, recruitment and retention, and leadership development.

Progress continues through the YAS Together culture programme, staff survey action planning, diversity and inclusion initiatives, sexual safety improvements and employee relations activity. Most workforce equality indicators have improved, although challenges remain in inclusive recruitment, experiences of bullying, harassment and abuse, and career progression. Employee relations activity remains broadly stable, while Employment Tribunal activity continues to require close oversight.

Sickness absence remains above target and increased slightly during the quarter, making improvement a key organisational priority. A structured absence reduction programme is progressing, supported by targeted interventions focused on wellbeing, mental health, musculoskeletal health, leadership and workforce recovery.

Recruitment and retention performance remains strong, supporting a reduction in the associated Board Assurance Framework risk rating. Workforce stability has improved, vacancies have reduced and recruitment pipelines remain healthy, while governance arrangements for bank workers are being strengthened.

Leadership and development indicators remain positive, with sector-leading appraisal outcomes, strong senior leadership compliance, continued review of statutory and mandatory learning, and national recognition for apprenticeship provision.

Overall, the Directorate is making good progress in reducing workforce risks, although sickness absence, equality outcomes, apprenticeship completion rates and Employment Tribunal activity remain areas requiring sustained focus.

Recommendation(s)	The Trust Board are asked to note the contents of the paper.
Link to Board Assurance Framework Risks (board and level 2 committees only)	6. Develop and sustain an open and positive workplace culture. 7. Support staff health and well-being effectively. 8. Deliver and sustain improvements in recruitment and retention.

	9. Develop and sustain improvements in leadership and staff training and development.

People and Organisational Development Directorate - Highlight Report

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper updates the Board on the key achievements, and ongoing work, of the People and Organisational Development Directorate, focusing on mitigating four principal risks from the Board Assurance Framework: workplace culture, staff health and well-being, recruitment and retention, and leadership and training:

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The NHS People Plan sets out the agenda, which supports how the NHS workforce can enable improvement of the patient experience. The Trust Strategy 'Great Care, Great People, Great Partner' supports the NHS People Plan and has a bold ambition 'Our People', that guides our work locally. These plans guide the Directorate as well as the day-to-day operations of leadership of an ambulance workforce.

2.2 The Board Assurance Framework (BAF) identifies four main risks linked to the Our People ambition, guiding the Directorate to address and resolve them. The four risks are:

#6 Ability to develop and sustain an open and positive workplace culture.

#7 Ability to support staff health and well-being effectively.

#8 Ability to deliver and sustain improvements in recruitment and retention.

#9 Ability to deliver and sustain improvements in leadership and staff training and development.

3.0 PEOPLE AND OD DIRECTORATE HIGHLIGHTS

3.1 The following sets out the key highlights of the directorate's work to mitigate and reduce the BAF risks.

#6 Ability to develop and sustain an open and positive workplace culture.

- **YAS Together** is focused on strengthening staff voice, embedding the Trust's behavioural framework, promoting psychological safety and supporting inclusive leadership through initiatives such as the Anti-Racism Charter and a new cultural awareness programme. Emphasis is being placed on ensuring operational colleagues are actively involved in shaping improvement priorities through engagement events, equality support networks and co-production approaches, e.g. strong participation and representation in an Anti-Racism consultation session. The programme is strongly aligned to the new NHS Staff Standards, including a focus on flexible working and staff experience. Overall, the cultural change programme remains on track to support the Trust's ambition of being a high-performing, inclusive and compassionate organisation.
- **2025 NHS Staff Survey:** Quarter one engagement cycle is complete, moving from results into structured action planning. Results have been shared across organisational forums and directorates, supported by Business Intelligence dashboard enhancements and further analysis on sexual safety, wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, and race equality. Directorates and teams have been supported to use the data to make local commitments, communicate transparently, and agree evaluation metrics focused on 'voice to influence' (ensuring staff feedback visibly shapes decisions), 'resilience to sustainability' (reducing workload pressure and improving safety and wellbeing) and 'stability to

progression' (strengthening career pathways, appraisal quality and development opportunities).

- **Diversity & Inclusion:** Workforce Race and Disability Equality Standards data was submitted meeting the 31 May statutory deadline. The majority of metrics have improved, although challenges remain in inclusive recruitment, experiences of bullying, harassment and abuse, and career progression. The Equality Support Networks have seen leadership changes as 'terms of office' come to an end although continued with strong joint working on station visits, cultural events and resources, a HQ Pride event, and automated membership processes. Analysis of the Lord Mann Review and NHS England immediate actions show good alignment with current practices and ongoing improvement work, e.g. development of Anti-Racism Charter, support resources including case studies and planned rollout of culture awareness sessions. Adoption of the Race and Health Observatory Seven Anti-Racism Principles as well as the Government definition of anti-Muslim hostility is in progress.
- **Sexual Safety:** The Trust continues to strengthen its approach to sexual safety through a comprehensive programme of governance, learning, prevention and cultural improvement. Oversight is provided through the Sexual Safety and Domestic Abuse Strategic Steering Group, which brings together insight from safeguarding, people processes, Freedom to Speak Up, trade unions and lived experience to drive organisational learning and improvement. The programme has matured beyond individual case management to focus on wider cultural change, workforce development and the prevention of inappropriate behaviour. A structured outcomes framework is being developed to strengthen assurance and demonstrate impact. Learning from sexual safety concerns, safeguarding cases and external developments is regularly reviewed to identify themes and inform improvements to policies, processes and staff support. Targeted communications, awareness campaigns and the Trust's Sexual Safety Charter continue to reinforce expected standards of behaviour and encourage colleagues to speak up. This work reflects the Trust's commitment to providing a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for staff, learners, volunteers, patients and the public.
- **Employee Relations** activity across the Trust remains broadly stable, with disciplinary, dignity at work, performance and sexual safety cases generally in line with levels reported by other ambulance services. Governance arrangements through the Professional Standards Panel continue to provide consistent oversight of key workforce decisions, while learning from disciplinary, sexual safety and recruitment-related cases has informed improvements to organisational processes and risk management. Employment Tribunal activity remains a significant area of focus, with 16 live cases during the quarter. However, the Trust successfully defended three cases, providing some confidence in the robustness of decision-making and case management arrangements. Improvement work continues to focus on reducing avoidable harm, encouraging earlier and more informal resolution of concerns, strengthening partnership working, preparing for legislative change, enhancing staff experience and maintaining a strong organisational commitment to sexual safety, fairness and accountability.

#7 Ability to support staff health and well-being effectively.

- **Sickness Absence:** The Trust's sickness rate deteriorated slightly increasing from 7.6% in April 2026 to 7.7% in June 2026 and remains above the 7.1% target. Given the concerning levels of absence, reducing absence remains a key Trust priority. A structured improvement programme has moved into the design and implementation phase, informed by data analysis, staff engagement and

stakeholder workshops. Six priority areas have been identified: leadership and culture, mental health and wellbeing, manual handling and musculoskeletal health, systems and processes, fatigue and recovery, and flexible, fair rostering. Planning is underway for pilot interventions to raise awareness and reduce musculoskeletal injury-related harm. A survey and review of existing resources have informed the prevention and recovery pathway within the absence management priority. Targeted operational interventions include enhanced psychological support, wellbeing and resilience initiatives, improved manual handling practice, BackTrack wearable technology to reduce injuries, and early referral to Health & Fitness Advisors for advice and recovery support. Early outcomes are encouraging, with evaluation continuing to identify and scale effective interventions that support sustainable improvements in staff wellbeing, attendance and patient care.

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Progress against the approved Health and Wellbeing plan 2026/27 is on track. Following completion of a comprehensive business case, work is now underway to extend the existing occupational health (OH) services contract and bring the management of occupational immunisations in-house.
- **Occupational Health:** Work continues to improve the quality and appropriateness of OH referrals and to reduce the associated cancellation costs, which have seen a slight increase in Q1 after a steady decline. To further support improvement efforts, work is due to start on the extension to existing OH service provision in readiness for 2027/28 with more rigour to contract management.

#8 Ability to deliver and sustain improvements in recruitment and retention.

- **Recruitment and retention:** Recruitment remains strong for Remote Patient Care, Ambulance Support Workers, and Paramedic programmes with a clear alignment with the Trust workforce plan. Although the Trust is nearly at full establishment overall, there are still vacancies in certain areas. Specifically, Integrated Urgent Care has a vacancy rate of 4.9%, Emergency Operations Centre stands at 9.7%, with 999 Operations currently exceeding their establishment by -0.8%. Turnover remains stable at a healthy 7.8% although, for IUC, it has remained high at 22.1%. Strengthened recruitment pipelines, improved retention, workforce stability and resolved staffing gaps justifies a reduction in the Board Assurance Framework risk rating from 15 to 10. The People Committee supported this reduction.
- **External Paramedic Recruitment:** A revised workforce requirement of 66-92 external Paramedics has been approved (previously 150). A strengthened recruitment and selection process including ECG Interpretation, Clinical Skills assessment and values-based interview has seen lower than anticipated pass rates. Resit opportunities have been offered for the knowledge and skills elements with 60 conditional offers made (24% of applicants). Further recruitment activity is ongoing where 66 minimum requirement is expected to be achieved. A series of six meetings have taken place with Higher Education Institute (HEI) partners to discuss the results, support for graduates who have not been successful and programme enhancements to ensure readiness for practice. A lessons-learned review on the newly implemented process is underway, using a Quality Improvement (QI) approach to evaluate the process and inform future campaigns.
- **Bank workers:** To address the corporate risk, a working group is reviewing the Trust's procedures for managing bank workers. This includes recruitment and exit processes, mandatory training, statutory sick pay entitlement, contract status, and entitlements. This will ensure robust processes and governance for safe,

compliant management of bank workers and support compliance with the Employment Rights Act 2025.

#9 Ability to deliver and sustain improvements in leadership and staff training and development.

- **Appraisal and Career Conversations:** YAS appraisal quality remains strong, with an average 2025/26 rating of 8.9/10, consistent with the previous year. The National NHS Staff Survey appraisal score increased from 4.0 to 4.3, placing YAS top of sector for the second year running. Staff satisfaction is high for preparation, environment, time, manager support, and quality of conversation, with scores around 89–90%. Improvement areas remain as appraisals need to better support job improvement, clear objective-setting, and feeling valued. The Appraisal Audit 2025 has led to updates in policy, templates, notifications, training, quality assurance, reporting, and escalation processes. Next steps focus on promoting quality resources, increasing survey responses, supporting managers, and reducing capacity barriers to meaningful appraisal conversations.
- **Senior Leadership Community (SLC) appraisal and career conversation window** ran across April to June with 92.1% compliance (14/07/26) with 3 directorates at 100%. Active discussions are ongoing with the managers of the 16 appraisals outstanding to provide support with completion. The Performance Review meetings actively monitor both appraisal and SLC compliance rates and plans to achieve timely completions.
- **Essential Learning Oversight Group (ELOG):** A key priority in 2026/27, transition year for statutory and mandatory learning as the framework is awaiting publication and the new nationally mandated learning is developed for release in April 2027, is a critical review of all locally mandated statutory and mandatory learning. Adopting the approach used for the national review, a three-stage Gateway process is being applied. Subject Matter Experts have been engaged and asked to submit gateway proposal for learning they wish to continue in 2027/28.
- **Apprenticeships:** Top 100 Apprenticeship Employers of the Year (Sunday Times) status was retained with YAS achieving #54. Retaining Top 100 status is part of our People Bold Ambition. This represents a reduction in our standing from 2025 at #12 which reflects the reduced number of Ambulance Support Workers new starters. London and North West Ambulance Services also retained their status but with a reduced ranking. Apprentices past their planned end date remains a focus, with a new Apprenticeship Management Standard Operating Procedure developed. This provides clear procedures for supporting apprentices fairly whilst protecting the Academy's funding and regulatory status.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 The work of the Directorate aims to reduce the risks set out in the Board Assurance Framework as well as meet the Trust’s bold ambitions and NHS People Plan.

4.2 We are committed to improving the staff experience to ensure our patients get the ‘Best Care’ possible. We know that there is much more we can do to ensure they come to work and give their best on every shift. The above work demonstrates our work programme is extensive and wide-ranging, and we will strive to ensure that our people can thrive at every opportunity.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

The Board are asked to note the contents of the paper.

People and OD Directorate - Risks aligned to the People Committee

Key issues/Risks to address	Actions implemented	Further actions to be undertaken
Sickness Absence – Whilst absence is slowly improving, it remains above 7%; hence a potential patient safety risk, if there are insufficient staff to support demand. In addition, the Trust target of 7.1% has not been achieved.	• The Absence Reduction Delivery Group, co-chaired by the Deputy Director of People and OD and the Associate Director of Quality Improvement and Safety, includes senior leaders from all operational areas to proactively manage plans. • The Priority 3 workstreams are progressing well with PMO supported plans on track for delivery. • The 4 QI-led projects arising from the listening exercise that took place in March 2026, are in test and learn phases; Leadership and Culture, Mental health and wellbeing, Moving and Handling, MSK and Physical Health, Data, Systems and Process Enablement.	• The Alternative Duties platform is undergoing User Acceptance Testing for a 'soft' release in August 2026. • The Attendance Management Policy is under review to ensure absence is being robustly managed with a clear process. The review will consider learning from the manager workshops held as part of the QI-led absence programme of work. • A review of recording absence on Trust systems is taking place to ensure this is efficient, without duplication of data.
Number of apprentices past their planned end date continues to be above the 15% threshold monitored by the Education and Skills Funding Agency resulting in workforce not progressing through the pipeline and financial risk of levy clawback. 48.28% ASW apprentices (n=56) 36.67% AAP apprentices (n=44)	• BI dashboard of individual apprentice performance against expected completion. • Implemented revised progress measures with apprentices put at risk of withdrawal for lack of progress, staged supportive process. • Monitoring of all apprentices on new extended programmes (ASW & AAP) to early identify any issues.	• Implement Apprenticeship Management SOP on approval. • Learning from the in-house Dyslexia Assessor capability to support SEND learners and reduce reliance on external provision. • Undertake a review of SEND resource requirements to strengthen support for learners, optimise in-house expertise and capacity, and reduce reliance on external provision where appropriate. • Progress Apprenticeship Support Lead post and local area leads.

Key issues/Risks to address	Actions implemented	Further actions to be undertaken
The Trust lacks systematic approach to managing bank staff including the recruitment, management, and leavers processes. Whilst the potential risks are to essential learning compliance and the implications for health and safety, safeguarding and clinical care overall. There are also risks to employment rights, regulatory compliance, clinical care and patient safety.	• Communicated entitlement for Statutory Sick Pay from 6 April, new entitlement also applies to bank workers. • Monitoring introduction of the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 2025 and identified the impact on Trust HR policies. • Created plan for updating all HR policies. • Identified inactive bank workers in ESR and GRS, in preparation for removing inactive workers.	• Continue to monitor introduction of ERA in 2026/27 and reflect changes in Trust policies and processes. • To identify bank workers not compliant with essential learning and work with 999 managers to agree next steps. • Working with departments to identify future requirements for bank workers, e.g. volume, activity and StatMand compliance requirements.
Employment Tribunals are significantly high, which brings risks regarding Trust reputation, financial risk due to increased legal fees.	• Provisions have been made in the Trust accounts to be able fund increased legal fees and potential awards. • Cases have clear direction and monitoring from Hill Dickinson. • A Disciplinary improvement plan is being progressed to support learning from cases, and quality of processes. • Given the significant number of cases that relate to disability discrimination, work to support workplace adjustments and alternative duties are part of the sickness absence work. • The Equality and Diversity action plan also supports culture change to reduce risk in this area.	• Work on workplace adjustments under Priority 3 in the Trust business plan continues and is on track for delivery. • Learning from 3 successfully defended cases will be incorporated into our approach going forwards. • The Absence Reduction work programme is progressing with a training workstream to ensure managers are compassionate in their approach, whilst robustly managing absence.