Maternity and Neonatal

Improvement Project: 'From Acorn to Oak' – Improving Newly Qualified Midwife Support, Wellbeing and Job Satisfaction to Reduce Early Career Midwife Leaver Rates

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NHS Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

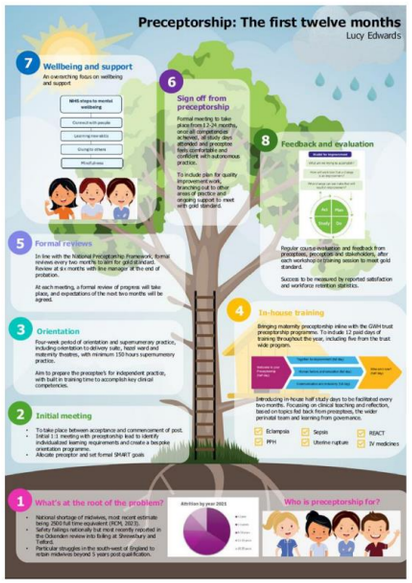
in association with Health Innovation West of England

Early career midwife attrition at the Trust was significantly above peer benchmarks, with the 0 to 1 year leaver rate at 13.% and 12-month rolling turnover averaged 9.5%. Newly Qualified Midwives (NQMs) reported low confidence, limited support and reduced wellbeing.
This project aimed to reduce early career midwife leaver rate below peer median and improve NQM satisfaction, support, competence and wellbeing by at least 50% within 12-months, through a structured preceptorship programme and dedicated Lead Preceptorship Midwife. The project was launched in September 2024 and evaluated after 12-months.

Prior to the project, the Trust had:

- An opportunity to develop a structured preceptorship programme.
- Identified that early career support could be strengthened through a dedicated leadership role.
- Preceptorship allocation and protected time, but recognised that there was an opportunity for it to be more consistent to enhance the experience.
- Identified the need to address MDT pressures- which would provide potential to strengthen the learning culture, and psychological safety.

These factors created an opportunity to strengthen ownership and coordination of preceptorship, enhance cultural consistency across the MDT, and develop more effective feedback mechanisms to identify unmet needs. Addressing these areas will better support individuals as they transition from student to autonomous practitioner, helping to reduce anxiety and improve retention.



Key Learning

- **A whole-team approach to culture change is essential**, ensuring that support extends beyond the preceptor to the entire multidisciplinary team.
- **Protecting time for learning is crucial for maintaining psychological safety** and enabling meaningful development.
- While quantitative data provides strong evidence of progress, **qualitative feedback offers important context by humanising the impact** and deepening cultural understanding.
- **Sustaining a positive culture also relies on leadership training and the promotion of civility.**
- **Clear communication and well-defined expectations help reduce anxiety** during the transition period, creating a more supportive and stable environment for early career midwives.

"I feel very supported and am grateful to have been given the protected super numeracy time."

"The preceptorship has helped me identify areas that I need to cover clinically - the preceptorship pack is clear and easy to follow, having this in place provides great support."

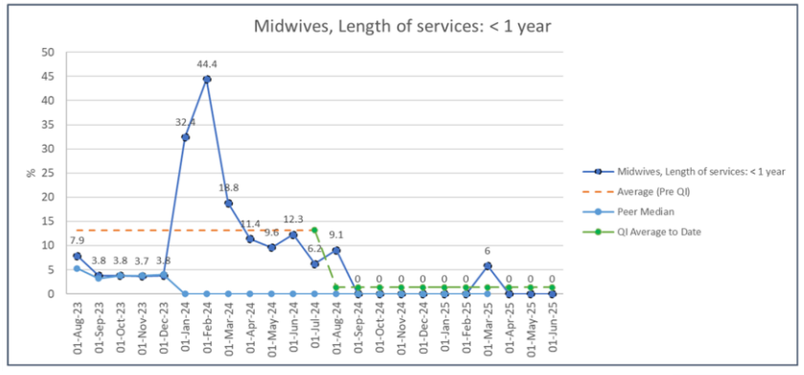
"I've noticed a massive difference now there is a preceptorship lead. I feel much more supported and know what I need to do to complete my preceptorship."

Key components of the implemented changes included:

- Appointment of a dedicated, supernumerary Lead Preceptorship Midwife
- Development and delivery of a structured, Trust wide preceptorship programme aligned with the National Preceptorship Framework
- 150 hours protected supernumerary time
- Named preceptor and buddy midwife allocation
- Bi-monthly one to one meetings
- Professional Midwifery Advocate access for pastoral support
- Education for senior midwives to build a supportive culture

Elements were assessed through self-reported experience (from the preceptees), quantitative measurements through leaver rates and assessed in quantitative themes from feedback received.

0-1yr Midwife Leaver Rates.



Watch Metrics Positive and Negative Results

Watch Metrics	Pre QI Intervention	Post QI Intervention
Satisfaction	21.1% Positive 68.5% Negative 10.5% Neutral	96.2% Positive 3.8% Negative
Support	26.4% Positive 73.7% Negative	100% Positive
Health and Wellbeing	0% Positive 94.5% Negative 5.6% Neutral	100% Positive
Competence	21.1% Positive 57.9% Negative 21.1% Neutral	100% Positive

Next steps and sustainability

- Following presentation of the project outcomes to the Trust Exec team, permanent funding for the Preceptorship Lead Midwife role was secured, and the role was successfully converted to a substantive position.
- Work will continue to build a longitudinal dataset to demonstrate long term impact on 0 to 5 year retention.
- Plans are in place to expand the early career midwife rotation model to offer broader clinical experiences and improve recruitment.
- Embedding civility, leadership development and psychological safety will remain ongoing cultural priorities.