



CHELSEA AND
WESTMINSTER NHS TRUST

Reducing In-Country Recruitment Timelines with OET



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Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is one of the top ranked and top performing hospital trusts in the UK, employing over 6,000 staff who meet the needs of around 1.5 million people. The Trust provides district general hospital services, maternity services and is also a specialist for burns, paediatric surgery, and for HIV and AIDS services.

To meet the steady demand for qualified NMC Registered Nurses the Trust's recruitment strategy combines an overseas campaign (attracting over 200 nurses in 2019, primarily from the Philippines) with a proactive drive to assist internationally trained nurses currently working as HCAs to achieve a recognised English language qualification and gain NMC registration.

The Trust is using the Occupational English Test—OET—to help reach its recruitment targets more quickly and economically, explains Cathy Hill, Deputy Director of Nursing for Workforce. 'Nurses recruited from overseas are encouraged to take OET before they leave for the UK and we reimburse exam fees and NMC application costs when they pass both OET and CBT. These nurses then go on to work with the Trust for at least three years from arrival with a number of our internationally recruited nurses remaining with the Trust for 20 years now' she says, adding: 'By using OET we've seen a significant rise in the number of overseas candidates because the test typically requires fewer retakes, and is also now accepted for Tier 2 visa applications.'

Given this success, the Trust has now extended OET training benefits to those international nurses working as HCAs. 'We should be supporting our own staff just as much as overseas

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nurses,' says Cathy. 'It makes real sense—it is a lot cheaper than recruiting overseas, and in-country candidates don't face the challenges of relocation or cultural assimilation. Our support also recognises their loyalty to the Trust,' she adds.

To deliver in-country OET training and exams, the Trust is working with local language school Wimbledon School of English (WSE) and The London Exam Centre (LEC) which is part of WSE. The Trust gives candidates a loan to cover language training and test fees (for both OET and CBT), the test costs are reimbursed if the candidate is successful. WSE offers a number of options for OET preparation, including an online course, with the majority of candidates opting for face-to-face training delivered either as evening classes or as an intensive, one week programme. In addition, candidates can take their OET exam at the end of their preparation course with The London Exam Centre, which allows them the opportunity to take the test in a familiar and supportive environment.

OET has proved the ideal test option for the Trust as it tests English skills in the context of real nursing situations. This makes the test easier to pass for healthcare recruits, giving them more confidence, while also reassuring the Trust that these new recruits can work effectively in an English speaking environment.

The Trust's overall recruitment strategy has proved very successful, reducing the vacancy rate to only 5%, while also making a real difference to the staffing budget: 'We have seen a reduction in our agency spend by around £8 million,' says Cathy. The speed with which candidates can prepare for, take and pass OET – compared to other English tests – is playing an important role in strategy delivery, especially in-country recruitment, and the test is also seen by candidates and managers as a direct route to career progression and a move to Band 5. This is further supported by the strong relationship the Trust has built up with WSE/LEC, developed by the joint efforts of both WSE/LEC and OET teams who led information sessions for hospital staff on the test, its potential benefits, and the value of working closely with an external training provider. As a result, the Trust will continue to fund OET candidates attending WSE courses and exams held at The London Exam Centre, with the possibility of developing a bespoke, joint OET training programme in the future.

