



# OET

YEOVIL HOSPITAL  
NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

## OET Helps Transform Staff Recruitment and Retention



**Mark Appleby**

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Hospital NHS Foundation Trust



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Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Nurse



**Yeovil Hospital**  
Healthcare

In 2017 Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, like many other NHS Trusts, was facing a growing nurse vacancy rate (peaking at 29 per cent) and an annual spend of around £3 million on agency and banked staff. Retention rates were particularly poor, at 23 per cent, with many nurses leaving Yeovil as soon as they were qualified in order to move to bigger hospitals in livelier locations.

As the Hospital had already tried, and failed, to recruit from overseas, the management team working with the nursing team decided to fundamentally change its approach. 'We went back to the drawing board, and began to place the overseas nurse at the centre of everything we did,' says Mark Appleby, the Trust's Director of HR. The first step was to set up an Overseas Recruitment Team tasked with creating a nursing registration programme based on a detailed analysis of the existing recruitment process, including the Hospital's investment in English tests.

As part of this analysis, Mark and his team immediately noticed an impressively high pass rate – 80 per cent – among overseas nurses taking the Occupational English Test (OET), compared to around 30 per cent for equivalent language tests.

The Hospital began to actively encourage its overseas recruits to take OET, not least because the much higher pass rate gave nurses a greater chance of attaining the qualification at the first sitting, thereby saving time and money.

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'This was because OET questions are all based on healthcare topics, so candidates feel they understand the test before they sit it,' says Mark. As a result, the Hospital began to encourage its overseas recruits to take OET, not least because the much higher pass rate gave nurses a greater chance of attaining the qualification at the first sitting, thereby saving time and money. In addition to this, the Home Office have now accepted OET as a recognised tests for Immigration under the new rules whereby tests are accepted along with the regulating body.

The Hospital also invested in English preparation support for its overseas employees already working in the UK who were nurses in their home country. Enrolling them with a local language school and giving them a three-month period in which to achieve a pass. 'However, we then faced the challenge of how to help our nurses combine study (for both OET and other registration tests) with hospital shifts and family life,' comments Mark, 'so we realised we had to change our approach to study support as well.' The solution was to encourage greater use of online training, as this more flexible approach to test preparation is particularly convenient for working nurses. It's also a familiar training format for many overseas recruits, and one which also brings access to a wide range of preparation resources.

Yeovil Hospital's innovative recruitment strategy, including the funding of English preparation, has been a much applauded success and recently gained the Trust the award for 'Best International Recruitment Experience' from the Nursing Times. The Hospital now has no ward nursing vacancies, has reduced its annual agency spend to £100,000, and overseas nurse turnover is currently only 11 per cent. 'Our recruitment programme, including English support, was so successful that suddenly we had more nurses than vacancies,' says Mark, adding: 'We now recruit for nearby trusts and use the programme to support their nurses through to registration.'



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