

## Developing a Support Network for International Staff

Creating a strong support network for international staff is essential in promoting wellbeing, retention, inclusion, confidence, and workforce stability within health and social care services. International recruits often relocate without established support systems, making employer-led support particularly important.

### Aim

To create a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment that helps international staff settle successfully into both the workplace and life in the UK.

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## Key Components of an International Staff Support Network

### 1. Structured Welcome and Induction Programme

A comprehensive induction should go beyond mandatory training and include practical settlement support.

#### Include:

- Welcome packs with local information
- Guidance on transport, banking, GP registration, schools, and shopping
- Explanation of UK workplace culture and expectations
- Introduction to safeguarding, professional boundaries, and communication styles
- Orientation to policies, rotas, payroll systems, and technology platforms

#### Benefits:

- Reduces anxiety
  - Improves confidence
  - Supports faster integration into the workplace
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### 2. Buddy or Mentor System

Assign each new international recruit a named buddy or mentor.

#### Buddy Role:

- Daily practical support
- Help with routines and documentation
- Emotional reassurance
- Guidance on workplace culture
- Support during first few months

#### **Ideal Buddy Characteristics:**

- Patient and approachable
- Good communicator
- Understands cultural sensitivity
- Experienced within the organisation

#### **Benefits:**

- Reduces feelings of isolation
- Encourages staff to ask questions
- Builds relationships early

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### **3. Peer Support Groups**

Establish regular support meetings for international staff.

#### **Examples:**

- Monthly wellbeing forums
- Cultural sharing sessions
- Safe spaces to discuss challenges
- Coffee mornings or lunch groups

#### **Discussion Topics:**

- Settling into UK life
- Homesickness
- Managing stress
- Career development
- Understanding policies and expectations

#### **Benefits:**

- Encourages belonging
  - Creates friendships and shared understanding
  - Strengthens morale and retention
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#### **4. Wellbeing and Emotional Support**

International staff may experience loneliness, anxiety, or adjustment difficulties.

##### **Support Options:**

- Access to Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)
- Mental health first aiders
- Counselling services
- Wellbeing check-ins with managers
- Flexible support during periods of stress

##### **Important:**

Managers should create psychologically safe environments where staff feel comfortable discussing concerns without fear of judgement.

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#### **5. Practical Settlement Assistance**

Support with practical matters can significantly reduce stress.

##### **Examples:**

- Assistance finding accommodation
- Support understanding tenancy agreements
- Help opening bank accounts
- Guidance registering with GP and dentist services
- Information about local faith groups and community organisations

##### **Benefits:**

- Helps staff settle faster
- Improves overall wellbeing
- Reduces risk of staff leaving early

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## 6. Cultural Inclusion and Diversity Initiatives

Promote an inclusive culture where diversity is valued and celebrated.

### Actions:

- Celebrate cultural events and awareness days
- Encourage staff to share traditions and food
- Provide equality, diversity, and inclusion training
- Address discrimination promptly and effectively
- Promote inclusive leadership practices

### Benefits:

- Staff feel respected and valued
- Improves team cohesion
- Reduces workplace discrimination

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## 7. Clear Communication and Supervision

Regular communication is essential.

### Managers Should:

- Hold regular one-to-one meetings
- Check understanding of tasks and expectations
- Encourage questions and feedback
- Use clear and supportive communication
- Avoid assumptions about understanding

### Benefits:

- Builds trust
  - Prevents misunderstandings
  - Supports professional development
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## 8. Career Development and Training Support

International staff should feel they have equal opportunities for progression.

### **Include:**

- Leadership development opportunities
- Clinical competency support
- Apprenticeships and qualifications
- English language support if needed
- Guidance around professional registration pathways

### **Benefits:**

- Increases motivation and retention
- Builds future leaders
- Encourages long-term commitment

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## 9. Immigration and Sponsorship Support

Visa and sponsorship concerns can create significant stress.

### **Employers Should:**

- Provide clear sponsorship guidance
- Support staff with visa renewals
- Explain reporting responsibilities
- Signpost to reputable immigration advice where appropriate
- Communicate policy changes clearly

### **Benefits:**

- Reduces anxiety
- Builds trust in the employer
- Supports workforce stability

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## 10. Family and Community Integration

Supporting families can improve staff retention and wellbeing.

**Examples:**

- Information on schools and childcare
- Local community groups and places of worship
- Family social events
- Guidance for spouses seeking employment or support

**Benefits:**

- Helps entire families settle
- Improves emotional wellbeing
- Encourages long-term retention

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**Role of Leadership**

Leaders play a critical role in shaping organisational culture.

Effective leaders should:

- Demonstrate inclusive leadership
- Listen actively to international staff experiences
- Respond quickly to concerns
- Promote equality and fairness
- Celebrate diversity as a strength

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**Outcomes of a Strong Support Network**

An effective international staff support network can lead to:

- Improved retention
- Better staff wellbeing
- Reduced sickness and burnout
- Increased confidence and competence
- Higher morale and engagement
- Stronger team relationships
- Improved quality of care for residents and patients

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## Conclusion

International staff are a vital part of the health and social care workforce. Developing a structured and compassionate support network helps staff feel safe, respected, valued, and empowered to succeed. Organisations that invest in supporting international recruits are more likely to achieve better workforce stability, improved care quality, and a more inclusive workplace culture.



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