NHS FINANCE INSIGHTS
placement scheme

NHS Finance Insights Placement Scheme

Regional Leads Handbook

Foreword

This handbook has been created to support regional leads, who play a central role in coordinating the scheme across the country. They work with host organisations and education partners to promote opportunities, support trainee recruitment, and ensure a positive placement experience.

The NHS Finance Insights Scheme sits alongside local and national apprenticeship and graduate pathways by offering an early introduction to careers in NHS finance. It complements programmes such as Access Accountancy by widening participation, supporting social mobility, and creating a more inclusive entry route into the profession.

The scheme provides valuable work experience to young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and helps to break down barriers by opening doors for those who may be disadvantaged and are underrepresented within NHS finance. The scheme aligns with the goals set out in the NHS Finance EDI action-plan, specifically addressing the objective of cultivating a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve, ultimately striving for NHS finance leadership roles to mirror the diversity of our local populations.

The aim of this document is to support consistent, high-quality placements across all regions. It is designed to strengthen partnerships with host organisations and education providers, support effective promotion of the scheme, and ensure compliance with HR, safeguarding, and governance requirements.

The content in this handbook is provided as guidance, and we acknowledge that approaches may differ by region and organisation.

Role of the regional lead

Regional Leads are responsible for the strategic coordination and oversight of placements within their regions. Key responsibilities include:

Finding and liaising with organisations:
- Identify NHS Trusts, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), or finance teams willing to host trainees.
- Maintain relationships and open communication with host organisations to ensure they understand the scheme.
- Being the point of contact between the national team and the host organisations.

Promoting the scheme:
- Share information about the scheme with schools, and student networks.
- Share marketing materials and/or deliver presentations to encourage participation.
  - » Insights Brochure
  - » Insights Applications Guidlines
  - » Insights Poster

Shortlisting and matching trainees:
- Review applications and shortlist candidates.
- Match trainees to appropriate host organisations based on location, interests, availability, and learning objectives.
- Share information and provide support to organisations through the interview process, where needed.

Liaising with organisations regarding onboarding:
- Communicate with your host organisations about the requirements. Has your contact in the organisation spoken with their HR team?
- HR requirements (ID checks, references, right-to-work, DBS if required, health & safety training) are completed before the placement starts.

Managing placement issues and risks
- Support organisations with emerging concerns.
- Supporting Placement Managers where placements are struggling.
- Liaising with the national team where intervention may be needed.
- Sharing learning and good practice from challenges encountered across the region.

Training and guidance:
- Deliver induction or training sessions for placement managers and trainees.
- Share templates, checklists, and best practice guidance.

Monitoring and evaluation:
- Support the central team's collection of feedback from trainees and placement managers.
- Identify improvements for future placement cycles and share these within the CFO and regional leads meeting.

Tip: The process of onboarding is slightly different, as they have not gone through the traditional channels. It is important to remind organisations of this.

Recruitment phase

As Regional Lead, you will oversee the recruitment process for the placement scheme, ensuring consistent shortlisting, timely interviews, and smooth onboarding of successful candidates, in line with the national timeline. **View the 2027 timeline here.**

Key dates for recruitment:
- 2027 cohort applications open 1st January 2027
- Expressions of interest closes and organisations are sent MOU to complete by COP 18th December
  - » 2027 Organisations must withdraw by 30th April if they are no longer able to host a trainee.
  - » 2027 Applications close on 7th May
- End of May/June Regional shortlist
- Mid-June - Notify Shortlisted Candidates
- End June / Early July – Interviews take place
- Mid July – Early August – Hosting organisations complete HR enrolment processes

Tip: encourage applicants to have all references ready now to speed up the process should they be successful

Recruitment and promotion

Host organisations

At this stage of recruitment, it is the role of the regional lead to reach out to organisations that have been previously involved with the scheme, or those that would be new to the scheme, to see if they would be interested in hosting a trainee.

This can be done through:
- Emails and phone calls
- Sharing documents – Information about the scheme
- Presenting at an organisation's internal meeting – asking organisations to share their experiences.
- Presenting at Value Maker Meetings

If an organisation expresses interest in wanting to take on a trainee, then your role will be to continue liaising with that organisation until they formally confirm their participation. Once they confirm that they will be taking on a trainee, they will need to sign the MOU.

The signed MOU must then be submitted to One NHS Finance Central team. Within the MOU, it states the deadline for the organisations to pull out by. If organisations do withdraw then make sure to update the central team as soon as possible. **Download the MOU here.**

Trainees

Alongside recruiting host organisations, Regional Leads play a key role in promoting the scheme to prospective trainees. The NHS Finance Insights Scheme is designed to widen participation and create opportunities for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, so Regional Leads should actively seek to engage applicants who may not otherwise be aware of NHS finance careers.

A great way to attract trainees to the scheme is through visiting local schools, colleges and careers fairs. It is recommended that leads are visiting schools and promoting the programme. When you do this there are printable versions of the brochure if you would like to use them, please note this would need to be printed by you if you do want to. There are online versions with QR codes if you do not have budget for printed materials.

The central team support with the promotion to the potential trainees through social media channels including Tik Tok.

To ensure the posts are shared far and wide, please re-share any posts you see and feel free to promote through your local channels. There is also support from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), who promote the scheme through gov.uk and job centres.

Other methods:
- Building relationships with local authority education teams and careers hubs.
- Engaging with organisations that support social mobility and underrepresented groups such as the Social Mobility Foundation.
- Working with youth organisations and employability programmes.
- Utilise people in recruitment roles within your organisation and the host organisations.
- A targeted and proactive approach to engagement will help ensure the scheme continues to attract diverse applicants from a range of backgrounds.

References

When trainees apply for the scheme, they are required to submit references. To ensure that the onboarding process runs smoothly it is helpful if you ensure schools/colleges are aware of this requirement when recruiting so they are prepared to support.

References will be collected between June and July and we recommend teachers supply personal details if they are providing references so that we can contact them.

Application form

The application sits with the national team as applicants from all regions use the same form. This is done for ease of reporting and for consistency across the regions, if you require information regarding applicant numbers or other scheme data you can ask the central team.

The form checks the eligibility of applicants by asking them if they meet the individual requirements. If they do not meet one or more of the criteria points, then they are not able to complete the application form.

This is the primary method of eligibility checking used within the scheme, and we rely on honesty from the applicants when completing the form.

Shortlisting

The central team will conduct an initial shortlist on all applicants to ensure they have applied for the correct region and that they are eligible for the programme.

Once the initial shortlist has been conducted, you will be sent all applications for your region. At this stage it is your responsibility to ensure all applications are reviewed and a shortlist of candidates is created for each host organisation.

To help with the shortlist process there are multiple guidance documents to ensure the process is consistent across all regions.

- **Placement managers guide – preparations and early challenges**
- **Insights application guidance – eligibility & shortlist criteria**

Interviews

Once the applications have been shortlisted, a list of 4 - 6 candidates will need to be sent to each host organisation to go through an interview process. Many applicants will be attending their first formal interview and may have limited experience of recruitment processes. Regional Leads should encourage organisations to create a welcoming and supportive interview environment whilst maintaining a fair assessment process.

Tip – When deciding which trainees to shortlist and where to send them for interview, consider where they live and personal circumstances to ensure it is feasible for them to get to work at that host organisation.

Once the organisation has decided who they would like to see in an interview, it is your role to support in telling trainees if they have been unsuccessful and working with the host organisation who will arrange the interview panels and circulate the information to the trainees.

Tip – We recommend a panel of three interviewers where possible

To make the process as smooth as possible and consistent across all organisations we would recommend putting together an interview pack for each organisation which could include examples of questions and a suggested scoring template.

- **Guidance for interviews (example from The Midlands)**
- **Interview questions (template)**
- **Interview scoring (template)**

Tip – Suggest to the organisation to have a reserve list should their preferred candidate be unable to accept the placement.

At this stage the leads should be communicating with the placement managers and CFOs to ensure that they have been in touch with the HR teams and they are aware of the trainees being interviewed. It may be helpful for the regional leads to request direct contact with the HR team to avoid any confusion.

Communication with interviewees

The role of the regional lead when it comes to communicating with the interviewees is:

- Introducing trainees to their host organisation via email
- Emailing candidates with the shortlist outcome
- Emailing all candidates of the outcome from their interview
- Providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates

Employment contract and HR

Each trainee will need to complete the onboarding process of their employing organisation, and each organisation may have different processes and requirements for this.

It is the role of the regional lead to support each organisation to ensure a smooth transition from interview to employment. As recommended earlier in this guidance document, it would be helpful for you to encourage placement managers to familiarise themselves with their organisations processes and encourage contact with the CFO or the HR team directly. You are there as a point of contact to support, should they have any questions.

Tip – Some processes can take time to complete so it is recommended that you familiarise yourself well in advance to ensure you can support where appropriate.

Approach

The standard approach for the onboarding process is for the employment contract to sit with the host organisation. However, as a region you do have an option to host all of your trainees through one organisation and second them to their placement organisations. There are benefits and challenges to both approaches so please ensure you have thought through and planned your approach before deciding.

Option 1: Multiple regional hosts

Benefits

- Established process: The current model has proven effective in attracting high-quality candidates and matching them successfully with placements.
- Shared ownership: The distributed model promotes joint responsibility and a sense of collective investment in the scheme's success.
- Organisational processes: Each organisation on-boards differently so this process is flexible to suit the organisation
- HR Issues: Any issues that may arise in the placement can be dealt with by the HR team in the organisation and not another organisation that may not understand the issue or their processes
- Accountability: The organisation takes responsibility for their trainee.
- Local engagement and relationships: Regional teams have strong networks with local trusts and candidates, supporting tailored communication and greater understanding of regional needs.
- Flexibility and responsiveness: Regional leads can adapt processes to suit specific organisational circumstances and timing requirements.
- Developmental benefits: Multiple hosts share learning, building recruitment and management capability across the NHS finance community.

Challenges

- Inconsistencies in approach: While alignment is improving, there can be variations in process and candidate experience between regions.
- Coordination effort: Requires ongoing communication between multiple hosts to maintain fairness, transparency, and timely delivery.
- Resource intensity: The role of the regional lead can require a lot of time at certain times of the year.

Option 2: Single host organisation

Potential benefits

- Consistency and standardisation: A single process could ensure uniform candidate experience and assessment criteria.
- Efficiency: Centralised administration could reduce duplication of tasks and provide a clear single point of contact for applicants.
- Data and reporting: Easier to collect and analyse recruitment data across the scheme.

Risks and considerations

- Loss of local engagement: Reduced regional input may weaken local networks, making it harder to tailor recruitment to diverse regional needs.
- Reduced flexibility: Host processes may be slower to adapt to organisational workforce changes or differing regional priorities.
- Dependency risk: Relying on one host organisation creates a single point of failure if capacity or resourcing issues arise. Changes in organisational leadership could impact long-term commitment to the scheme.
- Transition impact: Moving to a new structure would require time, resource, and communication effort, potentially disrupting upcoming recruitment cycles.
- Potential reduction in shared learning: Concentrating responsibility may limit the wider community's opportunities to gain recruitment and management experience.

Apprenticeships during the placement

Communication with the organisation is key to ensuring the onboarding process stays on track. It is your role as the regional lead to check in with your placement managers and make sure they have everything they need to complete each step and provide them with support if they are struggling.

Key points to check with each placement manager.

- Are the HR team aware of the placement and the different processes that may be required to onboard them?
- What documentation is required by that organisation for the trainees to be on-boarded?
- References, ID verification and right-to-work
- Bank account details
- National insurance numbers
- DBS checks
- Confidentiality agreements
- Signed contracts

To make this process as simple as possible, it would be helpful to track the interview and onboard process for each organisation. Keeping a central record for your region and update the central team of completed onboarding to track compliance and share trainees NHS emails.

During the placement

Once the placement has started and the trainees have settled into their new organisations, your focus as the regional lead will be on ensuring that there are inductions and development days organised for the students to support them in their new roles. Regional Leads should regularly check that each trainee is receiving a high-quality placement experience.

This can include confirming that:

- Regular one-to-one meetings are taking place between the trainee and Placement Manager.
- Rotations or shadowing opportunities are progressing as planned.
- The trainee is making progress with their placement portfolio.
- Development opportunities are being promoted.
- Wellbeing and support needs are being discussed.
- Career and progression conversations are taking place throughout the placement.

Regular review points throughout the placement can help identify issues early and ensure trainees receive appropriate support.

Inductions and development days

It is down to you as the regional lead to decide on how you would like to deliver your regional inductions. The national inductions are online, therefore we encourage regional inductions to be delivered face to face where possible to allow the trainees the opportunity to network with each other.

You can deliver this session within your region, or you can join up with nearby regions so you can have a bigger cohort, and the trainees can meet people from outside of their regions.

Following your regional induction, it is recommended that you deliver at least 2 online skills sessions to support your trainees throughout their placement. Some useful topics are highlighted below.

- Excel
- Power BI
- Writing Emails
- Word

To ensure we are not overlapping, below are the draft agendas of what the national team will be providing to the trainees.

- Two online inductions
  - Draft agenda
- Two online development days
  - Day 1 – draft agenda
  - Day 2 – draft agenda

Some other support that may be useful to the trainees could be running monthly teams meetings for them to ensure they keep in touch or encouraging them to arrange their own.

HFMA Membership for band 2 – 6 colleagues is free. It would be great to promote the HFMA online learning library so they can continue to develop their knowledge in their own time.

Early exit

Whilst every effort should be made to support trainees to complete the full placement, there may be occasions where a trainee decides to leave early or where a placement cannot continue. Where this occurs, Regional Leads should:

- Liaise with the Placement Manager and organisation to understand the reasons.
- Explore whether additional support or adjustments may enable the trainee to remain on the scheme.
- Inform the ONF Central Team at the earliest opportunity.
- Record the reasons for leaving and any lessons learned.
- Capture destination information where possible, including whether the trainee moves into employment, education or training.
- Share learning to support future improvement of the scheme.

Early exits should be viewed as an opportunity to understand and address barriers wherever possible.

Supporting progression

One of the key objectives of the scheme is to support trainees into future careers within NHS finance and the wider public sector.

Regional Leads should work with Placement Managers, CFOs, local apprenticeship teams and NHS finance networks to maximise opportunities for trainees approaching the end of their placement.This may include:

- Identifying suitable vacancies.
- Signposting apprenticeship opportunities.
- Supporting applications and interview preparation.
- Promoting further learning opportunities.
- Connecting trainees with local finance networks and mentors.

Whilst employment cannot be guaranteed, trainees should be encouraged and supported to take their next step upon completion of the scheme.

End of placement

When the placement comes to an end, you may be a point of contact for the trainees to help them establish their next steps, however, this would usually be the placement managers.

Before the trainees finish, please ensure that you have collected their completed portfolios as this is a requirement for them to successfully complete the placement and receive their certificates. The portfolio will need to be submitted before their final day of employment on the scheme. This will vary based on start dates, so we advise collecting them 2 weeks before the placement ends.

The central team will circulate feedback to trainees and placement managers so please encourage them to all complete this as it helps us to continue developing the scheme.

Please provide trainees with their CPD certifcate once their placement is complete and they have submitted their portfolio.

Finally, we recommend arranging a graduation event for the trainees so they can celebrate their achievements.

Tip – Run a joint graduation event with neighbouring regions so you can bring more trainees together.

Regional working groups and CFO & Leads meeting

Each month the CFO and Regional Leads meeting will take place and this is an opportunity to share any successes or challenges you have faced whilst managing the scheme and it is the steering group where we discuss and develop the scheme to ensure it is continuously improving.

As you are a key role in delivering the scheme we encourage the regional leads to attend as many of these meetings as possible so we can learn from each other.

Many regions run monthly placement manager meetings which allows an opportunity for the placement managers to share their experiences and learn from each other, as well as keeping them informed of any changes made in the CFO and Regional Leads meeting. It is your responsibility as the regional lead to arrange these meetings.

Funding

Your region may have a small amount of funding allocated to the insights scheme, and if so some of the areas you may want to put that budget towards could be delivering the induction day, delivering skills sessions, the graduation event, attending SDN, ONF or HFMA events, or travel expenses so the trainees can attend the events.