



Management Knowledge Transfer Partnership (MKTP) – A Case Study

A three-year university innovation partnership designed to improve the experience for NHS staff during pregnancy and maternity (2024-2027)

Overview

Innovate UK has supported a new Management Knowledge Transfer Partnership between the Northern Care Alliance (NCA) NHS Foundation Trust and Manchester Metropolitan University.

The project, which is the first of its kind in the public sector, aims to help develop a better approach to workplace maternity management, improving the retention of highly skilled and qualified staff, increasing productivity and efficiency as well as cutting costs and improving patient outcomes.

It is hoped that the experience of staff who are pregnant and taking or returning from maternity leave at an NHS Trust will be transformed as a result of this collaboration.

Improving workforce retention and reducing NHS costs

Bringing together academic research and practical experience, this unique innovation will initially focus on Registered Nurses and Midwives, who are two critical staffing areas with a high staff turnover. This, in turn, can have a significant influence on costs to the NHS and patient outcomes.

The trend, at the NCA and wider NHS, of nurses and midwives leaving the workforce typically happens within five years of achieving their qualifications, and when they are usually aged in their 20s – the average age for having a first child.

Work strain and work-life conflict are key forces causing staff to leave and these are particularly present during pregnancy and maternity when combining work with pregnancy and infant care is a huge challenge. This is even more prevalent in nursing and midwifery as the roles require physically demanding labour and shift work.

Julia Rouse, Professor of Decent Work and Productivity at Manchester Metropolitan University, said:

“ Both research evidence and the NCA’s practical observations suggest that when pregnancy and maternity are poorly managed, staff either exit the workforce or silently endure strain, often foregoing advancement or altering career pathways as their own solution to the problem.

“ All of these outcomes cause a shortage of talent at every level in nursing and midwifery leadership and widen gender inequalities in the NHS. Our project will develop and embed an improved maternity management process and provide the resources the NCA needs for organisational change. ”

Building support for better maternity management

To create an innovative approach to maternity management in the NCA, researchers will work with staff to develop the following innovations:

- A Rhythms Maternity Coaching process that will use the concept of ‘rhythm intelligence’ to enable nurses, managers and teams to work together to reconcile organisational, health, childcare and family needs during pregnancy, maternity leave and return to work so that women and wards can thrive.
- An Evolve organisational change process will shape the NCA’s policies and practices so that better workplace maternity management is normalised.
- Learning about ‘what works where and why’ that will enable wider change to workplace maternity management for all categories of staff in the NCA.
- A new evidence base that will be communicated inside and outside the NHS to help spread learning and innovation.

Working together to make a difference

This KTP will further support the NCA’s overarching holistic wellbeing programme S.C.A.R.F. (Support, Care, Assist, Recognise, Family). It builds on recent work with Manchester Met to develop their ‘Well Women Strategy’ which aims to provide colleagues and managers with invaluable information, resources and awareness sessions relating to women’s health in the workplace. Sharon Lord, NCA Health and Wellbeing Lead, said:

“We are keen to prioritise the health and wellbeing of all our colleagues, but we also recognise the need to improve and advocate better health and wellbeing support and experiences. Women represent 78% of our workforce and we know that if our colleagues are healthy and happy there is a direct correlation to improved patient care and safety, business productivity and reduced absenteeism”.

This ongoing partnership demonstrates why public sector organisations and universities should partner more to help develop capacity and innovation in under resourced sectors. Recent evidence (Bamford, D 2023 et al)¹ highlights the benefits public sector organisations gain from KTPs, not only as they value the introduction of evidence-based theories and frameworks, but they often excel at identifying internal issues of strategic relevance that these can be applied to. Additionally, these challenges often exist within complex environments, with many competing stakeholders and universities have the expertise and capability to draw on multi-disciplinary approaches which are hugely beneficial in terms of innovation via new ideas and synergies.

“What sets a Management KTP apart is its focus on driving internal productivity and improvement by injecting significant new management capabilities into the business and adopting new and innovative management practices to achieve greater efficiency, lasting change, and growth”

(Susan Suttle, KTP Adviser, IUK Business Connect).

“Management KTPs have been supporting UK businesses for decades, but this is the first ever public sector Management KTP. We hope that our model will improve staff retention, productivity and patient outcomes, in way that other public sector organisations can look to replicate.”

(Professor Julia Rose, Centre for Decent Work and Productivity at Manchester Metropolitan University).

¹ Bamford, D., Reid, I., Forrester, P., Dehe, B., Bamford, J. and Papalexi, M., 2023. An empirical investigation into UK university–industry collaboration: the development of an impact framework. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, 1-33. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10961-023-10043-9>

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