

Excellence Awards - 2021 Entry  
85 Tottenham Court Road  
London. W1T 4TQ  
020 7631 6900

Entry ID: 9628

### Third Party Authorization

*Are you entering on behalf of, or in association with, any third party?:* Yes

*If yes, please tick here to confirm you have the third party's permission to submit this entry:* Checked

### Basic Information

*Category:* 02. Internal Communications Campaign

### Entry Information

*Entrant company name:* North East Ambulance Service

*Client name (for joint entries only):* Work Networks

*Entry title:*

Integrating and improving internal communications in a pandemic

### Entry

*Brief, objectives and budget:*

Our chief executive had a vision to create a safe space for employees to engage. She wanted to connect a remote, mobile workforce and improve resilience and accountability in the wake of a pandemic

We set out to improve dialogue across the service, adopt a listening style, encourage conversations and seek feedback. This is particularly challenging in an ambulance service where our employees are constantly moving across 3,200 square miles in 24-hour shift patterns; and with a high workload.

Budget £20,000.

*The idea, research and planning:*

We wanted our corporate communication channels to be easy to use, accessible on any device; meet NHS guidelines on security and governance; and be flexible that employees

could switch off while away from work. The technology was just a means to support significant changes we made to the processes and distribution of messages. As a result of the pandemic, we introduced:

1. A daily e-bulletin. This was particularly important in the early days of the pandemic when guidance and health advice was updated, often daily.
2. A monthly LIVE broadcast on Microsoft Teams to give everyone the opportunity to ask questions of executive directors and hear the latest developments.
3. Workplace from Facebook – a private space owned by NEAS that all staff could access easily to connect with peers; bridging the boundaries of geography, time and department.

The annual NHS staff survey shows ambulance services have had the lowest staff engagement scores. Within NEAS before the pandemic:

- A weekly update had become too lengthy and often missed key updates which were then circulated by email
  - Ownership of departmental information on our intranet, called Siren, was nascent and developing, having only launched six months earlier with author training just rolled out to departments before the first lockdown.
  - Employees were not able to be involved in conversation or decisions.
- 

### *Strategy, creativity and innovation:*

---

We needed to build a new framework for internal communications to meet the demands of the pandemic that gave employees a safe space to share stories, ask questions, challenge each other and build a stronger team

We had to move quickly to react to the changing work environment created by the pandemic, collaborating in a highly regulated sector with teams from information governance, information technology, organisational development, operations and our senior leaders.

Our approach was focused around:

1. Strong personal leadership from our chief executive and senior team
2. Creating a team of 70 champions from mixed staff groups across the organisation to identify how we overcome barriers to communication flow, information ownership and team collaboration.
3. The communication team set up processes to support a new internal communications framework, providing strategic advice, training on new systems, generating engaging content and facilitating discussions and campaigns; as well as critical COVID-19 updates.
4. Learning from the data and developing a continuous cycle of testing and improvement of ideas, content and campaigns.

Our innovation and creativity were drawn from the bold approach to allow employees to shape the structure of Workplace themselves - to create communities of interest and customise their own environment. The result has been the creation of 204 groups, of which 76% are work related; 13% are discussion groups and 7% are set up for social purposes.

Some of the real gains are in the development of less formal groups that chart organisational history, give staff a safe place to speak up and build relationships between some who might never have met.

Key to our success has been the integration of these diverse channels. Our Siren intranet is a “single point of truth” while discussions on all topics are active on Workplace; supported with regular updates through a daily bulletin and frequent opportunities to hold senior leaders to account on live Q&A broadcasts. It is from this breadth of engagement and information that we are giving employees a voice, changing organisational culture and building trust.

---

#### *Delivery/implementation of tactics:*

---

Jan 2020

Intranet (Siren) development throughout 2020 building key portals of information for employee support, wellbeing and recognition, operational developments and leadership – including ‘Thank-you Thursdays’ and a Help Hub to support mental health and an “alerts library” of clinical developments mandated for patient care.

March 2020

Daily update launched with key updates on business activity, clinical alerts, Government announcements, infection prevention guidance.

April 2020

First monthly LIVE Q&A broadcast with executive directors

June 2020

Workplace launched to 2700 staff

August 2020

Weekly summary of the daily e-bulletins was added in response to shift workers who had been away for several days.

Oct 2020

‘T Awards’ - moving annual employee recognition awards into a 12-hour ‘Thank you’ event on Workplace featuring live video, video messages and thousands of appreciations sent between colleagues.

---

#### *Measurement, evaluation and impact:*

---

- Our daily update readership rose from an average of 1,775 views per week in January 2020 to an average of 4,948 views per week 12 months later.
- Intranet page views per month rose by 58% on average
- LIVE Q&A broadcasts seen by up to 100 employees per month
- Almost half of all employees claimed their Workplace account in the first three weeks of launch in June. Adoption rates are now at 78% against a target of 80% within 12 months
- 1,263 active users every month on Workplace
- 204 Workplace groups ranging from clinical interest, staff safety, LGBT staff network and a thriving photography group that now keeps the communications team supplied with regular imagery to use across internal, external and social media channels.
- Our virtual award ceremony on Workplace became the largest employee participation event ever held, with 133 scheduled posts over 12 hours, generating 981 comments and 4,681 reactions from employees.
- Since launching Workplace, there has been more than 400,000 connections between our workforce of 2,700 employees.

By intelligently applying digital solutions in a way that echoes our values; celebrates success; and supports genuine employee engagement has allowed us to move away from conversations behind closed doors to more openness and transparency.

---

## **Supporting Information**

*Additional supporting information (images, artwork, clippings and other media):*

---

Provided

---

*Campaign image (if entering individual/team awards, upload headshot/team photo here):*

---

Provided

---

*Company logo:*

---

Provided

---

*Please write a 30 word entry summary in the third person:*

---

Internal communications at NEAS is instilling a sense of belonging and giving employees a voice that is shifting conversations behind closed doors to and creating an open and transparent culture.

---