

Engagement with Education & Training

The [Delivering a net zero NHS](#) statutory guidance, recognises that an upskilled workforce will be needed to drive and implement net zero initiatives. They will need to be supported to learn, innovate and embed sustainable development into everyday actions in the health service.

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) aims to provide all staff with education and training in sustainability to ensure full understanding and engagement with its Green Plan



What was the problem?

Set against a background of an NHS deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, CDDFT recognised the urgency of the climate emergency by launching their Green Plan: 'Sustainability Matters' in the summer of 2021.

CDDFT established that one of the first key steps in implementing their Green Plan was to ensure everyone in the Trust achieves a baseline knowledge of NHS "net zero". The Trust also recognised the importance of staff awareness of national net zero policy, the relationship between climate change and health and NHS prioritisation of this agenda.

CDDFT identified that staff who joined after the Green Plan launch would have a knowledge deficit in comparison to existing staff. To address the deficit, they would need to be introduced to the key points in the Green Plan, understand the importance of this work and how to get involved with implementation.

What was the solution?

In July 2021, CDDFT agreed that all employees would be encouraged to complete the Greener NHS endorsed 'Building a Net Zero NHS' e-learning module and all new joiners would receive information on the Trust Green Plan 'Sustainability Matters' as part of their online induction training.

The online induction training is bespoke to CDDFT and includes a video of Dr Richard Hixson, consultant in critical care at CDDFT, talking about the Green Plan -. The training also sets out the first important steps to reach net zero by 2045 and the long and short-term targets in specific areas, including food catering and nutrition, travel and transport, medicines and medical care: [\(280\) County Durham and Darlington's Green Plan - clinician podcast - YouTube](#).

The decision not to make this training mandatory was a deliberate one. CDDFT limits statutory and mandatory training to the 'Core Skills Training Framework' which, as yet, does not mandate training on net zero, despite a [growing demand](#). CDDFT also didn't want to focus on compliance for this training, but rather appeal to staff's motivation to drive change in their own areas of work, an approach which the Trust has successfully used in the past.

This approach was agreed by the 'Sustainability Strategic Group' that provides governance and oversight of the Green Plan and approved via the 'Training Priorities Group' that has representation from all directorates and care groups across the organisation. Monthly progress was reported and monitored by both groups. This was important to ensure support from the CDDFT Board and key stakeholders across the Trust.

The communication strategy for the training used a variety of approaches:

- All messages came from the sustainability lead rather than corporate teams that are associated with compliance,
- Regular articles in the weekly staff newsletter
- Posts on social media - the Trust's closed Facebook page, and Twitter.
- Direct emails to those who had not yet completed the training
- "Sustainability" included as one of our Trust "Core Values" with indicating behaviours including completing relevant education and training
- Sustainability example included in our revised appraisal documentation.

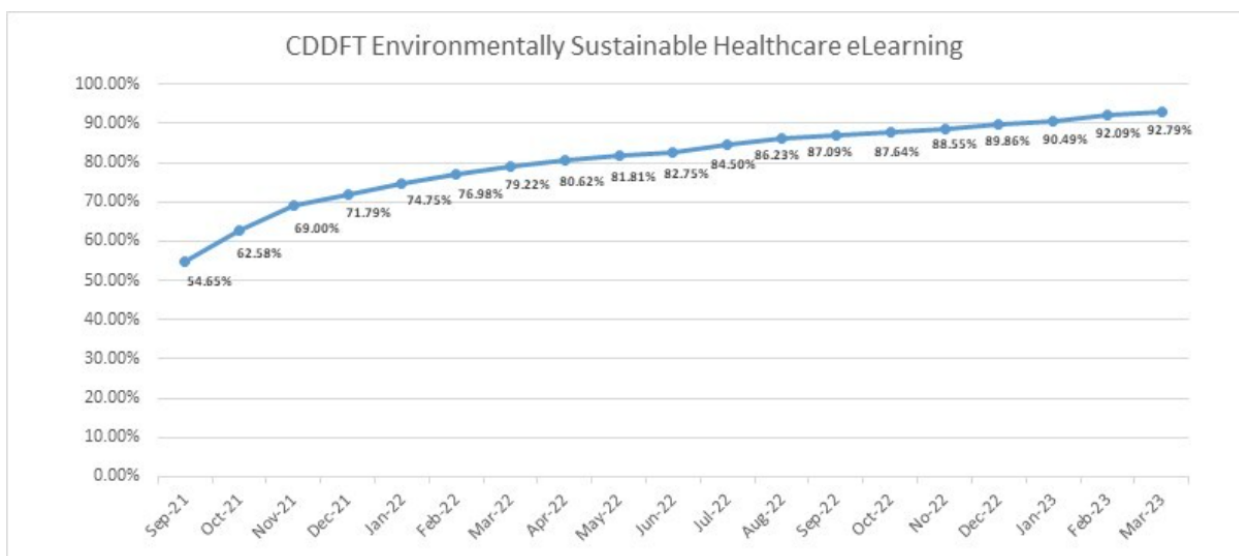
An important part of the process was making it as easy as possible for staff to complete this training. This was achieved by automatically enrolling them on the e-learning on ESR (Employee Staff Record) and offering and promoting the e-learning support available. Learning support included access to the general e-learning intranet page and the dedicated e-learning help desk by telephone or email inbox. This ensured that system or technical issues weren't a barrier to accessing or completing the module.

What were the challenges?

As a Trust, mandated training subjects are kept to an absolute minimum for front line staff to ensure they do not add unnecessary burden when running busy services. Therefore, the decision not to make this e-learning mandatory resulted in an alternative drive to motivate staff to complete it. For some staff a compliance approach did work and for them having it "red" (not compliant) on their ESR record helped to spur them onto complete the module. For others, communications were used to inspire them to complete the training. Reaching everyone in such a large workforce, geographically spread over more than 80 locations, was also a challenge as a variety of communications methods were required.

One of the Trust's actions for net zero has been a move towards online training and staff inductions. However, e-learning is not everyone's preferred method of learning and there has been past reluctance from staff to engage with it. The timing of the e-learning launch was potentially fortunate, in that the shift to more online learning had accelerated due to the pandemic and staff attitude towards this method had become more positive with integration into business as usual.

What were the results/Impact?



In 12 months, 86% (5856 staff as of 31st August 2022) of the CDDFT workforce had completed the Building a Net Zero NHS e-learning module, compliance is now at 92.8% (as of April 2023).

The Trust strongly believes that the high uptake of learning, alongside the implementation of the Green Plan has led to significant shifts in the mindset of the workforce, both in making working practices more sustainable and also in the personal attitudes of staff. This has been illustrated by the high number of nominations in the new Green Champion category of CDDFT annual staff awards for 2022.

What were the learning points?

Actions CDDFT took to achieve high compliance in net zero training:

- Auto-enrolled staff onto the e-learning module on ESR by making it a requirement for all staff, this ensured it was simple and easy for staff to access and the organisation to monitor.
- Promoted the module from a 'benefits gained' perspective and encouraged staff to be part of a solution.
- Used a variety of communication mechanisms to promote the training.
- Marketing communications were sent by the Sustainability Lead so it was seen as separate from corporate training compliance or mandatory training. Additional positive communications/ social media posts from a variety of staff across the organisation had a positive impact, especially on social media.
- CDDFT has "Sustainability" included as one of the Trust "Core Values" with indicative behaviours, including completing relevant education and training.
- Sustainability was included in our revised staff appraisal documentation.
- CDDFT built the local approach on sustainability into induction for all new starters.
- Gaining buy-in from senior leaders was extremely helpful. The Trust CEO was very engaged in the Green Plan, setting a strong example for staff to follow.
- CDDFT had a Training Priorities Group (made up of representatives from across the organisation) that makes all decisions on training requirements for the Trust and what goes onto ESR as a competency. Therefore, it was very important to gain support and backing from this group to ensure smooth and speedy implementation.

Next steps

Next steps are to capture case studies of what initiatives, no matter how small have been put in place following the training and sharing the approach CDDFT has taken with other organisations.