

Pulse magazine

Spring
2026



Welcome to the spring edition of Pulse.

I'm Umesh Jetha, one of the Trust's Non-Executive Directors, and it's a pleasure to introduce this edition. I joined the Board last year, but like many in our community, my connection to the Royal Berkshire goes back much further.

My wife and I live in Newbury with our two children, both proudly born at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, so this Trust has played a meaningful role in our family's life for many years. It's a privilege now to help support its future direction.

My professional background is in technology, digital innovation and data, and I'm passionate about how these tools can help us improve patient experience, support colleagues and strengthen the Trust for the future. It's been inspiring to see how much of this work is already underway across our organisation.

This edition brings together a range of stories that reflect the dedication, compassion and innovation shown every day. Our strong NHS Staff Survey results are a testament to the commitment of colleagues who continue to deliver exceptional care in a challenging environment. We also celebrate our long serving staff, whose experience and loyalty form the foundation of so much of what we do.

We look ahead too, with the announcement of James Blythe as our incoming Chief Executive and the appointment of our new Chief Finance Officer, Frances Khatcherian. Both bring valuable leadership as we continue to strengthen the Trust for the years ahead.

You'll also find inspiring features from across our services, from local artists creating a calming 'four seasons' mural, to our stroke team contributing to the largest global study of its kind, to colleagues improving outcomes for people living with Hepatitis B. We are also proud to celebrate the achievements of Anna Horwood MBE and our Berkshire Cancer Centre colleague appointed President of the UK Oncology Nursing Society.

I hope you enjoy this edition.
Umesh Jetha
Non-Executive Director

Celebrating top marks in latest NHS Staff Survey

Staff at the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust have ranked it as the top acute trust nationally across 16 areas in the latest NHS Staff Survey results released today, putting the Trust up there with the best in terms of working experience.

The NHS Staff Survey is one of the largest workforce surveys in the world – collecting feedback on staff experience across a variety of key areas including inclusivity, reward and recognition, staff safety, engagement, and morale.

With over 4,000 responses, more staff than ever took the time to make their voice heard. From the feedback received, the Trust saw some of its best scores and has been ranked as the top acute Trust in England in 16 areas including:

- We each have a voice that counts
- My organisation acts on concerns raised by patients.
- I look forward to going to work
- We are a team

These positive results show that supporting its people to thrive - one of the Trust's key strategic aims – is feeding through to the experience staff have in their day-to-day work as they deliver compassionate care to the community.

Steve McManus, Chief Executive said: "I am incredibly proud of these latest staff survey results. As a team of thousands, we all contribute in different ways to make the Trust the best place it can be, both to work as part of, and as a place to receive care.

"Our staff and volunteers are what make the organisation such a special place, and it's brilliant to see that we are continuing to build on the positive culture we have, despite a challenging environment we operate within.

"We know there's always more we can do, and these results allow us to go further still and identify where we can make the Trust an even better place to work."



Thanks to you we're Top Trust in 16 Staff Survey areas!



Tea, cake, and good times at our annual long service event

In March, some of our Board members joined more than 30 of our longest serving colleagues at a celebratory tea party to thank them for their years of service.

We're privileged to have so many long serving colleagues who have chosen to spend many decades with us. We benefit hugely from the experience they share, and the behaviours and contribution to our culture they role model.

The tea party was a lovely chance to recognise their dedication, and give colleagues who may have known each other for a whole career the chance for an informal catch up over tea and a sandwich or two.



James Blythe announced as incoming Chief Executive



James Blythe, previous Interim Group Chief Executive Officer at one of the largest NHS health groups in the country, has been announced as the new Chief Executive Officer at the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, starting in mid-May when Steve McManus steps down after more than 9 years in the role and more than 38 years service with the NHS.

Oke Eleazu, Trust Chair said, "James is coming 'full circle' as he started his career in the NHS at the Royal Berks as a graduate trainee in 2004. He brings with him a vast amount of experience and expertise gained from more than two decades of leadership roles within the NHS which we will embrace and benefit from as an organisation."

In his Interim Group Chief Executive Officer role, James has been responsible for the services across St George's, Epsom and St Helier Hospitals (gsh), which includes community services teams in Surrey and south west London.

With more than 20 years' experience in the health service, he has worked in operational management, system management and policy roles. Through his system roles and at Epsom and St Helier, James has had longstanding involvement with plans to redevelop acute hospital estates.

Steve McManus, Chief Executive at the Trust said, "It's been the privilege of my life to lead this Trust for almost a decade. And as I said when I first announced my intention to step down, I will be leaving with a heavy heart. However, one of the things I am most proud of is the culture our staff and volunteers have developed, lived, and breathe day in day out. As always, they have compassionate care, aspiration, and a will to be 'even better' at their core - all the while focused on supporting their patients, and each other - and I know that will continue under James' leadership.

"Leading an organisation like this one, that has been at the centre of the community it serves for almost 200 years is a huge honour for anyone taking on the role. I know that James will lead the Trust into this next period supported by a hugely capable team, and I wish them the absolute best and all the success as they do so. My job now is to make sure that James is able to arrive well into the CEO role and we continue the outstanding work we do each day for this community."

James Blythe added: "It is an enormous privilege to be appointed to the CEO role at the Trust. Over the last few weeks, I've come to appreciate the exceptional culture, drive to innovate and focus on patient care that makes RBFT so special, and I'm really excited to work with the team to ensure this continues and goes further. I'll be working closely with Steve over the coming months to ensure we have a smooth handover and I look forward to meeting everyone at RBFT very soon."

Local artists bring comfort with 'four seasons' mural

This year marks the 30th anniversary of our Royal Berks Charity, who over the years have supported us to improve the care we provide and the experience our patients have of coming to see us.

Just recently they have unveiled a four seasons' mural they co-ordinated. It spans the wall outside our bereavement area - and was made possible by 18 local artists volunteering their time to create it, bringing comfort and calm to our visitors at their most vulnerable times.

Jo Warrior, Charity Director said, "This artwork has been created with great care and sensitivity, and its location makes it particularly significant."



Stroke team lead the way in largest global study

A major study published in the Lancet has shown that the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) imaging software across NHS stroke networks significantly increased access to lifesaving treatment for patients with severe stroke in England. The study was authored by colleagues from the Trust in collaboration with Health Innovation Network Oxford and Thames Valley, and Brainomix 360.

The research, conducted across 107 hospitals found those implementing the software doubled the rate of endovascular thrombectomy — a specialist procedure that restores blood flow in patients with large vessel occlusion stroke, and reduced the time for transfer to a specialist centre by more than an hour. The study included over 450,000 stroke patients between 2019 and 2023, making it the largest global evaluation to date of AI in stroke care.



Breaking ground in West Berks

A groundbreaking ceremony took place at the end of last year to mark the official start of construction on a new MRI community diagnostic centre at West Berkshire Community Hospital. Steve McManus, Chief Executive turned the soil with Dr Rob Tayton, Chairman of the Newbury and Thatcham Building Trust, alongside partners and colleagues from the Trust to mark the occasion.

This state-of-the-art facility will be home to two new MRI scanners which have been generously donated by four local charities, including the Newbury and Thatcham Hospital Building Trust, the Peter Baker Foundation, the Greenham Common Trust, and the Storey Foundation. This new MRI facility has been designed to meet the growing demand for advanced diagnostic imaging across Berkshire West. Equipped with two new MRI scanners, the facility will be capable of delivering 17,500 MRI scans annually ensuring local patients get faster access to essential imaging services.



It will be the latest addition to the development of radiology facilities at West Berkshire Community Hospital. In 2021 the hospital became part of the government's Community Diagnostic CDC Programme and has seen substantial investment and improvements into imaging services. This includes the opening of a new mammography unit, DEXA scanner and two ultrasound suites in December 2024, and two digital plain film x-ray machines and cone beam CT scanner in 2023.

Steve McManus said: "I'm delighted that construction is now underway on our new state of the art diagnostic imaging facility at West Berkshire Community Hospital. The project has been in development for some time, and thanks to the dedication of everyone involved, we've reached this exciting milestone."

Thames Valley Integrated Care Board launched

With an annual budget of £5.6 billion, the new ICB will take responsibility for commissioning high-quality NHS services across the region, from GP practices and community services to local hospitals. The change reflects national direction for the NHS, including the Government's 10-Year Health Plan and the NHS Model ICB Blueprint, which emphasise more consistent, population-level planning and reducing unwarranted variation.

Importantly, the way people access services will not change. Patients will continue to use their local GP, community services and hospitals as usual. The ICB's role is to strengthen what sits behind that, improving prevention, shifting more care closer to home, and making better use of digital tools that help people manage their own health. [You can see the full article on our website.](#)

Improving outcomes for people living with Hepatitis B

We have recently received confirmation that central funding has been extended for an additional two-years for 'opt-out' testing in ED to increase diagnosis of people living with Hepatitis B and HIV in the community. During the 12-month pilot period we saw detection rates of Hepatitis B double.

Alongside this, Gastroenterology and Hepatology colleagues have also recently published a research study looking back on 700 patients at the Trust over a 10-year period which shows the clear benefits of taking a more proactive approach to identifying people living with chronic Hepatitis B a condition that can have severe impacts, including liver cancer, if left untreated.

[The full article is available on the Trust website.](#)



Berkshire Cancer Centre colleague named President of the United Kingdom Oncology Nursing Society



Dr Mary Tanay, Nurse Consultant in Genomics at the Trust, who has been elected President of the United Kingdom Oncology Nursing Society.

The Society is a professional charity run by cancer nurses with over 12,000 members. It promotes excellence in cancer nursing care across all four UK nations through education, research, and policy development, while representing their collective voice. The society hosts educational events and annual conferences, publishes resources many being used across UK Trusts, and collaborates widely to advance specialist cancer nursing.

Mary is the second colleague from the Trust to have held this role in recent times, alongside Mark Foulkes' tenure, and that is testament to the dedication and standard of expertise we are so privileged to have in the organisation. It is only right, as we celebrate Mary's achievement that we hear what it means to her in her own words. Mary, over to you:

"For over a decade I've been proud to volunteer with UKONS. I am deeply honoured to serve as UKONS President, a role that offers a vital opportunity to influence change as the NHS 10 year plan and National Cancer Plan take shape. Making sure the voice of cancer nursing is heard, and the unique contributions of cancer nurses recognised, will be central to these transformations."

"At the Berkshire Cancer Centre, I am inspired every day by colleagues whose dedication and compassion make an extraordinary difference to patients and their families. This commitment to advancing excellence in cancer nursing is the very goal of UKONS. I am truly thankful to the Trust for standing behind me and supporting me in this cause."

Congratulations to Anna Horwood MBE

Congratulations to Anna Horwood, Emeritus Professor of Orthoptics who was awarded an MBE in the King's New Years Honours list. Anna has been with the Trust for 44 years, and this honour is in recognition of her services to Orthoptics and Research in Visual Development, specialising in children's vision.



Anna said, "I feel very humbled to have been honoured in this way. Orthoptics is a specialist, and therefore fairly small profession within the NHS. And I'm proud that through our research we can continue to serve our patients well, both in the UK and further afield. I want to share and dedicate this award to all my fellow Orthoptists who do amazing work every day, supporting our patients, their families and loved ones."

Katie Prichard-Thomas, Chief Nursing Officer at the Trust said, "Anna is a true inspiration, an internationally recognised innovator and leader for the Orthoptics profession, one of the 15 Allied Health Professions in the NHS, 11 of which we have as part of the team at the Trust.

"In her role at the Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust, Anna has helped countless families and children to protect the most precious of things that we so often take for granted – the ability to see and engage with the world around us. This honour couldn't go to a more worthy recipient, who we are so lucky to have as part of the team at the Trust. Huge congratulations Anna from us all."

Welcoming our new Chief Finance Officer



We are delighted to announce Frances Khatcherian as our new Chief Finance Officer in-post since the beginning of March 2026. Frances replaces our Interim Chief Finance Officer Helen Troalen who had been with us since July last year.

Frances joins us from Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust, where she has been serving as Chief Financial Officer with responsibility for Finance, Estates, and Systems. During her time there, she led the Trust through a period of strengthened financial resilience, embedding value for money, supporting long-term sustainability, and aligning estates and digital infrastructure with strategic priorities. She is known for her collaborative approach and for building strong relationships across clinical, operational, and corporate teams.

Speaking about her appointment, Frances said: "I'm genuinely excited to be joining the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust as Chief Financial Officer. The organisation has a strong and well-earned reputation as a great place to work, with a people-centred culture that really matters to me. I'm passionate about innovation and digital transformation, and I'm looking forward to working closely with colleagues across the Trust to help drive that agenda, strengthen our financial resilience, and support the teams who deliver outstanding care every day."

Steve McManus, Chief Executive Officer said, "Frances is a great asset to the Trust, and the skill and experience she brings with her will be invaluable to us. I would like to also take this opportunity to thank Helen Troalen for all her hard work, putting us on a stable footing to build on into the future. Helen has shared that being a part of the team at RBFT has been a joy and she wishes Frances and the whole finance and procurement function every success in the future."

Getting to know our Governors: Maria Norville, Public Governor Wokingham

Hi I'm Maria, I've lived in Berkshire most of my life and I have been a Public Governor for Wokingham for about a year and a half.

The Governor role is varied. On paper, it's about attending a few meetings a year to support or endorse decisions. However, it's much more than that. We help shape hospital services through contributing to the decisions being made and representing the views of our constituents. We also get to see some of the amazing work the Trust does through services showcasing their work to us.

Over the last year, I have been on a guided tour of the Medical Museum, attended meetings at our partner organisations, visited the University of Reading and learnt about their joint Clinical Skills Training and Research activities with the Trust. By the way, this Trust has a really active Research team who presented alongside a patient at our recent Public Board meeting. Anyone is welcome to attend these meetings and we regularly hear from patients and staff.

I have also contributed in various selection processes for Non-Executive and Executive Board members.

I think the best part about being a Governor is hearing directly from patients. It's a chance to find out what is working well, learn what could be better and hear their ideas for changes that could be made. I hear from fellow patients at outpatient appointments, patient stories at Public Board or at our Governor Information Point.

I would encourage you to ask your friends and families to enrol as members so that they get a chance to help shape the services the Trust provides and can elect Governors in their area to advocate their views along with hearing about the many great things happening at this Trust.

The next Governor Information Point is on Tuesday 28 April so do stop by and chat to us on the 2nd floor reception area in Craven Road.



Governor Information Point

During March, our governors held an information point in the main reception of the Royal Berkshire Hospital, providing an opportunity for patients, visitors and staff to meet some of the people who represent the interest of our members and local communities within the Trust.

This provided opportunity for anyone to ask questions, hear more about the role of governors, learn how they support the Trust and understand how feedback from members help shape our priorities.

Another information point has been scheduled on 28 April 2026, again in the main reception on Level 2. Governors will be available to talk about the Trust's membership strategy, explain the benefits of being a member, and support anyone who would like to sign up as a member. We'd love for you to stop by, ask questions, and find out how you can get involved.

Meet your Council of Governors

Find a [full list of your Council of Governors](#) on our website.

Get involved and have your say

Join us at one of our upcoming open meetings. Full details and agendas are available on our Trust website [Open Meetings - Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust](#)

- Wednesday 27 May 2026: Board of Directors
Seminar Room, Trust Education Centre, Royal Berkshire Hospital. 9am.
- Wednesday 27 May 2026: Council of Governors
Seminar Room, Trust Education Centre, Royal Berkshire Hospital. 5pm.

Become a member

Invite your family and friends to become a members through our [online form](#) to receive our latest updates, help shape how hospital services are delivered and enjoy access to NHS discounts.

Get in touch with the team Foundation.trust@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Discounts? Did you know?

As a member of the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust you are eligible to amazing Health Service Discounts to save money on holidays, electrical goods, meals, goods, meals, days out and more! To register contact us at: Foundation.trust@royalberkshire.nhs.uk for a letter of eligibility follow this link: [Register | NHS Discounts | Health Service Discounts](#)
Select 'Foundation Trust Member' upload your letter.

Interested in work experience and placements?

Work experience gives those interested in a career in the NHS the opportunity to gain hands-on experience observing what happens in hospitals, the day-to-day work of NHS multi-disciplinary teams and an understanding of the attitudes, the behaviours and values that are expected in a healthcare setting. Shadowing our teams, you will have the opportunity to see first-hand what is involved in the job role you are considering.

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is committed to supporting young people and adults looking to pursue a career in healthcare. Our placements are open to students and adults resident in the Berkshire or surrounding South Oxfordshire area. Students from outside these areas and outside the UK will not accepted for a placement.

We offer clinical placements and non-clinical placements at set times in the academic year.

For more information and to check out the eligibility criteria please visit [Work Experience and Placements - Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust](#)

How to apply

- Year 12 and 13 Placements: To apply for a placement for areas including nursing, midwifery, allied health professions, pathology, clinical engineering and medical physics and pharmacy please contact: healthcareworkexperience@royalberkshire.nhs.uk.

Please note we are unable to offer placements within Psychology, Psychiatry, Paramedics, Art Therapy, Music Therapy, Drama Therapy, Dietetics, Social Work or Mental Health.

- Adult Placements: these are offered at different times of the year depending on the capacity of the hosting department at the time. Please contact healthcareworkexperience@royalberkshire.nhs.uk.