

BP3 Case Studies | NHS MWL

How MWL NHS Trust is leveraging automation to put its people first.

Mersey and West Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (MWL) was formed in July 2023 following the merger of St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust.

We serve a population of over 600,000 with a combined workforce of around 9,000 dedicated and skilled staff delivering acute hospital care, intermediate care, primary care, and community-based services. We provide regional services for burns, plastic surgery, and spinal injuries, to more than four million people across Merseyside and West Lancashire, Cheshire, The Isle of Man and North Wales.

Like many other NHS organisations across the UK, MWL faces pressure to continue to deliver excellent patient care, whilst also improving efficiency and reducing cost of back-office functions. The Trust's Human Resources leadership team identified automation as an opportunity to support staff using digital workers and alleviate these pressures.

The Employment Services department, made up of payroll, pensions and HR admin, which acts as a commercial service arm for weekly and monthly payroll for 13 Trusts in the North West, was identified as a key area for an automation pilot to be rolled out.

The processing of NHS Payroll is complex and involves repetitive, time consuming and high-volume tasks, making it an ideal test bed for automation within the Trust.

"We originally set about building our automation capabilities in-house in 2021. However, it was quickly discovered that we did not have the required Developer skills, and it became apparent that we needed outside support. We tested the market and identified BP3 as a market leader.

The BP3 team immediately set about putting the structure in place for us to transform two key processes: pension auto enrolment and processing of weekly payroll files," said Mark Ramsay, RPA Project Manager at MWL.

Best Practice Deployment:

BP3 offered best practice insights to enable MWL to implement automated bots, logging and error handling to transform Employment Services processes. BP3 was instrumental in bringing the following two implementations to fruition:

Pension auto enrolment: Any new member of staff joining the NHS or any organisation in the UK has to be auto enrolled in a pension, with the option to opt out. Previously, sending out an auto enrolment letter was a manual process. Physical letters had to be filled out with the correct information and sent to each member of staff, which would take five to ten minutes per letter.

Automation has allowed the Trust to send emails with accurate pre-filled information to speed up the process. Where no email address is available, a template is created for staff to post out. The Trust is obligated to send out emails at scheduled intervals to allow opted-out staff to opt back in if desired.

Processing of weekly payroll files: Staff members completing weekly payroll previously spent valuable hours manually manipulating and processing these files, with limited and pressured time to complete quality checks.

With Automation Anywhere automated bots, the Trust is able to eradicate the chance of human errors and enable staff to undertake these checks, ultimately improving the accuracy and quality of payroll.

Following this, BP3 also worked with MWL to build bots for data protection purposes. Certain correspondence sent out by the Trust needs to be protected with a password due to National Insurance numbers being included.

With the potential for human error, this couldn't always be guaranteed with the previous process. BP3 helped MWL to build bots that automated this process with a 100% success rate.

Tangible Results:

The Trust has made a commitment to using efficiencies gained through automation to improve quality metrics and service to its clients i.e. reducing unwanted variation and rework. This has not resulted in reduction to headcount but has delivered higher levels of customer satisfaction and wellbeing of the Employment Services team.

With BP3 laying the groundwork & Automation Anywhere offering the cutting edge technology, MWL has achieved a number of tangible results by incorporating automation:

Pension auto enrolment:

- The pension auto enrolment bot, adapted to send pension re-enrolment notifications, sent out over 1,700 re-enrolment letters in June 2022. This volume of work previously took a payroll officer 20 days and was completed by the bot in 20 hours
- Over the course of six months following deployment, this automated process has saved almost 500 hours of time compared to previous manual processes

Processing of Weekly Payroll Files:

- Automation has enabled 229 payroll runs to be completed since March 2022, and saves approximately 60 minutes per run for staff members, leading to a total saving of 229 hours so far, while also contributing to enhanced quality checks on the payroll

Staff Development:

The knowledge transfer provided by BP3 has allowed MWL to take steps to develop the skills of its people.

Using BP3-implemented Automation Anywhere bots as the benchmark, staff have taken on ownership of the technology and gained the confidence to build a number of processes themselves. A small team has transitioned from the payroll team to being RPA developers by taking an active role in developing the logic for bots.

“The future of automation is about enhancing knowledge, skills and staff expertise through “citizen” development, which essentially means that organisations and their employees own and build their own processes. Our partnership with MWL has very much been a testament to this mindset. It’s well documented that the NHS has limited resources to invest in this type of technology. Better use of technology enables MWL to optimise the effective use of its resources and develop its own people at the same time,” said Eduard Sabbagh, BP3.

Further Key Figures:

Following BP3's support for programme set-up, the Employment Services Automation Programme now has over 240 bots handling 30 processes (as of January 2024) with the following achieved so far:

- Filed over 88,000 files to employees' personal folders
- Completed over 3,400 Statutory Sick Pay (SSP1) forms
- Communicated over 4,500 pension auto enrolments and re-enrolments
- Distributed over 4,700 third party reports to client finance teams
- Input over 4,700 Appraisals into ESR, saving line managers 15 minutes per appraisal
- In total, these bot processes have saved the equivalent of over 1,000 workdays across the department.
- Automations have now been developed across external payroll reporting, employee correspondence, payroll processing, administrative tasks, management information reporting and system uploads (ESR). In the long term, around 7,500 hours of time per year is expected to be saved by the automation of these processes. Automation opportunities scoped out across the Trust show opportunities for up to 45,000 hours to be saved annually.