WELCOME TO THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP FORUM

The Social Partnership Forum (SPF) brings together the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS Employers, NHS Trade Unions, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) and Health Education England (HEE) to contribute to the development and implementation of policy that impacts on the health workforce.

How this handbook can help you

This handbook contains useful information about the SPF. It explains the purpose of the SPF, the role of partners and how you, as a member of the forum, can get involved to support its aims. It also provides practical information on the SPF’s detailed working arrangements. The handbook will be reviewed annually to ensure content is up-to-date.

This handbook should be used alongside the SPF Partnership Agreement and the SPF website: www.socialpartnershipforum.org.

SPF secretariat and key contacts in partner organisations

- James Shepherd, SPF programme manager, james.shepherd@nhsemployers.org
- Emily Smith, administration and communications support officer, emily.smith@nhsemployers.org
- Andrew Morris, head of stakeholder engagement, DHSC, andrew.morris@dhsc.gov.uk
- Robert Pickard, stakeholder engagement, DHSC, robert.pickard@dhsc.gov.uk
- Alan Lofthouse, national officer, UNISON, a.lofthouse@unison.co.uk
- Ciara Luscombe, senior programme support officer, NHS Employers, ciara.luscombe@nhsemployers.org
- Melanie Whitfield, head of people practises, NHSE/I, melanie.whitfield3@nhs.net

The SPF is a forum to discuss, debate and involve partners in the development and implementation of the workforce implications of policy. The aim of the SPF is to:

- contribute trade union and employer perspectives to the development of policy
- provide constructive comments on emerging policy at a formative stage
- contribute ideas on the workforce implications of developing policy and implementation
- promote effective communications between partners.

The SPF is built on a framework of effective partnership working. The principles, processes and structures of partnership working are linked to partners’ shared goals and objectives. The shared approach and principles for effective joint working are set out in the SPF Partnership Agreement.

Why work in partnership?

There is a growing body of evidence that shows good staff engagement, such as the partnership approach, can deliver better patient outcomes as well as improve overall organisational performance - see the link between staff engagement and organisational effectiveness on the SPF website.

The NHS Constitution Handbook also emphasises the importance of staff engagement and partnership working and requires the NHS to commit to 'engage staff in decisions that affect them and the services they provide, individually, through representative organisations and through local partnership working arrangements.' The potentially serious impact of a disengaged workforce was highlighted starkly in the Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (2013). See the following web page for more information on the Inquiry and the SPF response.

Effective partnership working at a national level has the potential to produce some important benefits for all parties. These include:

- delivering improved outcomes for patients/service users
• improved mutual understanding
• an opportunity for partners to contribute their experience and ideas to the development and implementation of the workforce implications of health and social care policy
• an ability to assess the likely impact of emerging policy on the NHS workforce and to mitigate risks
• more effective development and implementation of policy
• ensuring high standards of employment practice
• providing a transparent and streamlined structure for NHS trade union, employer and staff engagement across the health and care system.

What are the benefits for each partner?
The SPF enables partners to work together to promote effective partnership working on the workforce implications of policy. It brings together representatives from the DHSC, NHSE/I, HEE and the NHS Trade Unions (representing NHS staff) and NHS Employers (which provides the employers' voice). This model enables partners to discuss, debate and involve each other in the development and implementation of policy that impacts on the workforce.

**DHSC perspective:** Ministers and the DHSC value the SPF, as it provides a forum which upholds high levels of cooperation and commitment to improve health and social care outcomes for patients. The forum provides valuable input into the workforce implications of policy development and supports the implementation of policies.

Working in partnership across the health and care landscape and engaging with the workforce is key to making the best decisions about patient care. Evidence shows that engaged, satisfied employees are more productive and that in the NHS, staff and patient satisfaction are closely linked. DHSC believes that engaging NHS staff in decisions that affect them is a crucial factor in the delivery of safe and high-quality care for our patients.

**Trade Union perspective:** The NHS Trade Unions believe it is in their members' best interest to engage in partnership working with governments and employers, to seek solutions to challenges and problems. Partnership working puts an onus on both employers and trade unions to engage and consult on all decisions that affect staff. Partnership underpins and facilitates sound and effective employer and trade union relations and has a track record of delivering real gains for staff and patients. As a crucial determinant of the quality of healthcare, a growing body of evidence-based research shows that effective staff engagement in NHS organisations improves the patient experience and healthcare outcomes.

**Employers’ perspective:** The SPF allows employers to get an early sight of health policy. It also allows them to give their perspective on how policy should be developed and highlight the possible workforce implications of a policy. In particular, the forum allows employers to influence how proposals are implemented and, through discussions with partners, to make sure they are workable and realise maximum benefits for patients.

**NHSE/I’s perspective:** Responsible for the wise investment of over £100bn of tax payers’ resources, NHSE/I makes critical decisions about patient care which affect the NHS and the people who work in it. The SPF is an invaluable forum which allows for the workforce implications of those decisions to be discussed with employers and staff representatives in an atmosphere of constructive partnership.

NHSE/I is also responsible for supporting foundation trusts and NHS trusts to give patients consistently safe, high quality, compassionate care within local health systems that are financially sustainable.
With the workforce at the heart of all NHS providers it is imperative that NHSE/I maintains strong working channels through the SPF to fully understand any concerns and issues that partners may have. There is clear evidence showing the link between staff and patient satisfaction, and NHSE/I believes that a well-motivated and committed workforce is of benefit to patients.

**HEE’s perspective:** HEE is responsible for the education, training and personal development of every member of staff, and recruiting for values in order to deliver a better health and healthcare workforce for England. HEE is committed to working in partnership with its recognised trade union partners, to maximise both the successful delivery of HEE’s strategy and corporate objectives and to work for the wider development and benefit of the service in general.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

To enable effective operation of these partnership arrangements, all partners agree to recognise and respect each other’s roles and functions, which are distinct but complementary.

At national level partners recognise that:

- Ministers are democratically elected and have formal responsibility as leaders of the health and care system for developing and implementing public policy through the DHSC and its Arm’s Length Bodies (ALBs).
- Trade Unions have a responsibility to represent the interests of their members.
- NHS Employers has a responsibility to represent the views of employers in the NHS.
- NHSE/I has a responsibility to discuss and engage with partners on significant policy decisions which affect the NHS workforce and to ensure health interested unions understand NHSE/I’s role, reasons for developing specific policies and its evidence base, and regard NHSE/I a partner with the best interests of the NHS, patients and the workforce at heart.
- HEE has a responsibility to discuss significant decisions and developments affecting the planning and development of the healthcare and public health workforce.

A range of other organisations, groups and networks exist at a national and regional level with which the SPF liaises and interfaces through the national SPF, its subgroups and regional SPFs. This includes the Care Quality Commission, Public Health England and other organisations leading health and care initiatives that impact on the health workforce. The SPF also works with the NHS Staff Council, which is responsible for formal negotiations on pay and terms and conditions issues for staff covered by NHS Terms and Conditions of Service.

At regional level partners recognise that regional level partnership forums provide an arena for overarching confidential discussions and debate between trade unions and employers about strategic issues affecting the NHS workforce. They contribute ideas on the workforce implications of developing policy and its implementation. They take a lead role in promoting good practice and communication between national and local partnership forums to drive up the quality of care for patients and improve staff experience. Further information regarding the different regional partnership forums, their membership and work plans can be found on the SPF website.

At local employer level - the SPF recognises the importance of partnership working between management and trade unions in health and care organisations and the positive contribution it can make to patient care. Partners have a shared aim to ensure that effective partnership working is sustained and embedded in all employer organisations and produce and promote tools and resources, made available on the SPF website, to support a partnership approach.
Members’ behaviour
The SPF and its subgroup meetings are conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect even when the partners are in disagreement over a specific issue. The following guidelines provide some agreed ground rules to support a positive and constructive working environment:

- Wherever possible keep the language simple and avoid jargon. If you do not fully understand an issue, ensure that you seek clarification before agreeing or disagreeing.
- Respect other members of the forum as individuals with equal rights.
- Recognise and respect the responsibilities that individuals have as representatives of their respective partner organisations.
- Where appropriate, maintain confidentiality on issues of a sensitive nature and where agreed, do not share confidential papers outside of the meeting. If an issue is potentially sensitive, agree how and when it will be communicated externally. During the meetings individuals have the right to express opinions without having their views quoted outside of the meeting.
- Strive for consensus as far as possible. Sharing of information should be encouraged and enough time allowed for meaningful discussion.
- Where a consensus is not reached but a recommendation still must be made, the divergence of views needs to be clearly noted.

As a member of the national SPF or one of its subgroups, you represent one of the partners i.e. NHS Employers, NHS Trade Unions, HEE, NHSE/I, DHSC (not the SPF as a whole). As an SPF member you should use your judgement, guided by the principles of partnership working, to engage with your own constituents outside the group as and when necessary. Each partner organisation has its own processes in place for gathering wider views to input into discussions.

Representatives should:
- use their judgement to engage with their own partner constituents within SPF for views/feedback, as and when necessary
- report back to their SPF colleagues on relevant developments or progress via the lead contact for the partner organisation they represent
- market SPFs and encourage regional tiers to become more involved in regional SPFs
- be involved in the annual programme of regional visits.

The SPF undertakes stocktakes to identify where it is working well and areas for improvement. In 2015, an independent report of the SPF undertaken by the Involvement and Participation Association (IPA) found that it ‘remains one of the most advanced forms of industrial partnership in the British public sector’.

In addition to the stocktake, a review of communications, including the website, is undertaken periodically to identify how the SPF can better communicate information on the benefits of partnership working; the work of the national and regional SPFs and the impact of this work.

Detailed Working Arrangements

National Meetings
The SPF Wider Group meets three times a year with the smaller Strategic Group meeting four times a year. The Wider Group meetings are chaired by a Minister of State for Health. The Strategic Group is co-chaired by NHS Trade Unions and NHS Employers and operates under the auspices of the Wider Group.
Conduct of meetings
Items may be placed on the agenda by any of the parties. Secretariat arrangements are led by the DHSC, who liaise with key contacts from NHS Trade Unions, NHS Employers, HEE, NHSE/I. All partners are encouraged to use the forum to showcase effective partnership working in line with the aims of the forum.

The agenda and any supporting papers will be circulated one week before the meeting date where possible via the spfmailbox@dhsc.gov.uk.

The SPF chairs manage business and maintain proper conduct of meetings and are responsible for ensuring that individual members uphold the partnership principles and the co-operative spirit of the forum. There is a quarterly chairs teleconference, which includes the Strategic Group and Workforce Issues Group chairs. This teleconference is used to prioritise work areas and agree where partnership activity is required.

Consultation and information
In addition to SPF meetings, consultation and dialogue will continue and partners will meet informally as necessary to discuss specific policy issues.

To help facilitate effective working the partners agree to the following:

- every effort will be made to provide information in good time for discussion and/or consultation
- all parties will undertake to provide a considered, co-ordinated and timely response to issues on which their views are sought/on which they are consulted
- all parties to respect confidentiality where that is required or requested; and otherwise to conduct their dialogue openly.

Minutes and communications
Minutes of all meetings are produced. Joint key communications from the Wider Group meetings are also agreed by all partners and published on the SPF website.

SPF subgroups
From time to time, as appropriate, the SPF may establish subgroups to develop specific pieces of work or to look at issues in more detail. For more detail on the current SPF subgroups see the SPF website.

Secretariat support to the subgroups is provided by the SPF Programme Manager. Each subgroup is made up of representatives from partner organisations and has agreed terms of reference, which are reviewed regularly and published on the subgroup’s web page on the SPF website.

An update of subgroup activity is presented at each national Wider Group meeting and a National Action Log is refreshed regularly and published on the SPF website.

SPF campaigns/initiatives
SPF has led or supported a number of national campaigns such as the Flu Fighter campaign, to encourage healthcare workers to have the seasonal flu vaccine and the Learning for Life campaign to increase the level of access to learning opportunities in the NHS and to raise awareness about the positive impact of training on patient care. In December 2016, the SPF chairs signed up to the Tackling bullying in the NHS: a collective call to action initiative to encourage a partnership approach to improve the culture and tackle bullying in NHS organisations. The initiative has developed and is now called Creating a culture of civility, compassion & respect - tackling negative behaviour, bullying & harassment. For more information on this, see the SPF website.
SPF website
The SPF website is a resource for members. It provides information on the forum's priorities and showcases good practice in partnership working through a range of case studies. It also includes key documents which have been developed in partnership through the SPF.

Evaluation and review
The SPF partnership arrangements set out in this document will be subject to annual evaluation and review, to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose.
Annex A - Membership of Social Partnership Forum

STRATEGIC GROUP

NHS Trade Unions
Sara Gorton  UNISON (Staff Side Co-chair)
Jon Skewes  Royal College of Midwives (RCM)
Josephine Brady  Royal College of Nursing (RCN)
Raj Jethwa  British Medical Association (BMA)
Claire Sullivan  Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP)
Jon Restell  Managers in Partnership (MIP), Co-opted from SPF Workforce Issues Group

NHS Employers
Danny Mortimer  NHS Employers (Employers Side Co-chair)
Rebecca Smith  Director of Engagement
Plus two nominated employer representatives

DHSC
Lee McDonough  Director General, Acute Care and Workforce
Gavin Larner  Director of Workforce

NHSE/I
Helen Bullers  Director of People and OD
Caroline Corrigan  National Director for People Strategy
Prerana Issar  Chief People Officer

HEE
Lee Whitehead  Director of People and Communications
Giles Denham  Director of Strategic Partnerships

Secretariat
Andrew Morris  Department of Health and Social Care
Robert Pickard  Department of Health and Social Care
Alan Lofthouse  NHS Trade Unions
Ciara Luscombe  NHS Employers
Deborah Shipp  HEE
Melanie Whitfield  NHSE/I
James Shepherd  SPF Programme Manager
WIDER GROUP

Chair
Minister of State for Health.

NHS Trade Unions
Sara Gorton UNISON
Raj Jethwa British Medical Association (BMA)
Jon Skewes Royal College of Midwives (RCM)
Claire Sullivan Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP)
Jon Restell Managers in Partnership (MiP)
Josephine Brady Royal College of Nursing (RCN)
Colenzo Jarrett-Thorpe Unite the Union
Rachel Harrison General Municipal & Boilermakers (GMB)
Annette Mansell-Green British Dietetic Association (BDA)
Lesley-Anne Baxter British and Irish Orthoptic Society
Emma Lewis Federation of Clinical Scientists
Joe Chattin Hospital Consultants & Specialists Assoc (HCSA)
Martin Furlong The College of Podiary
Ian Cloke Society of Radiographers (SOR)
Helga Pile British Association of Occupational Therapists (BAOT)
Matt Dykes Trade Union Congress (TUC) – observer

NHS Employers
Danny Mortimer Chief Executive
Rebecca Smith Director of Engagement

Plus four nominated employer representatives

DHSC
Lee McDonough Director General, Acute Care and Workforce
Gavin Larner Director of Workforce

NHSE/I
Helen Bullers Director of People and OD
Caroline Corrigan National Director for People Strategy
Prerana Issar Chief People Officer

HEE
Ian Cumming Chief Executive
Giles Denham Director of Strategic Partnerships

Devolved administrations
Paula McGeown Northern Ireland Assembly
John Nicholls Scottish Devolved Administration
Donna Hill Welsh Assembly

Additional stakeholders
Gill Dix ACAS
Hein Scheffer NHS Clinical Commissioners representative
Gemma Parrick Business Services Association (BSA)
John Rogers Skills for Health
Jon Sutcliffe Local Government Association
Annex B – Partners’ websites

**SPF partners’ websites**

Social Partnership Forum  
www.socialpartnershipforum.org

UNISON  
www.unison.org.uk

NHS Employers  
www.nhsemployers.org

NHS England  
www.england.nhs.uk

NHS Improvement  
www.improvement.nhs.uk

Health Education England  
www.hee.nhs.uk

Royal College of Midwives  
www.rcm.org.uk

Royal College of Nursing  
www.rcn.org.uk

British Medical Association  
www.bma.org.uk

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy  
www.csp.org.uk

Managers in Partnership  
www.miphealth.org.uk

Unite  
www.unitetheunion.org

GMB  
www.gmb.org.uk

British Dietetic Association  
www.bda.uk.com

British and Irish Orthoptic Society  
www.orthoptics.org.uk

Federation of Clinical Scientists  
www.acb.org.uk

Hospital Consultants & Specialists Association  
www.hcsa.com

College of Podiatry  
www.cop.org.uk

Society of Radiographers  
www.sor.org

British Association of Occupational Therapists  
www.cot.co.uk

Trades Union Congress  
www.tuc.org.uk

Business Services Association  
www.bsa-org.com

**Other useful partnership organisations' websites**

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service  
www.acas.org.uk

Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development  
www.cipd.co.uk

Involvement and Participation Association  
www.ipa-involve.com

Partnership Institute  
www.partnership-institute.co.uk

Skills for Health  
www.skillsforhealth.org.uk