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

SPF key messages on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

1. Keeping the staff of the NHS safe at work is an absolute priority to the SPF and its member organisations.

2. There is widespread recognition of the impact on NHS staff of shortage in supplies of PPE, differences in content interpretation of formal guidance, and the prominence of PPE in current public debate.

3. The SPF and member organisations play a key role in relation to their reach into the NHS and are a helpful route for accurate information cascade and feedback on PPE issues for urgent resolution. Recent briefings provided for the SPF by Public Health England (PHE), NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) have demonstrated the efforts being made to improve the procurement and supply of PPE and to develop policy and guidance.

4. In order to assist employers and trade unions in this task, the SPF secretariat will facilitate access to regular and comprehensive information on both the formal scientific guidance and the supply plans relating to PPE and other issues designed to keep staff safe at work. The SPF has also encouraged all those responsible to take a much more active and prominent role in communicating through all channels with the NHS workforce.

5. Detail of the recommended levels of PPE appropriate to particular settings has been published by Public Health England along with details of the evidence base for the recommendations. The SPF recognises that access to PPE of the necessary specification forms one part of the necessary safe systems of work necessary to protect staff.

6. The SPF is keen to involve NHS staff through their representative structures in the planning and operation of COVID-19 risk management strategies at organisational and system level,
using employer level partnership structures and, in support, regional social partnership forums to facilitate this important work.

7. The SPF wants to ensure that at local this involvement includes:
   a. Support for trade union statutory health and safety representatives to be consulted in good time in relation to PPE, including on policies and risks
   b. Sharing of local risk management strategy/plans particularly relating to PPE with trade unions
   c. Early notification to local trade unions of deviation from or change to established plans or formal guidance
   d. Provision of local risk assessments where requested.
   e. The establishment of local mechanisms for trade unions to escalate to employers any PPE related concerns raised by their members

8. In relation to this work, the SPF recognises that employing organisations hold the responsibility for the safety of staff under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. In reaching decisions on management of risk to staff in the current pandemic, employing organisations will take advice from senior clinicians, infection control leads and health and safety managers/representatives. In this context, trade unions should be consulted on, but not be asked to endorse local decisions, particularly in relation to deviation from established plans or the formal guidance at a local, regional or national level.

9. It is hoped that partnership structures can, in this way, support the vital work of NHS organisations in keeping staff safe at work during the COVID-19 pandemic.