



By Email

27 August 2021

To: Regional SPF co-chairs

**National SPF priorities 2021/22**

Dear Colleague,

We are writing to let you know the national SPF priorities for the rest of the financial year, but firstly we want to thank you for what you and all those in the regional SPFs have done throughout the pandemic and continue to do to support the NHS through recovery. Members of the national SPF are grateful for your hard work and the important role you continue to play.

In previous years we have written to let you know what the current and upcoming priority areas are for the national SPF, so you can make connections with your regions' work areas and ensure a co-ordinated approach. Over the past 18 months the number one priority has been on supporting the NHS through the pandemic and this has taken up most of all our time and effort. As we move to a position where managing COVID-19 is incorporated into a more business as usual approach, we thought it would be helpful to send you information on what we plan to focus on in the coming months as this may help with your agenda planning.

We recognise the NHS continues to face ongoing pandemic pressures. On top of this the recovery of services and steps to reduce the elective backlog are placing enormous demands on staff, many of whom are exhausted and in desperate need for rest and recuperation. This is compounded by staff sickness and staff having to self-isolate. There is also a big increase in demand for NHS services as people, who have held off seeking healthcare during the pandemic, present at GP surgeries and accident and emergency departments. Because they delayed seeking treatment these people are often presenting with more complex conditions, which requires more time and resources to address. How the NHS recovers services and supports the demands on staff, is therefore our number one priority and we will continue working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) to assist the national approach. Regional SPFs have an important role in this agenda, working with NHSEI regional teams to share intelligence on how staff are coping with service demands, good practice on how staff can be supported effectively and innovation in the delivery of services.

To address workforce pressures in the longer term, the national SPF is working with Health Education England (HEE) on workforce planning. HEE has been commissioned to review its long-term strategic framework for health and social care workforce planning and is currently [calling for evidence](#) to inform this review. This will be part of an ongoing conversation, in which the national SPF will be involved. Your region may want to consider contributing to the process as HEE refines its new strategic framework.

The national SPF will continue to work closely with NHSEI on implementing the People Plan and is involved in initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of NHS staff and preventing and reducing violence against staff. These stem from the theme in the People Plan for staff to be safe and physically and mentally healthy and well.

Another theme in the People Plan is for the NHS to be open and inclusive. The Workforce Issues Group, a subgroup of the national SPF, is linking in with NHSEI on related equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) activity. This includes the overhaul of recruitment and promotion practices in the NHS and the Workforce Race Equality Standard. We encourage you to work with regional NHSEI colleagues to support the development and implementation of this programme and for trade union reps in NHS trusts and CCGs to contribute to their organisation's EDI actions.

We are aware that many of the regions are involved in the embedding of just and learning cultures in the NHS. This is something we encourage you to continue as the approach has been shown to lead to more positive and open working environments where there is learning, rather than recrimination, when things do not go to plan and this results in improved patient care. The national SPF has published a [web page](#) on its website to host good practice related to just and learning cultures. We hope you find this resource of use.

A key area of focus for us over the next seven months is the workforce organisational change arising from the establishment of statutory integrated care systems (ICSs) and we have set up the ICS [Transition Partnership Group](#) (TPG) as a new SPF subgroup. The aim of the TPG is to enable trade unions and employers to work with NHSEI and DHSC to support staff during the organisational change, by minimising uncertainty and limiting employment changes. Regular meetings between the TPG and yourselves are in diaries up until February 2022. These are to enable you to seek clarification on the transition process and give feedback on issues arising in your region that need to be considered at a national level. We welcomed your contribution to the first meeting held on 21 July and we hope we can keep this constructive two-way conversation going to ensure that the transition runs smoothly.

An area which the regional SPFs have an important role is in the identification and promotion of best practice social partnership working. If you are aware of such examples, please share with the national SPF via NHS Employers National Engagement Service so learning can be circulated wider. One way in which we celebrate and showcase excellent social partnership working is through our sponsorship of a HPMA award. On 23 September, HPMA is running a 2021 partnership award - meet the finalists webinar, which you may be interested in. More information about the webinar, including how to join is available [on the HPMA website](#).

Once again thank you for all your efforts and in demonstrating the strength of social partnership in the NHS and how it can support NHS staff and enable them to provide quality patient care and services.

Yours sincerely,



Sara Gorton  
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UNISON  
Trade Union SPF Chair



Danny Mortimer  
Chief Executive  
NHS Employers  
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