

Welcome and introductions

Gavin Larner, Director of Workforce, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave apologies for Helen Whately, Minister of State (Minister for Care) who could not attend the meeting as she was a visiting a trust.

White Paper/Health and Social Care Bill

Philippa Baker, DHSC, presented the White Paper/Health and Social Care Bill. The Bill will support recovery, implementation of the long-term plan and integrating care as well as increasing accountability and public confidence. The aim is to introduce measures into social care, public health, improvement of patient safety and quality in the NHS. With its introduction planned for late spring, the earliest the Bill will commence is April 2022.

The difficult context with the pandemic is recognised but updating legislation is crucial to help support recovery from COVID-19 by empowering local systems. The Bill will reflect best practice and set a clear framework with flexibility built in so that local areas can implement it in ways which work for them.

There will be workforce accountability measures, which commit Secretary of State to set out an assessment of workforce duties at least every five years.

Staff side highlighted the sensitivity of change for the workforce, particularly during the pandemic. They asked for a HR transition group to be set up to build on nationally agreed principles to support system leaders, engage in recovery and build stability.

COVID19 mass vaccination programme

Dr Jonathan Leach, Medical Director for Vaccinations, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) updated the meeting, reporting a total 16.3 million people vaccinated. He noted that there will be a ramping up of second doses and there are no current concerns about supply, they also continue to ensure that health and social care staff are vaccinated. Dr Leach reiterated that the two doses should be of the same type and that the vaccines are effective, especially for mortality against the newer strains. They are now looking further ahead and planning for the Autumn.

Tom Simons, NHSEI, advised that 73 per cent of staff have received the vaccine in the substantive and bank workforce. There were similar levels for agency and contractors and there was now greater uptake among BAME staff. Uptake is expected to level off at over 80 per cent and work continues to build trust and confidence with staff.

HEE forward plan

Giles Denham updated on the work to help recover time students and trainees had lost in their education programmes. He thanked staff side for the helpful conversations on the redeployment of third year students. More generally, there has been some impact on pre-registration courses, but the number of students affected was relatively low. Around 40 per cent of postgraduate medical trainees had been redeployed from their specialties, presenting a challenge to catch up.

Work is underway on flexibility alongside working with NHSEI on their service recovery programme. There has been a 30 per cent plus increase in applications to pre-registration nursing courses and there is a need to capitalise on that for future supply of nurses.

Other points of focus include supporting the priorities of the long-term plan, mental health, cancer and diagnostics. Work continues on the reform of professional education and building a digitally literate workforce. HEE are also working with NHSEI on the development of work with ICSs on joining up with social care on workforce planning and development.

Yeovil District Hospital NHSFT- HR Policy Manual

Mark Appleby, Director of HR and OD and Nikki Goff, staff side rep at Yeovil shared their journey to develop a set of accessible, practical, and concise HR policies from scratch. The trust found that their HR policies were often out of date, too long, contained too much jargon and were not helpful to anyone. Management and staff side came together with the mutual goals of treating staff fairly and having policies which were clear, easy to understand and helpful. They produced guides as an online 'flip book' available for all existing and prospective staff. The guides contain much shorter written policies, which are easily understood by staff and managers alike.

Yeovil's journey is available as a [case study](#) on the SPF website. The policies which can easily be adapted and replicated by other trusts have already been shared with other HR directors.

NHSEI's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion programme

Jenni Douglas-Todd, NHSEI presented the recently published Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) results.

Key points are that there has been a widening of discrimination based on ethnicity over the years. There is an increase of BAME staff at very senior level, but this is mainly board level. Appointment of BAME staff from shortlisting has worsened; there is an increased ratio of 1.61 of BAME staff more likely to enter a form of disciplinary compared to their white counterparts; and BAME staff are more likely to experience harassment. NHSEI will now work on actions with the system, employers and staff side on this.

The Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) report is due to be published next month. The report will show an increase in reporting declarations on disability, likely due to COVID-19 initiatives on health and wellbeing and being asked to record underlying health conditions. Organisations will be asked to sustain the level of reporting they have had during COVID-19.

Key points are disabled staff are 7.8 per cent more likely to experience bullying and harassment; disabled staff are 7 per cent less likely to believe they have equal opportunity for career progression; and disabled staff are 9.4 per cent more likely to feel under pressure to come to work.

Looking ahead, bank and temporary staff are going to be reported on in 2021/22. On recruitment and promotion, some work has been done with those organisations that have been doing well and six specific actions have been identified and will begin to be piloted in some regions.

Next meeting of the Wider Group meeting will take place on 27 April 2021.