

Wider Group key comms

December 2021

Welcome and introductions

Edward Argar, Minister for Health, welcomed the group to the meeting and told attendees he was pleased to have the NHS workforce in his portfolio, and that he looked forward to working with the SPF.

Minister spoke about the unprecedented pressure across the health and care system over the past two years and how the workforce has risen to the challenge and made sure patients are cared for, often at a physical, personal and emotional cost to themselves.

He said it was important to remind the public and commentators that it is the same workforce, that worked in the pandemic, that is now being asked to improve waiting lists and deliver the booster programme; and this is a challenge, since the workforce also needs to recharge themselves physically and emotionally.

Secretary of State (SoS) priorities for healthcare and the NHS workforce

SoS for health and social care, Sajid Javid joined the meeting and thanked the SPF for the work it has done through the pandemic. He praised the exceptional performance of the NHS during a challenging period. SoS told the group his priorities are COVID-19 and recovery and reform, noting that none of this can be delivered without the brilliant people that work for the NHS. He spoke about the hard work ahead not least with the new variant of COVID-19, the extended booster programme, and the importance of the people delivering this taking breaks, annual leave and having access to support for their

mental wellbeing. He reminded the forum of the investment in the NHS to tackle the elective backlog and to support technical transformation.

Danny Mortimer, Chief Executive, NHS Employers and SPF co-chair reflected to SoS on the partnership working between employers, trade unions and national organisations through the SPF during the pandemic. Whilst there have been moments of strain and concern, there has always been a high quality of dialogue and commitment to work together which has allowed work to be done at pace and without duplication.

Sara Gorton, Head of Health, UNISON also asked for open and honest messaging around the scale of backlog to the public. She asked for understanding and compassion for staff, particularly as we head into uncertainty with the new variant and the booster programme.

NHS leadership review

General Sir Gordon Messenger and Dame Linda Pollard updated the group on the NHS leadership review. They are in the early stage of engagement and whilst ideas are starting to frame themselves, they are keen to hear views.

The terms of reference for this work are broad and talk about leadership and management at all levels and across the health and social care sector. The review looks at how to improve the system to allow the workforce to flourish, develop and be empowered. They want to look at where improvements can be made for everyone's interests and once the broad thematic ideas are created then teams will be appointed to bottom out practicalities of implementation, ensuring there is a minimum disruption, and engagement is as broad as possible.

The SPF raised issues in terms of geographical challenges, lack of racial diversity in the NHS leadership - which needs addressing, and supporting clinical managers. There is a need to retain good leaders and look at management as a career and invest in this. The SPF was supportive of the approach in the methodology for a narrower set of themes moving to implementation.

NHS recovery, staff welfare and planning guidance

Em Wilkinson-Brice, Deputy Chief People Officer, presented on integrated planning and ensuring there is a balance between people finance and operations as the NHS continues with the recovery plan. She confirmed the aim to secure more people, working differently, in a compassionate inclusive culture. She said the intention is to add more than 20,000 people to the NHS workforce by the end of 2021/22.

As well as recruiting more people, NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI) is looking to better retain staff. There is a big focus to listening to people to find out what it takes to stay with initiatives including providing good pension advice to allow people to make informed decisions, and better understand what flexible working options are available.

Iain Eaves, Director of Planning and Oversight, NHSEI talked about planning approaches, triangulating how NHSEI look at money and their ambition and workforce; with workforce central to all programmes.

Last year, the People Plan put the wellbeing of the workforce front and centre. This will be the same in the planning guidance expected shortly. Given the uncertainty due to COVID-19 and competing demands, NHSEI aim to give as much certainty as possible in the planning guidance and they will be asking all systems to develop a whole system workforce plan. Longer term, Health Education England is working on a long-term strategic framework for health and social care workforce planning.

Danny Mortimer confirmed the SPF has rightly focussed on recovery and wellbeing for some time. The point of tension is the competing demands placed on the system and the workforce. He welcomed the fact that staff wellbeing is now a central part of recovery.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) programme and the Race Ahead series

Jenni Douglas-Todd provided an overview of the wider EDI programme update and focus on 2022-23. This includes:

- As part of the Long-term Plan, develop a trajectory for a proportion of BAME staff in leadership roles and the NHS having more people working in a compassionate culture.
- Inclusive recruitment practices, with six high impact actions which should be being used by organisations and is now part of the integrated care systems (ICS) programme of appointment of chairs and chief executives and non-executive directors and executives.
- Implementing action plans across all protected characteristics through an equality diversity and inclusion strategy.
- Establishing a governance framework for all staff networks to ensure assurance of these, aligned to equality accounts signoff process.

- EDI integrated care board (ICB) leadership development programme running alongside the wider leadership development programme.
- Line management development programme specifically targeted at very senior managers (and band 6-8 as they are responsible for most of the recruitment).

In addition, NHSEI are planning to publish an LGBTQ report and a disability strategy action plan and are also thinking about gender.

On the Race Ahead implementation plan, Jenni thanked all who supported it and reported a 35 per cent increase for people who felt confident talking about race.