



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care



# **Social Partnership Forum – partnership agreement**

An agreement between the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS Employers, NHS trade unions, NHS England and Health Education England

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## Foreword: Rt Hon Sajid Javid

Like so many in this country, I have been in awe of the way colleagues in health and social care have risen to meet the greatest public health challenge in a generation. But I know how much these efforts have taken a difficult toll on the dedicated people working on the frontline.

One of the clearest lessons of the pandemic is that recovery and reform must go hand in hand. We are using this unique window of change to develop plans to take the health and care system into the future, built around prevention, personalisation, performance and people.

For me, it is that fourth 'P' – people – that is most important. Positive and inclusive workplaces don't just make the NHS a better place to work – they make this country a better place to live. We know that when staff are well supported, patient outcomes improve and performance improves with it.

That is why our work with the national Social Partnership Forum (SPF) is so important; because policy development must always be a collective endeavour that puts people at the heart of recovery and reform.

So I'm delighted to support this new SPF partnership agreement. Continuing to work together in this way will help give our health and care system the support it needs for years to come.



Rt Hon Sajid Javid

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

# Foreword: Ministerial Social Partnership Forum Chair

I am delighted to chair the national Social Partnership Forum.

Events of the recent past have placed unprecedented pressures on the health and care system and that has inevitably put great strain on the healthcare workforce.

Workforce is vital to the operation of the NHS; simply put, it is our people who make everything happen.

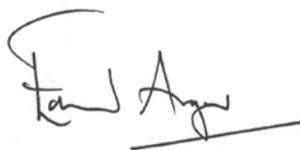
The NHS is a team, and it is the collective effort of everyone in that team that will be required for us to recover services for patients and make the NHS sustainable into the future.

But we need to be realistic as well. We owe it to those people who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to protect us and care for us to support and empower them in every way we can. It starts with listening to their voices and working with them to co-create changes that will benefit both staff and patients.

That is why I look forward to continuing our work within the SPF, which has created an environment where partners can have honest and open conversations and help to manage the uncertainty and challenges going forward.

Throughout the pandemic, the SPF exemplified partnership working in a way, and at a pace, not seen in the past and, as the latest independent SPF stocktake reaffirmed, it remains one of the most advanced forms of industrial partnership in the British public sector.

I do not underestimate the scale of the challenges ahead but working with collective commitment and resolve in the SPF remains as important as ever in ensuring we support our people to continue to deliver excellent healthcare for future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Argar', with a horizontal line underneath.

Edward Argar MP

Minister of State for Health

# Partnership agreement

This partnership agreement sets out a framework agreed by the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS Employers, NHS trade unions, NHS England and Health Education England, which describes the aims of the SPF, partners' shared values, and principles for effective joint working.

It will be important in light of the establishment of integrated care systems (ICS) and integrated care boards (ICB) and the focus on personalised care and population-based approaches to integrated healthcare, that the SPF continues to build links with the wider care sector.

The processes and structures for partnership, which underpin this agreement, can be found in the [SPF members' handbook](#).

## Aims of the SPF

The national SPF and its subgroups are used to discuss, debate and involve partners in the strategic development and implementation of policy and strategy where there are implications for the healthcare workforce.

A range of other organisations, groups and networks exist at national, regional and system levels with which the SPF liaises and interfaces through the national SPF, its subgroups and regional (and system-based) SPFs. This includes the Care Quality Commission, the National Guardian's Office, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), and other organisations whose work impacts on the healthcare workforce. The SPF also works with the NHS Staff Council, which is responsible for formal negotiations on Agenda for Change pay, terms and conditions.

The SPF supports strong and effective partnership working at a local level with the overall aim of improving outcomes for patients by creating a positive and inclusive workplace culture where staff are supported to deliver high quality care. A growing body of academic evidence shows that the quality of staff engagement, in well-led organisations, is a strong indicator of improved patient outcomes and experience and overall organisational performance in the NHS.

## Shared approach

This agreement reflects partners' strong and long-standing commitment to shared values and common purpose.

In particular, partners:

- are committed to an NHS which provides a universal service paid for from taxation, with equal access for all and free at the point of use based on clinical need not ability to pay

- support an NHS which is accountable to government, commissioners, regulators and the public and provides high quality care integrated for patients and service users
- fully embrace our shared commitment to continuous improvement in relation to digitalisation and new technology within health and social care as these services become more integrated, and ensuring staff are fully supported across all aspects of their job role
- believe the NHS should promote good practice in all areas of workplace culture and people management, including tackling bullying, harassment and violence against staff, promoting and supporting staff health and well-being, inclusivity, and learning and development
- share a commitment to the healthcare system as a whole working together to avoid redundancies in an effort to support job security for staff and to retain talent and skills
- agree that the NHS should adopt a partnership approach to engage and support staff who may be involved in or affected by service changes at the earliest opportunity

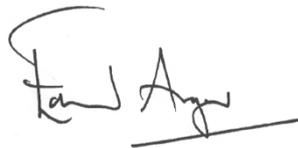
## **Principles for effective joint working**

To deliver partnership working successfully it is important to have in place, and continue to develop, good formal and informal working relations that build trust and share responsibility, while respecting difference. These principles are underpinned by the [NHS Constitution](#).

To facilitate this, all parties commit to the following principles in their dealings with each other:

1. Build trust and mutual respect for each other's roles and responsibilities.
2. Openness, honesty and transparency in communications and engagement.
3. Top level commitment, reinforced by senior level representation.
4. A positive and constructive approach based on shared goals and aspirations.
5. Commitment to work with and learn from each other.
6. Early discussion on emerging issues and maintaining dialogue on policy and priorities.

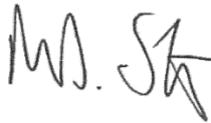
7. Commitment to improving and ensuring high quality outcomes for patients and the public.
8. Where appropriate, confidentiality and agreed external positions.
9. Make the best use of resources.
10. Ensure a no surprises culture.



Edward Argar  
Minister of State for Health and SPF Chair



Sara Gorton  
NHS Staff Side Co-chair



Matthew Style  
DHSC Co-chair



Danny Mortimer  
NHS Employer Side Co-chair



Amanda Pritchard  
NHS England



Em Wilkinson-Brice  
Acting Chief People Officer



Navina Evans  
Health Education England

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