

Key comms

Social Partnership Forum (SPF) Wider Group

22 June 2022

The meeting was chaired by the minister of state for health, Edward Argar, who discussed the Health and Care Act which received royal assent in April. He emphasised the challenges the NHS workforce faces and advised there is a need to be open with the public about setting reasonable expectations on what the NHS can achieve.

Jason Yiannikou, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) – Reform and Health and Social Care Act

Jason thanked the SPF for their role in getting the Health and Care Bill through parliament. He discussed the strengths of the health and care system, whilst acknowledging some of the long-term challenges it faces, including a growing and ageing population, changing lifestyle, burden of disease, rising public expectations, scientific advances and the continuing impact of the pandemic.

Jason spoke about the Secretary of State's address which took place on 8 March 2022 at the Royal College of Physicians. The address highlighted the following strategic challenges:

- keeping the NHS focused on delivery while future proofing it for changing demographics and disease
- meeting rising patient expectations and addressing the injustices of widespread disparities
- dealing with an unsustainable financial trajectory while backing the brilliant people who work in health and care.

DHSC is working with the NHS and other key stakeholders to develop a plan for the sustainable recovery of healthcare services. This is structured around the Secretary of State's four priorities:

- Prevention
- Personalisation
- Performance
- People

Sara Gorton, Head of Health, Unison, touched on the difficulty of staff seeing any developments due to the overwhelming nature of getting through the day with the current staffing crisis. She reminded the Government that it has a critical decision to make, but an opportunity to show their support for the NHS with a respectable pay rise.

Danny Mortimer, Chief Executive, NHS Employers, acknowledged that the legislation may not solve all the problems, but it will support a move away from a competitive NHS environment, where organisations compete against each other, to an environment where health and social care organisations work collaboratively.

Em Wilkinson-Brice, NHS England – NHS Recovery and Workforce

As acting chief people officer in NHS England, Em reaffirmed her commitment to work in partnership with the SPF. She reminded the group that the overall aim of the People Plan is: 'More people, working differently, in a compassionate and inclusive culture'. This aim remains the focus for the NHS workforce and the recovery of services.

Em highlighted the importance of improving staff retention, increasing recruitment, and reviewing staff experiences in the workplace. NHS England is working with 23 People Promise exemplar sites and asking them to use a quality improvement approach to self-assess against a set of standards and create a community of learning. Due to the high risk in staff leaving within their first two years of employment, the exemplar sites will provide a foundation to understand what makes a difference in retaining staff.

John Drew, NHS England, spoke about elective recovery and how diagnostic centres and elective hubs provide opportunities to deliver the work differently. He mentioned staff being able to make improvements in their own area of work and stressed the importance of staff engagement when redesigning ways of working.

Trade union representatives expressed their concern on how achievable productivity targets were, especially with increased Covid-19 infections, and high levels of staff sickness and burn

out. They identified a need for an increase in the number of support staff if productivity targets are to be achieved.

Employer representatives spoke about some of the initiatives they are implementing for support staff., one of which included taking staff out of intensive environments like maternity and A&E so they have a chance to recover, with a view to returning later. They also highlighted the potential benefits of NHS reservists and stated that it should be possible to use the apprenticeship levy to backfill posts.

Amber Taylor, Department of Health and Social Care – Health and Social Care Leadership review

Amber Taylor thanked the SPF for their continued support with the review recommendations, which have been accepted in full by the Government. She said the report was the first phase as there is still a great deal of work to do. The review sets out priorities and focus areas that are key to successful implementation. One of them is the proposed Review Implementation Office (RIO), where key details are being worked through – including how it will work in practice, what the right membership is and how it can maximise on-going stakeholder engagement. Amber emphasised that the aim was to build on what currently exists and works well, with the report providing a framework to build on good practice without reinventing the wheel.

Navina Evans, Health Education England (HEE) – Workforce Strategy

Navina thanked the SPF for their support with the strategic framework for future workforce planning, which is nearing completion. It is themed around different skills, roles, and the ability to plan for different scenarios. The framework will inform a workforce plan, which is in development and will sit alongside an update of the Long Term Plan.

The vision of the workforce plan is to look at different avenues to train and retain staff and the supply of staff, all in the short, medium and long term. To achieve this, engagement with partners will be key. Navina highlighted that the quality of patient care is priority. Moving forward this would require individuals to develop their skills and work in different ways which are the fundamentals of the framework. With the introduction of new roles, it is important to

strike a balance between specialist and generalist roles as the need varies across services, age groups and population.

Update from SPF meetings

ICS Transition Partnership Group (TPG) – Alan Lofthouse, UNISON, and Rebecca Smith, NHS Employers, spoke about the purpose of the ICS TPG, which was to support the smooth transition of staff to ICBs (Integrated Care Boards). At the request of the TPG, the Health and Care Bill was extended to cover non-CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) staff, in addition to CCG staff. The group also drafted transition documents, FAQs, and principles and a framework for partnership working in the ICBs. It supported NHS England’s connection sessions, which explored different aspects of the transfer with HR and trade union representatives. There was continuous engagement between the TPG and the regional co-chairs to cover any issues that may have come through the regions.

There was an update from the SPF strategic group meeting held on 17 May. The meeting included items on the NHS staff survey, diagnostic hubs workforce plan, recovery and workforce update and policy look-ahead, and an update on actions in the HR futures report.