



# SPF Wider Group key comms

6 December 2022

## Welcome and introductions

The meeting was opened by the Minister of State for Health, Will Quince and chaired by Gavin Lerner, director of workforce for the Department of Health and Social Care.

The minister welcomed members to his first meeting and acknowledged the importance of partnership working with employers and trade unions. He was pleased to see the long term workforce plan on the agenda, which the Government has committed to, and which will now be independently verified, as set out in the Autumn statement. The Autumn statement announced that there will be an additional £3.3 billion in each of the next two years, funding for the NHS alongside additional social care.

The minister said he believes in honesty, openness and being candid about what can be achieved, and he wants to work with the SPF to make the possible happen.

Trade unions said they look forward to a robust and productive relationship with the minister. They highlighted the very challenging situation in the NHS and that they remain open to discussions on investment in the workforce. Employers welcomed the minister to the group and said the NHS can draw on its history of joint working with trade unions, including through the SPF, to add real value to national policy development and implementation.

## Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP)

Barry Leavers, director of the NHS long term workforce plan at NHS England and Health Education England provided an update on the plan and its main aims. Which include:

- ensuring the NHS has sufficient workforce to meet demand



- ensuring the NHS workforce can achieve its full potential
- attracting and engaging staff in a competitive labour market.

A dedicated workshop for SPF Wider Group members on the LTWP was held 2 December 2022. Points discussed included:

- the importance of continuing professional development and career progression opportunities, and the importance of educators capacity and the lead in time for new roles
- the importance of diversity in routes into employment and using apprenticeships as enablers for building a workforce which represents local communities
- logistics of the plan.

Trade union representatives suggested NHSE develop a universal careers advice offer to support managers and staff in navigating career opportunities. Unions also proposed an offer of level two literacy and numeracy qualifications to staff, as the absence of these qualifications, block potential career routes.

Employers commented on the importance of taking an integrated approach to work on the plan and considering both middle and senior management.

## **Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) Strategic Review**

Dr John Barber, deputy director for UEC in England, NHSE provided an update on the strategic review and SPF Workshop held 5 December 2022. Discussion in the workshop covered:

- patchwork commissioning of NHS 111 and recognition of the importance and benefits of more consistent delivery of the service
- the need to take action in the short term to reassure staff and patients on UEC
- the role of primary care in UEC, and recognition of the importance of multidisciplinary teams

- ensuring appropriate risk thresholds are built into ways of working.

John acknowledged that it would take time to build the necessary workforce to deliver what is needed. The strategy is looking at a five-to-ten-year timeframe.

Trade unions emphasised the importance of stability and creating low risk environments in which staff feel confident in making decisions to move patients out of emergency care. They stressed the importance of the different elements of the system working together to meet patients' needs.

John Drew, director of staff experience and engagement at NHSE, referenced the refreshed winter preparedness guidelines on the NHSE website and commented on ensuring there is a strong emphasis in the planning guidance on looking after the health and wellbeing of staff.

## **Regional/local NHS case study – AgiLab**

Emma Russell, University of Sussex; Louise Mckenzie, Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust; and Mike Cracknell, UNISON offered insight into AgiLab, a University of Sussex and NHS/regional SPF collaboration and knowledge exchange forum established in 2020. Work aligns with the NHS People Plan and People Promise 'we work flexibly'.

Agile working is a liberation from any traditional way of working in relation to time, place, and ways of working. This is enabled through innovative practices and digital tools. AgiLab enables the latest research in agile working to be shared and acted upon more immediately. It promotes and facilitates an evidence-based approach to best practice and research in agile working.

AgiLab operates three half-day conferences a year, each featuring an academic thought leader. Previous leaders/sessions have included Professor Beauregard, Birkbeck, University of London, who spoke on balancing home working; Professor Brendan Burchell, University of Cambridge, who spoke on the four-day week; Professor Chuddy, who spoke on bottom-line mentality in management; Dr Chris Grant, Coventry University, who spoke on workers with neurodiverse needs and disability; Petera something, who discussed managing remote teams.



AgiLab's research projects include:

- leading an agile workforce in the NHS, completed August 2022
- addressing the agile working needs of low socioeconomic status workers, completed November 2022
- understanding and reducing tensions between clinical and non-clinical staff in the NHS, in relation to agile working, starting March 2023.

Louise and Mike provided employer and trade union perspectives on the establishment of, and work conducted by AgiLab respectively. Emma acknowledged that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to agile working and the time and effort required to discuss individuals' needs. She spoke on the importance of managers developing 'professional intimacy' with staff and having the time and capacity to do so. Louise highlighted learning from the work can be used to help improve staff morale, wellbeing, and retention. The link was also made to the positive impact on productivity.

## **SPF stocktake report**

The SPF regularly undertakes a review of how it is performing. This year it undertook an internally led heat check focused on the period January to October 2022. The SPF sent out a survey to members and policy leads it had engaged with during this period. Key messages from the survey include:

- the importance of policy makers engaging with the SPF at the earliest opportunity
- the need to maximise the impact of communications
- increasing the input of employer reps in meetings and ensuring a system perspective.

The recommendations from the report will be taken forward by the SPF co-chairs and secretariat.



## Any other business

Trade unions asked about the national promotion of this year's COVID-19 and flu staff vaccination programme and how to maximise the impact of employer vaccination campaigns.

