

Key comms

Social Partnership Forum (SPF) Wider Group

6 December 2023

Welcome and introductions

Gavin Larnar, director of workforce at DHSC chaired the meeting along with Andrew Stephenson, minister of state for health and secondary care, who, because of parliamentary business, joined part way through.

Sara Gorton, SPF staff-side chair has commenced a one-year secondment with the general secretary's team at UNISON. Helga Pile, UNISON is covering Sara's roles as acting head of health at UNISON, staff side co-chair of the NHS Staff Council, and SPF staff side co-chair.

Retention exemplars - Em Wilkinson-Brice and Ronke Akerele, NHS England

The leaver rate across all NHS staff groups has reduced from 9.4 per cent in August 2022 to 7.9 per cent in September 2023. Approximately 11,000 staff are retained for each one per cent reduction in rate.

The exemplar programme began in April 2022. The first cohort of exemplars included 23 acute, community, and mental health trusts, which were put forward by their regions. Actions for the exemplars, intended to improve retention, were laid out under the seven domains that make up the [NHS People Promise](#). The leaver rate fell more rapidly in the exemplars than in non-exemplars. Quarterly staff survey results have also been promising.

Em fed back that there is a tangible energy/buzz amongst staff in the exemplar organisations and they have embraced the People Promise. The work is being sustained through being people-focused and tied into organisations' strategies. Staff side chairs were present at around 70 per cent of the NHSE exemplar site visits, which showed trade union reps are getting involved in this work.



Work on pension reform and supporting line managers to have conversations about flexible retirement is beginning to produce results. 30 per cent of retirees returning to the NHS, often to fewer hours and sometimes to less intense settings.

The attrition rate for newly qualified staff is 13 per cent across the NHS. Legacy mentoring, alongside the new preceptorship programme, is being used to lower this.

Dame Ruth May, chief nursing officer (CNO) for England, and Em sent a [letter](#) to CNOs and chief people officers (CPOs) outlining five actions to help retain nurses, covering legacy mentoring and the preceptorship programme, menopause, pensions and flexible working.

Drivers for success identified from the first exemplar cohort include:

- board level ownership
- self-assessments performed up front
- a quality improvement approach
- positive relationships with staff and peer learning
- a dedicated resource (the programme funds an 8a People Promise lead for each exemplar)
- a bundle approach, including different components that support a positive staff experience
- access to relevant data and resources.

NHSE is onboarding a second exemplar cohort, which will include NHS trusts, ambulance trusts, and primary care. Work with the third cohort will commence in April 2024. They hope to take a system approach to the work, maximise the advantages of place, and link to the Messenger review recommendations on management and leadership.

On sustainability, NHSE has tried to create a return on investment argument that can be put forward to executive teams. Most organisations are prioritising the 8a manager post as business as usual, or they are content that there is a team and ethos to enable work to be sustained.

Sexual safety – Catherine Hinwood, NHSE and Rebecca Smith, NHS Employers

Catherine updated on NHSE's domestic abuse and sexual violence programme. NHSE's [sexual safety charter](#) has been signed by 200 organisations. All commitments in the charter must be fulfilled by July 2024.

NHSE is developing a sexual safety people policy framework and training packages for staff. The policy is due to launch in March 2024. An expert advisory group (EAG) has been established and includes colleagues with lived experience, academics, employers and trade union reps. Catherine thanked the SPF for sourcing the trade union reps and praised their contributions. The intention is this policy will be reviewed by the SPF and the wider NHS will be encouraged to adopt it.

Every trust and ICB has been instructed to appoint an executive-level domestic abuse and sexual violence lead to see that the charter is properly implemented. The biggest question from leads has been how they have conversations on the policy. This will be NHSE's focus for the first half of 2024. London Ambulance Service will be hosting masterclasses in January 2024 on culture change in relation to sexual safety.

Rebecca shared the national SPF's intention to run a campaign focusing on bystanders and allyship. The [white ribbon campaign](#) was signposted.

Ministerial introduction - Rt Hon Andrew Stephenson MP, Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care

Minister was delighted to join the meeting and said he looked forward to working with the SPF and trade unions on shared priorities. He issued a personal thank you to the SPF and NHS staff, for all they do.

Helga raised trade unions concerns around the impact on the NHS and care sector of the recent visa restriction announcement. Minister said health and social care staff are exempt from the salary threshold, though details are still being worked through. He was keen to gather ideas on what could be done to ensure internationally recruited staff feel valued.

Violence prevention and reduction (VPR) – Rebecca Smith, NHS Employers

Rebecca outlined the SPF's intended work in response to the commission on the VPR element of the 2023 NHS pay deal. The SPF is currently mapping out existing work on tackling violence. This includes running a survey to identify further evidence and good practice. The SPF will explore the findings of the survey, and then develop recommendations to government based on survey findings and rest of the mapping work. Work is being conducted via the SPF infrastructure, linking in with employer and trade union reference groups, and working with the NHS Staff Council.

Case study – Liverpool University Hospitals NHS FT (LUHFT) - James Dawson, LUHFT and Joe Baldwin, UNISON Liverpool Hospitals branch

LUHFT was a 2023 HPMA partnership award finalist. Read their [case study](#) on the SPF website. In partnership, LUHFT:

- successfully opened a new hospital and migrated six key services
- encouraged uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine - 1800 staff were previously non-vaccinated, and just over 200 staff remained non-vaccinated following joint efforts
- established a new leadership team and structure.

The Royal College of Podiatry rep at LUHFT had fed back that, as a member of a smaller union, she feels she is listened to and can contribute to partnership discussions on an equal footing with the reps from larger trade unions. Minister praised LUHFT's good partnership work.

