

Wider Group key comms –

December 2025

Welcome and introductions

Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care, Karin Smyth, chaired the meeting. She acknowledged recent allegations of sexual misconduct in the NHS and strongly condemned sexual abuse, harassment and violence towards our NHS staff. She signposted to [updated actions from NHSE](#), which she said she expects will be rigorously implemented, and the [Ministerial statement](#) endorsing these actions. She reassured the Group that sexual safety remains a priority.

10 Year Workforce Plan – Barney Shekleton, DHSC

Barney said the 10 Year Workforce Plan (10YWP) will outline a vision for workforce over the next ten years and what is needed to achieve this vision. It will give the broad size and shape of the workforce needed and implications for skills mix. The plan will encompass the workforce delivery commitments made in the [10 Year Health Plan](#) (10YHP), striving to see the NHS employ the right people with the right skills and empower and enable staff to work in the most effective way.

The 10YWP will set out five delivery areas: to become the country's best employer; to become a fully digitally enabled workforce; neighbourhood health to be the standard; modern education, training and leadership; and community recruitment.

Barney thanked everyone who contributed to the call for evidence, which DHSC colleagues are now evaluating. Highlights from initial analysis include: wellbeing is central to retention; strong leadership to tackle discrimination; and career progression and widening participation. The 10YWP will additionally draw on intelligence from SPF workshops which are planned for the new year.

Employers mentioned neighbourhood health and the 10YWP enabling staff to move outside of the NHS. They also said they feel there is a long way to go before the NHS becomes digitally led.

Trade unions asked about the NHS being the best employer and where industrial

relations fits within the 10YWP. They also asked for more understanding on how workforce numbers will be determined and how the SPF can be involved. Barney said ensuring the SPF is engaged fully throughout the plan's development is a priority and committed to organising policy workshops with SPF members.

Staff standards – Louisa Elias-Evans, DHSC; Jon Restell, MiP; Rebecca Smith, NHS Employers

Since the last update in the October SPF Strategic Group meeting, a dedicated SPF engagement group for the work has been established. NHSE and DHSC have additionally formed a joint project team. Work will be supplemented by an analysis of the existing evidence base on what is important to staff and what will positively impact on staff experience.

Louisa said DHSC and NHSE have received a steer from ministers to aim to publish a full suite of standards by April 2026. Once implemented, the standards can be refined and reviewed over time to ensure continual improvement. The standards will apply to all staff, including students and contractors, though the initial focus will be on secondary care, recognising the complexity of primary care. They should include a balance of immediate actions that will make a difference to staff quickly and long-term drivers for cultural change.

The standards will be underpinned by the NHS Oversight Framework, which will ensure accountability and make sure the standards are acted upon. Early discussions have taken place with CQC on how the standards can be embedded into CQC inspection processes.

Rebecca said there is a real commitment to see the standards be successful, and both Rebecca and Jon recognised that some matters which need to be tackled are long-standing cultural issues. Jon said national trade unions support the idea of staff standards, particularly around accountability. Trade unions would like to see the SPF endorse the standards and help to implement them locally.

The standards will be developed by DHSC/NHSE, with engagement with the SPF and other stakeholders.

System transformation update – Miranda Carter, NHSE Regional/ICB transformation update

Funding for redundancy has now been agreed and ICBs are going through the process of restructuring. Miranda recognised this is a difficult time for staff.

A [strategic commissioning framework](#) was published recently by NHSE, which looks at what it means to be an effective strategic commissioner. NHSE is also looking to develop an offer to upskill ICB colleagues in strategic commissioning.

Work is underway to review all services carried out by NHSE, DHSC, regions and ICBs and work out the right destinations for functions. Regional colleagues are exploring high-level designs for regions, in line with the [model region blueprint](#). NHSE is reviewing all functions highlighted in the [model ICB blueprint](#) for transfer to ICBs, to ensure they are able to deliver these within the £19 per head of population funding envelope.

Tom Simons, NHSE, acknowledged that NHSE's previous engagement with the SPF on the transformation was lacking. NHSE has committed to improve on this. Following discussions with trade unions, a system transformation partnership group will be established to ensure effective partnership working.

Trade unions were interested in understanding what a well-resourced regional workforce function would look like and how partnership working is going to play out above employer level. They also highlighted the difficulties staff are facing in getting accurate information from the NHS BSA on their pensions, which they need to make informed decisions on voluntary redundancy. Minister referenced a [ministerial statement](#) she made on this topic.

Both employers and trade unions flagged the issue of timeframes not aligning for staff facing redundancy, particularly for those in ICBs, and the risk of the NHS losing staff with important skills and knowledge.

Wholly owned subsidiary guidance/consultation

A consultation document describing proposed changes to guidance relating to the transfer of NHS staff into wholly owned subsidiaries (WOS) was shared as a paper. The policy changes will not apply to people entering subsidiaries from outside of the NHS. Miranda said NHSE is eager to engage with the SPF on this work.

Helga was grateful for the clear, unambiguous [commitment made in September](#) to change policy and pause all transfers of staff, agree changes with unions, and make union support a priority, alongside the protection of NHS Terms and Conditions of Service. Trade unions agreed to provide feedback on the paper.

NHS reform legislation – Jennifer Benjamin, DHSC

The plan is to fully absorb NHSE into DHSC by April 2027, subject to parliamentary time. This will require primary legislation to enable the transfer of powers and key responsibilities into DHSC and formally remove NHSE as a statutory body. The legislation will help to take forward some of the key structural changes in the 10YHP and key recommendations outlined in the [Dash review](#) which require structural change.

AgiLab partnership working case study – Emma Russell, University of Sussex

[AgiLab](#) was established in 2021 to understand how to deliver on the NHS People Promise 'we work flexibly'. It has hosted conferences and undertaken several research projects on agile working and SPF colleagues have played an important role in this work.

AgiLab's definition of agile working goes beyond that of flexible working in the NHS Terms and Conditions of Service, focusing instead on the aim to design truly flexible work that is inclusive, safe, fair, dignified, adds value and gives people control over when, where and how they work through innovative practice and with the support of digital tools, meeting the needs of both staff and the service.

AgiLab has run four funded NHS projects to date, the most recent of which explored [what decent agile working should look like and how it can be delivered](#). Regional SPF members were part of the steering group for the work.

Lord Mann Review – Aisling Fox, DHSC

Aisling presented on the [Review into antisemitism and other forms of racism](#) in the NHS, announced by the Prime Minister on 16 October. This will explore how effective action can be taken to enable NHS staff to feel safe. It will cover how regulators address complaints of antisemitism and racism; increasing transparency; how national, regions and systems can root out racism more effectively; and explore guidance and policies that could be adopted across the NHS. The review will be England focused, but DHSC will continue to meet with other UK administrations and share best practice.

NHS Employers raised the issue of balancing free speech and hate speech. They recognised this is not only an issue for regulators but also for employers, who need to set standards and enforce these.

Any other business

The minister announced that Andrew Morris, DHSC, will be leaving his role as head of NHS staff partnerships/SPF at DHSC and recognised his valuable and long-standing contributions to the work of the national SPF. She thanked him for working tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure all ran smoothly. The national SPF's co-chairs thanked Andrew for his commitment, professionalism, care and support, and wished him well for the future.

The next Wider Group meeting will be held on **24 March 2026**.

Learn more about the [SPF Wider Group](#).