

Guidance for social partnership working in developing and implementing new care models and system transformation

The Social Partnership Forum (SPF) and the NHS Five Year Forward View, New Care Models Programme Team have agreed the following guidance for partnership working with trade unions to support the development and implementation of new care models and other forms of system transformation.

Social partnership is employers involving staff, along with their trade union representatives, in decisions that impact on them. It is built on shared principles of trust and mutual respect; openness and honesty in communications, and a positive and constructive approach based on shared goals and aspirations.

Academic evidence shows that good staff engagement, such as the partnership approach, can deliver better patient outcomes, as well as improve overall organisational performance. Social partnership can also help system transformation be successful. The move to more integrated care may require the development of new partnership mechanisms to support change beyond organisation boundaries. This guidance is primarily to help you ensure that appropriate partnership arrangements are in place at cross organisational/new care model and regional level to facilitate system change. It also updates on how the national SPF will support this agenda.

Partnership working can support system transformation

Employers working in partnership with staff and their representatives is embedded in the NHS Constitution because it is the best way to effect change. The NHS Constitution requires all providers supplying NHS services and local authorities in the exercise of their public health functions, to commit to *'engage staff in decisions that affect them and the services they provide, individually, through representative organisations and through local partnership working arrangements.'*

System partnership working

The 2016 national [SPF Partnership Agreement](#) sets out a framework agreed by the Department of Health, NHS Employers, NHS Trade Unions, NHS England, NHS Improvement and Health Education England, which describes partners' shared values and principles for effective joint working. This focus on joint working at a national level is particularly important in light of the NHS Five Year Forward View and moves to greater integration and devolution. The national SPF encourages, where appropriate, a cross sector partnership approach at all levels in the health and care system, in the development and implementation of new care models. At a Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) and new care model level, the health and care system could include: NHS providers, community providers, primary care providers, private providers, social enterprises, charities, the voluntary sector, local government and commissioners.

Common partnership principles for all levels in the health and care system:

- Staff and their trade unions are involved in the development and implementation of system transformation that impacts on them.
- Messages related to system change are clear and transparent and partners have a role in developing them.
- Guidance and procedures, relating to how system changes impact on staff, continue to ensure transparency, equitability, fairness and equal treatment of staff.
- Wherever possible organisations work together to manage the impact of organisational change on staff.

How the national SPF will support system transformation

The national SPF working with the arm's length bodies will:

- Contribute to the development and implementation of policy on system transformation.
- Work together to resolve challenges, related to new ways of working that can only be addressed at a national level.
- Identify and promote good practice examples of successful partnership working in developing and implementing new care models.
- Where required, produce joint national guidance and/or model policies.

The role of regional SPFs

Regional SPFs can provide assurance that appropriate partnership working with trade unions is in place where system transformation within that region is proposed or already underway. They can:

- Link with the STP footprints in their region, either with representatives from the STPs or organisational leads responsible for implementing change, to get an understanding of planned system change within the STP and how and when trade unions should be involved.
- Ensure meaningful consultation and engagement is taking place about transformation plans and promote openness, honesty and transparency in communications.
- Engage with the Local Workforce Action Boards, or other groups responsible for developing STP workforce plans, through a mechanism agreed in the regional SPF, to establish the workforce issues within each STP and how trade unions can contribute solutions to issues.
- Put in place mechanisms to enable liaison with new care models within their region, so members of the regional SPF can assure themselves that trade unions are being involved at the organisational/new care model level.
- Encourage the use of the regional Memoranda of Understanding in minimising the impact of organisational change on staff.
- Identify and publicise good practice within new care models so the learning can be shared.
- Consider widening membership to be more reflective of the health and care system (for example, representatives from local authorities, non-NHS providers or arm's length bodies).

Partnership arrangements at cross organisational / new care model level

Employers will be better able to introduce system change if they:

- Agree collectively how early and on-going effective engagement with employees and trade unions will be carried out.
- Involve employees, and their representatives, in decisions that affect them and the services they provide to enable effective and sustainable change.
- Make sure staff and trade unions are kept fully informed on the strategy; the objectives and the likely impact on staff of planned system transformation.
- Support staff during the system change, keeping them and their representatives updated on progress and giving them the opportunity to influence the change process on an ongoing basis.
- Consider cross organisation partnership arrangements, where required, recognising the limitations of these forum as compared to organisational negotiating committees.
- Agree with trade unions appropriate project time for union reps engaged in system transformation projects, in particular for union stewards representing staff who are affected by restructuring, relocation, redeployment, new roles, new technology or role changes.

- Work with trade unions on planning and delivering staff engagement activities such as roadshows, surveys and focus groups.
- Promote transparency, equitability and fairness in all transfer, selection and appointment processes and ensure the consistent treatment of employees at all levels.
- To participate in the regional [Memoranda of Understanding](#) to minimise the impact of organisational change on staff

Trade unions will be better able to influence system change for the benefit of staff and patient care, if they:

- Seek to organise their representation to better streamline their involvement in system transformation. This could mean closer working between trade unions with some unions taking the lead role in a new care model, STP, LWAB or other groups responsible for developing STP workforce plans, and co-ordinating responses from all staff side constituents.
- Get involved at an early stage in the development of system change so that a staff voice can be fed into the development of plans before they are fully formed.

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