

A Unite representatives update on the NHS Staff Standards

Tuesday 18 August 2026



An introduction to this update

This is the third webinar that we've done aimed at Unite reps in the NHS (in England).

The first session was on Annex 31 and the second on how best to write a job description (JD) with a focus on what is needed for (NHS Job Evaluation Scheme) job evaluation purposes.

Today's session is focused on the NHS Staff Standards which were launched on 6 July 2026.

You can catch-up on the previous presentations on the Unite in Health website:

<https://www.unitetheunion.org/what-we-do/unite-in-your-sector/health-sector/unite-reps-update-on-the-nhs-job-evaluation-scheme-afc>



The NHS Staff Standards

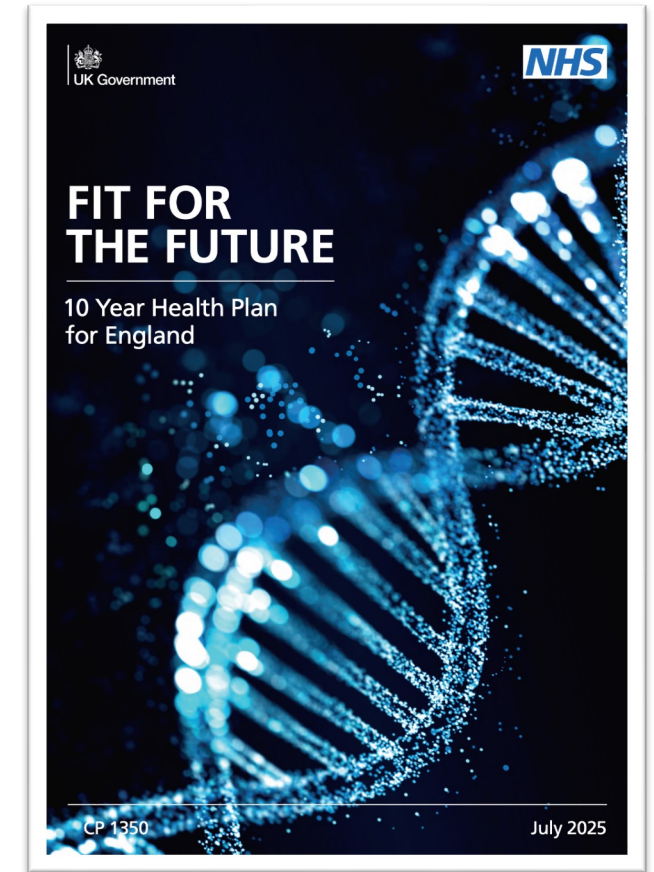
The Department of Health & Social Care 10-Year Health Plan (2025¹) committed to developing a new set of staff standards which would outline minimum standards for employment across a range of areas, aimed at improving staff experience.

The standards set out the actions employers must take to deliver them and what staff can expect at work as a result.

Today we will cover:

- an overview explaining why the staff standards have been introduced,
- how they will be used, and
- what each standard means in practice.

You can view online the full staff standards, which includes information setting out the detailed requirements for employers (2026²).



1) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future>

2) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-staff-standards>



The NHS Staff Standards

The staff standards focus on key areas that members (and wider NHS staff) have said matter most:

- line management (including how to best support line managers)
- health and wellbeing (physical environment, rest spaces, and occupational health and wellbeing support)
- preventing and reducing violence against staff
- championing sexual safety
- tackling racism
- promoting flexible working

The standards have been developed by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England, working closely with employers and trade unions through the Social Partnership Forum (SPF), and are intended to be implemented locally through partnership working.

The aim is to raise the profile of staff experience, giving it the same priority as other important areas like finance and operational priorities, and to help all NHS staff have a more consistent, positive experience. The standards will be different from other staff experience initiatives because performance against them will be measured, with clear action taken when they are not being delivered. They set a minimum expectation, but it said these are ‘just the starting point’, with the plan to refine them, and the way they are measured against in future years.

The standards are for NHS staff, employers and leaders, and should be used alongside existing workforce policies and initiatives to support implementation. The standards will apply to secondary care, which includes acute, mental health, ambulance services and community healthcare.



Why the standards are being introduced

Staff experience directly impacts staff retention and absenteeism, ultimately affecting quality of patient care and overall organisational performance. Over recent years, the NHS has introduced a range of initiatives to improve staff experience, one of which is the [NHS People Promise](#)³. Some organisations have made real improvements using the NHS People Promise framework and shown what is possible when staff are well supported.

However, progress has been uneven across the NHS. Staff experience still varies widely, and good practice is not consistently implemented in all organisations. The staff standards are being introduced to help fix this. They set a clear national requirement for what staff should be able to expect at work, no matter which organisation they work for. The staff standards will work alongside and complement initiatives like the NHS People Promise, providing a clear framework for employers to focus on and through which they will be measured.

Unlike previous initiatives, implementation of the staff standards will be compulsory and how well each provider meets the 6 standards will be measured. If an employer does not do well, this will be taken into account when looking at how that organisation is performing overall. This will be done through a new score for the standards in the [NHS Oversight Framework](#)⁴. This is a national system used to check how organisations are performing against important priorities, including the staff standards.

3) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/our-nhs-people/online-version/lfaop/our-nhs-people-promise/>

4) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/nhs-oversight-framework/>

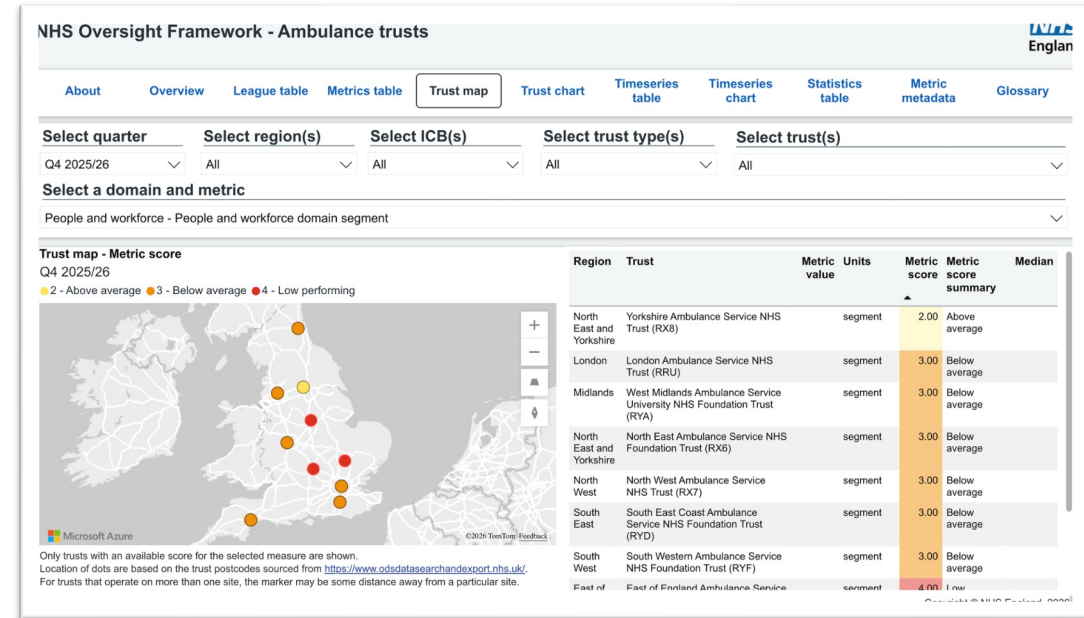


Why the standards are being introduced (cont...)

Under this system, organisations are placed into one of 5 groups, based on how well they are doing. Those that are doing well have more freedom to make decisions and have less involvement from NHS England, while organisations facing more challenges receive additional support and closer engagement to help them improve.

Staff can see how their organisation is performing on the [NHS Oversight Framework segmentation and league tables page](https://www.england.nhs.uk/nhs-oversight-framework/segmentation-and-league-tables/)⁵. This includes dashboards for acute, ambulance, mental health and community healthcare.

5) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/nhs-oversight-framework/segmentation-and-league-tables/>



Putting the standards into practice locally

The standards are set at a national level, but they need to be put into practice locally. They set clear expectations for employers, but staff also have an important role to play in creating a positive culture and workplace. Employers are accountable for meeting the standards themselves; however, their successful delivery relies on partnership with staff locally, recognising the shared role staff play in shaping culture, feeding back on experience and driving improvement. Future versions of the standards may explore options to formalise the role of staff further.

Employers and trade union representatives should work together through their local partnership arrangements to apply the standards in ways that fit local services, staff needs and how different organisations work. This includes boards working with trade unions to provide assurance on delivery of the standards and to ensure that the staff voice shapes local improvements.

The standards are not intended to cut across or replace staff experience programmes that organisations have in place already and are working well - rather, they should complement them.



Line management staff standard

“Staff can expect supportive, fair, developmental and compassionate line management, enabled by employer support for line managers to help staff to perform well, feel valued and fulfil their potential.”

About this standard:

“Line managers play a big role in how people feel at work.

This standard is about making sure staff are supported by their line managers, and that line managers are properly supported by their organisation to provide high-quality line management to their teams. We know from the 2025 NHS Staff Survey results that there is already a lot of good line management across the NHS. However, we need to build on this and ensure that is consistently true for all staff. This standard recognises that wider pressures, limited time and poor systems can make good line management difficult. The standard is about changing that by creating a culture where line management is valued, supported and properly resourced by organisations, so all staff experience fair, consistent and compassionate management.”



Line management staff standard

What to expect as a line manager:

Line managers should expect their employer to help them to do their job well. This means line managers should expect:

- training and development to help them manage people effectively, especially for those new to line management
- enough time in their job to carry out line management responsibilities properly
- simple, accessible HR policies and processes that help rather than hinder
- supervision, advice and support from their own manager
- opportunities to give feedback to their employer about what helps or gets in the way of supporting staff

The standard recognises that line managers are staff too. It is about improving systems and support, so line managers can support their teams consistently and compassionately.



Line management staff standard

What to expect as a member of staff:

Under this standard, staff should expect that their line manager:

- listens to them and takes their concerns seriously
- treats them fairly, with respect and compassion
- carries out regular, meaningful appraisals with feedback that helps them do their job
- provides them with support for issues when they need it
- gives them clear objectives and regular feedback
- actively supports their development and career progression
- creates a team environment where everyone feels safe to speak up
- takes action when problems arise, and escalates issues when needed

Staff should also feel part of a team with shared goals, where differences are handled constructively and everyone is treated with respect.



Line management staff standard

Why this matters:

Line management has a big impact on how people feel at work. Good line management helps staff feel listened to, supported and valued. Poor or inconsistent line management can lead to:

- Stress
- low morale
- people leaving their jobs
- teams struggling to work well together

When line managers are properly supported, they are better able to support their teams. This leads to:

- clearer objectives
- better feedback
- stronger teamwork
- safer, more inclusive working environments



Line management staff standard

Why this matters (cont...):

This standard also matters because good line management underpins the other staff standards. Progress on tackling racism, reducing violence, championing sexual safety, supporting flexible working and improving health and wellbeing all depend on line managers having the time, confidence and support to act.

By valuing line management and giving it the attention and resources it deserves, the NHS can improve staff experience more consistently and create workplaces where people can do their best work and want to stay.



Line management staff standard

How this will be measured:

Success against the standard will be measured by what staff have to say about their experience of their line manager.

This will be done through the NHS Staff Survey, including questions on:

- appraisals and whether they help staff agree clear objectives for their work and how valued they feel their work is by their organisation
- career development and whether staff feel like they have access to the right opportunities to develop their potential
- whether their line manager takes a positive interest in their wellbeing, and whether they will help with any problems faced in a compassionate way
- their team and whether they feel a valued member of their wider team and with a set of shared goals



Health and wellbeing staff standard

“Staff can expect their organisation to protect their health, safety and wellbeing at work. Employers are responsible for supporting staff wellbeing, preventing ill-health associated with work and helping staff to feel safe, cared for and able to perform well.”

About this standard:

“This standard is about making sure that NHS organisations are proactively supporting the health and wellbeing of their staff and taking action to prevent work-related illnesses. It is important that organisations care for staff and prioritise their wellbeing so that they feel safe, well and able to perform their roles.

The 2025 NHS Staff Survey shows us that many NHS employees have experienced physical and psychological impacts as a result of their work, and not enough staff feel that their organisation takes positive action on health and wellbeing.

There is a wealth of existing guidance and frameworks around keeping staff safe and improving staff wellbeing in the NHS, yet this is fragmented, lacks a co-ordinated approach to staff safety and lacks the ability to enforce action.

This standard builds on existing expectations, requiring organisations to make ambitious progress across wider determinants of staff safety, health and wellbeing, and sets clear expectations on employers to take a preventative, data driven and accountable approach to staff health and wellbeing.”



Health and wellbeing staff standard

What to expect as a member of staff:

Under this standard, staff should expect:

- their organisation to actively protect their health, safety and wellbeing at work
- clear leadership accountability for staff wellbeing, including oversight at board level
- an evidence-based and needs-driven local health and wellbeing approach shaped by staff feedback, data and partnership working
- that basic wellbeing needs are met, including to rest, eat and drink while at work with arrangements that are suitable to different operational settings
- managers who are trained to support health and wellbeing, and to have regular, supportive conversations
- fair and inclusive support, including:
 - reasonable adjustments for disabled staff and those with long-term conditions
 - support for pregnant and breastfeeding staff
 - support for those experiencing perimenopause or menopause
- access to occupational health and wellbeing support, with recommendations acted upon
- ongoing improvement of staff health and wellbeing outcomes informed by workforce data and staff experience



Health and wellbeing staff standard

Why this matters:

The health, safety and wellbeing of NHS staff is fundamental to delivering safe, high-quality patient care. The NHS Staff Survey shows persistent levels of work-related stress and burnout, alongside declining confidence that organisations take positive action on wellbeing. This standard makes it clear that employers should not just react when staff are struggling but take action earlier to keep people well. It focuses on using information and evidence to spot problems, taking responsibility at leadership level, improving day-to-day working conditions, supporting managers and making sure staff can get the right health and wellbeing support when they need it. This helps keep staff safe, well and able to do their jobs.

Injury and harm caused while working, and poor wellbeing, leads to absenteeism and staff leaving their roles. Preventing harm and protecting staff wellbeing improves retention and morale, and has positive benefits for patient care.



Health and wellbeing staff standard

How this will be measured:

Success against the standard will initially be measured through the NHS Staff Survey, including through questions on whether staff:

- feel their organisation takes positive action on health and wellbeing
- have felt unwell in the past 12 months due to work-related stress
- feel burnt out because of their work



Violence prevention and reduction staff standard

“Staff have a right to feel safe and supported at work, in an environment that takes meaningful action to prevent and reduce violence, aggression, intimidation or abuse in any form. Staff should have access to simple, safe and supportive channels for reporting violence in the workplace; timely, compassionate support after any violent or harmful incident; and the right training to equip them with the confidence and knowledge to keep themselves and others safe.”

About this standard:

“All NHS staff deserve to feel safe at work without fear of violence, aggression or abuse in any form.

We know from the 2025 NHS Staff Survey results that the number of staff who experience violence while working in the NHS continues to rise.

The violence prevention and reduction staff standard will build on the work already underway in this area in partnership with NHS Employers and trade unions. This includes preventing and reducing violence, aggression, intimidation or abuse in any form.

This standard sets out targeted action that employers must take to prevent and reduce violence and abuse, as well as work with partners in the police and elsewhere to create a culture whereby violence against NHS staff is unacceptable.”



Violence prevention and reduction staff standard

What to expect as a member of staff:

Under this standard, staff should expect:

- their employer to implement and embed the [2024 violence prevention and reduction \(VPR\) standard](#)³, which helps NHS organisations to assess and manage risks around violence, so that staff feel safe, supported and empowered to report violence, and so their employer can measure and improve their response to violence
- accessible reporting systems to help them report any incidence of violence
- access to high quality, post-incident psychological and welfare support from their manager, who understands how to ensure staff receive post-incident support and where to signpost staff to
- HR policies and procedures that provide them with the right support following incidents and during any investigations
- appropriate training to equip them with the confidence and knowledge to keep themselves and others safe
- opportunities for staff to feed back to their employer, so that they can shape and contribute lived experience to any changes planned in their organisation

6) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/violence-prevention-and-reduction-standard/>



Violence prevention and reduction staff standard

Why this matters:

All NHS staff should feel safe at work without fear of violence or abuse. The NHS Staff Survey for 2025 shows that violence against NHS staff continues to be a major issue. In the last 12 months, 14.47% of staff reported that they had experienced at least one incident of physical violence from patients, service users or members of the public. This figure has increased from 14.38% in 2024, making it clear that there is much more to do to tackle this issue.

Staff must know that they are listened to and that appropriate action will be taken. The staff standard aims to ensure that NHS staff can:

- safely report violence in the workplace
- receive timely and compassionate support
- receive the right training they need to feel confident and keep themselves and colleagues safe



Violence prevention and reduction staff standard

How this will be measured:

Success against the standard will be measured by what staff have to say about their experience of violence in the workplace.

This will be done through the NHS Staff Survey, including questions on whether:

- staff have personally experienced physical violence at work from patients, service users, their relatives or other members of the public, managers or other colleagues
- they or a colleague have reported any incidents of physical violence at work



Championing sexual safety staff standard

“Staff have a right to feel safe and supported at work, in an environment that is free from sexual harassment, abuse and unwanted or inappropriate sexual behaviours. Staff can expect: their organisations to take clear, consistent action to prevent sexual misconduct and harassment; promote a culture of transparency and openness that ensures incidents are reported and acted upon promptly and appropriately; training to be provided on how to recognise and report inappropriate behaviours; an approach that centres on the victim, with support provided to those affected; and that lessons are learned to reduce the risk of future incidents.”

About this standard:

This standard sets out how to make sure that staff are able to go into their workplace and feel safe and protected from inappropriate sexual behaviour. The 2025 NHS Staff Survey results about unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature shows that there is still a problem that has to be tackled and it is unacceptable that staff should be subject to these behaviours.

This standard is about reinforcing the work that is already underway by NHS organisations in championing sexual safety. It sets out:

- what organisations must do to prevent unwanted sexual incidents
- how staff should be protected and supported
- how to learn from such incidents so staff are able to work in an environment free from sexual harassment, abuse and unwanted sexual behaviours



Championing sexual safety staff standard

What to expect as a member of staff:

Under this standard, staff should expect:

- their employer to uphold the 10 principles of the [NHS Sexual Safety Charter](#)⁴
- to be able to work in an environment where they are not subject to any form of sexual abuse, harassment or inappropriate comments and that they feel safe in their workplace
- that all investigators of sexual misconduct allegations are specially trained for this role
- for their boards and leaders to work to track progress on tackling sexual misconduct and ensure that all policies and procedures are maintained and updated
- that everyone, no matter what grade, should complete the [Understanding sexual misconduct in the workplace](#)⁵ e-learning
- that all staff are familiar with the [sexual misconduct people framework](#)⁶ so that they understand how to recognise and report sexual misconduct
- that robust staff policies are in place, so individual staff do not suffer any detriment as a result of reporting any concerns about behaviour
- that any relevant concerns about behaviour from other members of staff, where appropriate, are shared with future employers and host organisations

7) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/sexual-safety-in-healthcare-organisational-charter/>

8) <https://learninghub.nhs.uk/Resource/57103>

9) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/national-people-sexual-misconduct-policy-framework/>



Championing sexual safety staff standard

Why this matters:

The 2025 NHS Staff Survey results show that unwanted behaviours of a sexual nature are still a major issue. In the last 12 months, 3.51% of staff reported that they had been a target of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature in the workplace from staff or colleagues. Although this figure has seen a reduction from 3.68% in 2023 (the first year of reporting), it's clear that there is much more to be done to tackle this issue.

We want staff to be able to come to work and feel confident that they are going into a place of safety, free from inappropriate sexual behaviours from either colleagues or members of the public. If staff do encounter these behaviours, then they must have the assurances that that their concerns and complaints will be listened to.

Staff must know that they will be listened to, appropriate action will be taken and that they will be supported throughout any process.



Championing sexual safety staff standard

How this will be measured:

Success against the standard will be measured by staff reporting incidences of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature in the workplace.

This will be done through the NHS Staff Survey, including questions on:

- how many times they have been the target of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature in the workplace. This can include offensive or inappropriate sexualised conversation (including jokes), touching or assault
- whether the behaviour is from other staff



Tackling racism staff standard

“Staff should feel safe and supported at work, in an environment where their organisation takes sustained and meaningful action to prevent all instances of racism and discrimination in the workplace.”

About this standard:

All staff should expect to experience a safe working environment, free from racism and discrimination. Data from multiple sources such as the NHS Staff Survey shows that ethnic minority staff have poorer experiences at work.

This standard is about ensuring all NHS organisations take robust and meaningful action to foster positive change in organisational cultures, to improve experiences and outcomes for ethnic minority staff.

This standard will help to embed a consistent preventative approach across all NHS organisations that not only reduces but tackles the existence of racism and the culture and conditions that have allowed this to thrive across the NHS.



Tackling racism staff standard

What to expect as a member of staff:

Under this standard, staff should expect:

- to work in an inclusive team environment where they are treated fairly, are listened to and have their concerns taken seriously
- clear consequences for racist behaviour, whether that's from patients, their relatives or other members of staff
- their managers and board to take meaningful action if problems arise and escalate issues when needed
- to have access to simple, accessible HR policies and processes that prioritise wellbeing and restorative support
- updated grievance, disciplinary and investigative processes that are responsive to the experiences of racism and are unbiased
- to have opportunities where staff can safely give feedback to their employer to improve and inform local plans, particularly where they have lived experience
- that their organisation's board is accountable for tackling racism with consequences for poor performance
- that their organisation will work to implement inclusive recruitment and talent management practices by developing a recruitment and career progression plan that ensures equity of opportunity for all staff but particularly ethnic minority staff



Tackling racism staff standard

Why this matters:

Compared to White staff, ethnic minority staff face greater levels of bullying and harassment, are significantly less likely to be appointed to roles from shortlisting and have a level of board and senior leadership representation that is significantly below their overall level in the NHS workforce.

The 2025 NHS Staff Survey showed that instances of staff experiencing discrimination at work from patients, their families and the general public, managers or other colleagues, had increased again and are higher among ethnic minority staff compared to White staff.

Given these inequalities, this standard sets out the minimum national expectations for how all NHS organisations must prioritise, prevent, respond to and learn from incidents of racism in the workplace. It will encourage NHS organisations to proactively work to eliminate the conditions in which racism and racist behaviour thrive.



Tackling racism staff standard

How this will be measured:

Success against the standard will be measured by what staff have to say about their experience of racism in the workplace.

This will be done through the NHS Staff Survey, including questions on:

- career progression in their organisation and specific data on this for staff members from an ethnic minority background and other protected characteristics like gender, religion, sexual orientation and disability
- whether staff have experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work from patients or service users, their relatives or other members of the public and from managers or other colleagues
- whether staff have experienced discrimination at work from patients or service users, their relatives or other members of the public and from managers, team leaders or other colleagues



Promoting flexible working staff standard

“NHS staff can expect flexible working (flexibility in how, where and when they work) to be openly encouraged and supported, fairly and equitably considered, and embedded into everyday practice, creating a ‘flexible first’ culture rather than treated as an exception. Requests must be considered objectively and not unreasonably refused, and where they cannot be agreed, alternatives will be explored.”

About this standard:

Flexible working in the NHS helps staff manage their lives, boosts wellbeing and improves retention and patient care.

This standard is about NHS organisations creating a positive, fair and transparent culture in which flexible working is normalised as part of everyday operational practice. This may include changes to working patterns, hours and roles and/or the location in which work takes place. Terms used to refer to flexible working could also include agile, hybrid, dynamic, smart, and remote and home working.

It is intended to ensure that flexible working is proactively offered, openly discussed and consistently applied, from job adverts and interviews, through workforce planning, appraisal and ongoing conversations between staff and managers.

It also makes clear that senior leaders have responsibility for creating the conditions that empower staff to make requests, and that enable managers and leaders to respond to both staff needs and service requirements.



Promoting flexible working staff standard

What to expect as a member of staff:

Under this standard, staff should expect:

- flexible working to be openly encouraged, supported and promoted by their organisation's board and leaders
- their organisation to capture and review information about flexible working requests and outcomes, so that practice can be improved over time and shared transparently with staff
- that requests for flexible working are considered objectively and not unreasonably refused and, where a request cannot be agreed, alternative options are explored with the requester
- flexible working is considered as part of normal workforce planning and will be an option in all job adverts
- approaches to flexible working recognise that what is possible will vary depending on roles, services and operational context
- decisions and outcomes to be handled in a way that is fair, transparent and consistent, and for informal arrangements to be regularly reviewed
- the implementation of preference-based team e-rostering for all frontline workers (where operationally appropriate)



Promoting flexible working staff standard

Why this matters:

While there have been some improvements in relation to flexible working in the NHS, there is still a long way to go to ensure all staff have fair and equitable access, which is consistently felt by all staff across the NHS.

Flexible working supports recruitment and retention across the NHS, helping organisations build long-term workforce capability and capacity.

It can also improve staff wellbeing and experience, which in turn supports productivity and the sustainability of NHS services.

By setting clear, consistent expectations, this standard is intended to reduce variation in experience for staff and ensure flexible working is a normal part of working life across the NHS, rather than something that depends on where they work or who they work for.



Promoting flexible working staff standard

How this will be measured:

Success against the standard will be measured by what staff have to say about their experience of flexible working opportunities in their organisation.

This will be done through the NHS Staff Survey, including questions on:

- how satisfied staff are with the opportunities for flexible working patterns
- how committed their organisation is to helping you balance your work and home life
- whether they can approach their immediate manager to talk openly about flexible working



NHS staff standards: detailed requirements for employers (guidance¹⁰)

Today we've focused on what staff can expect, why this matters and how it will be measured in respect of these new standards. Alongside this the Department of Health & Social Care has also produced guidance for employers which goes into greater detail. Once you've had the chance to think about the information shared today it would be worth looking into this further guidance and thinking how you can use it locally to ensure your employers are responding appropriately.

As an example, to demonstrate the detail, in the line management staff standard, the guidance highlights: The standard, its purpose, actions for employers, the context, metrics to be used, legal duties and how the standard relates to the staff rights and pledges in the NHS Constitution.

10) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-staff-standards/nhs-staff-standards-detailed-requirements-for-employers>



Questions?

