



NHS Wales Welsh Partnership Forum

Joint Statement on industrial relations and facilities time during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic

A key strength of NHS Wales is the strong partnership between employers and the trade unions representing the workforce. At this most difficult of times, we will rely on that partnership working and jointly do what we can, collectively, to strengthen it at every level. It is at unprecedented times like these that we need partnership working more than ever.

We all recognise that the workforce, their managers and trade union representatives, should not be distracted from the core task of meeting the emergency faced by the country, therefore in some cases for the duration of the outbreak we will need to work in new ways or vary our typical employment relations activity where required. It is however essential that regular contact is maintained with local representatives both formally and informally.

Recognising the significant flexibility and extra-ordinary efforts, which are being made by our NHS staff, the Welsh Partnership Forum partners will aim to ensure that no member of staff or group of staff is disadvantaged by the emergency conditions and arrangements arising from the pandemic.

Welsh Government, employers and trade unions will seek to maintain partnership working at all levels and the partnership principles of working collectively in relation to the constantly changing arrangements, so as to find common ground and move forward with mutual respect.

At a local level, employers will ensure that so far as is possible facilities time for union representatives including health and safety representatives is safeguarded, and extended through agreement where necessary, for example to allow involvement in new emergency structures. Regular trade union involvement in such emergency structures is important and will have a positive impact on managing the current crisis. It is recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances where the needs of the service mean that facilities time cannot be safeguarded as representatives may be required to support frontline services. In such circumstances, organisations will work with TU partners to ensure that a workable minimum is maintained. Trade union representatives for their part will recognise and respond to the context in which they are working with even greater sensitivity with the care of patients during this time a clear and shared priority.

At a national level, a COVID-19 Workforce Deployment and Wellbeing Planning Response Group has been established by Welsh Government as part of the emergency response and meets on a weekly basis. The membership of this includes representation from Welsh Government, employers and trade unions. In addition the Welsh Partnership Forum Business Committee is now meeting on a weekly basis to progress workforce matters on a collective basis. Trade union partners will also have

access to other national and regional fora and will continue to raise issues that span organisations within those fora.

We will continue to work together to support creative responses for our workforce, finding new ways of working to combat the spread of the virus and its impact. We are striving to find the right mechanisms to support the workforce during these unprecedented times; however, we won't always get it right. Accordingly, informal mechanisms, which presently exist, will allow for resolution of partnership challenges or disagreements at both local and national levels and more than ever these arrangements will come into their own going forward.

This statement is endorsed by the joint Chairs of the Welsh Partnership Forum:

Andrew Goodall, Director General Health and Social Services/ NHS Wales Chief Executive on behalf of Welsh Government

Tracy Myhill, Chief Executive, Swansea Bay UHB on behalf of Health Boards, Trusts and HEIW

Nicky Hughes, Royal College of Nursing (vice Chair) on behalf of Trade Union partners

20th April 2020