

Annual staff survey

On 30th March, NHS England and NHS Improvement published the annual NHS staff survey results. This is a large scale survey which explores the views of NHS staff on a range of different aspects based upon their lived experience of working within the NHS.

The survey ran from September to December 2021, amid winter demand and an upswing in COVID-19 cases due to the new Omicron variant. 648,584 staff responded (8.96% up from 2020), with responses from 280 NHS organisations, including all 217 trusts.

Key findings

Overall, the results make for difficult reading, reflecting the extremely challenging operational environment facing staff at all levels of the NHS workforce. While it is good to see that the majority of staff feel their leaders are compassionate listeners who take effective action to help alleviate their concerns, metrics across staff wellbeing, recognition, and perceived quality of care have all seen significant decreases since 2020.

Of particular note this year is the fact that only 32.7% of staff were satisfied with their pay (the lowest level for four years) and only 27.2% think there are enough staff in their organisation for them to do their job properly (a significant 11.2% decrease from 2020). It is overwhelmingly clear from these results that a meaningful, fully funded uplift to staff pay is vital this year, and a fully costed and funded national workforce plan remains of utmost importance to address persistent vacancies, protect staff wellbeing and the delivery of services across the NHS.

What does this mean for governors?

Governors can use their holding to account duty to gain assurances that the board is tackling the issues identified in its local staff survey and use the national survey results to compare their performance with other trusts. Some suggested questions:

- 1 Was there anything in the survey that surprised the NEDs?
- 2 If yes, how have they been assured that this is being addressed?

- 3 How have the NEDs been assured that we have enough capacity in the Trust to enable staff to do their jobs properly? How is the trust planning to ensure that sufficient staff with the right skills will be in place to deliver care in the future?
- 4 How have the NEDs been assured that as an organisation we are doing enough to retain existing staff?
- 5 What assurances can the NEDs provide that the board is focusing on the morale and wellbeing of our staff?
- 6 Why is the board confident that we are building a modern working culture where staff feel valued and supported, with opportunities to work flexibly?
- 7 How are NEDs assured that the trust is delivering on its commitment to reducing staff stress/poor health? How is the trust building a culture of psychological safety with staff empowered to speak up about any concerns, in terms of care and in terms of their working environment?
- 8 Why are NEDS confident that we are tackling discrimination as best we can?
- 9 We compare unfavourably with other trusts on some issues. How is the board learning from other trusts?
- 10 What is the impact of our trust results on quality of care?

Governors can also use their duty around engaging members and the public to feedback staff issues/concerns to the board at their council of governors meetings. Staff governors are particularly well positioned to do this and creating a culture of psychological safety starts at the top. Governors can also compare the feedback they receive from their constituents and the public against the data supplied in their council of governor papers to ensure it matches.