

Freedom to Speak Up: NHS England's Pilot Whistleblowing Support Scheme for Primary Care

Update for Workshop Participants

Background / Context

NHS England is running a pilot scheme to test an approach to delivering Robert Francis' recommendation for an employment support scheme for NHS whistleblowers. Given NHS England's role within the NHS, this is open to whistleblowers from primary care.

The pilot scheme was formed following consultation with whistleblowers and other key stakeholders and is tailored to each individual. It provides services including:

- Career coaching and support;
- Occupational Health assessment and advice;
- Financial advice;
- Mediation;
- Whistleblowing mentorship i.e. specific support from people with expertise in whistleblowing.

We are currently engaging with stakeholders to develop more opportunities for access to employment placements.

Following an open procurement exercise provision of the pilot Whistleblowers Support Scheme has been awarded to [Working Transitions](#). A whistleblower was on the selection panel. This panel unanimously decided to appoint [Working Transitions](#) because of their track record in providing similar support in the private and public sector, and they have successfully delivered career transition support to numerous individuals in a range of circumstances and settings. They were very flexible in their approach and willing to consider a number of different solutions to best support each individual on the scheme.

All aspects of the pilot scheme will be evaluated by [Liverpool John Moores University, who were also appointed following an open procurement, again with a whistleblower on the panel](#). The university will be undertaking engagement with a range of stakeholders and applicants, and the format of any future scheme will be adapted to take account of the evaluation results.

Further information about NHS England's work on Freedom to Speak Up can be found on the [NHS England website](#).

FAQ

Q1. How long is the pilot?

The pilot is running until March 2018

Q2. Is it a national pilot or focussed in one or more particular area?

This is a national pilot

Q3. What are the specific goals of the support scheme?

The programme goals are to provide tailored support for each participant to provide services, including:

- Career coaching and support;
- Occupational Health assessment and advice;
- Financial advice;
- Mediation with former employers if needed;
- Access to employment placements and work experience;
- Whistleblowing mentorship i.e. specific support from another whistleblower.

Q4. How will we know that the support scheme has been a success?

The programme is being tailored to meet the objectives of individual participants. Whilst employment is a common theme, it is not the only objective being set by participants. The programme is going to be independently evaluated and will be considered a success if it helps achieve personal objectives, including removing barriers to employment, increasing employability or facilitating employment. The exact success criteria will be developed and refined as part of the pilot and evaluation process.

Q5. How are the experiences of whistleblowers helping to shape and inform the development of the scheme?

Workshops and 'listening to you' type events have been held which helped us to design the pilot. One firm conclusion from the workshop was that we should 'learn from doing' which is why we have proceeded to launch this pilot.

Whistleblowers have been involved at each stage, including as panel members, and their views have helped us to shape our approach and ways of working on an ongoing basis. The support scheme is now being tested and evaluated by whistleblowers themselves. Whistleblowers who participate in the scheme will provide invaluable intelligence for the evaluation.

No single whistleblower organisation has been contracted by NHS England to provide advice on the scheme. Individual whistleblowers have been approached to advise or participate in panels according to their clinical or professional experience. We have striven to ensure that whistleblowers do not come from a single organisation.

Q6. What is the budget?

NHS England has set a budget of £10,000 per participant but we did not set a limit on the number of participants. In the end, we admitted all whistleblowers who applied onto the scheme.

The budget for the evaluation research is £23,500

Q7. Why was this particular provider for the scheme selected and what was the process?

Working Transitions were appointed because of their track record in providing similar support in the private and public sector and have successfully delivered career transition support to numerous individuals who:

- Have suffered from health issues or stress
- Have been through a challenging or traumatic situation
- Are feeling vulnerable due to their experience in the workplace
- Have been out of the workplace for a period of time and may have become deskilled

Q8. How did people who have been affected apply?

NHS England wrote to all organisations and individuals we were aware of who had an interest in whistleblowing with an invitation to express an interest in the scheme. A number of whistleblowers' organisations distributed this information to their mailing lists. A number of individuals then expressed interest in the scheme and were invited to apply.

Currently we are not allocating further places as part of this pilot and further expressions of interests for future iterations of the scheme can be directed to the programme leads using the following email address

Whistleblowersupportscheme (NHS ENGLAND) - england.wss@nhs.net

NHS England will consider giving access to elements of the scheme to current whistleblowers who approach us with concerns about their employment. This may prevent loss of employment.

Q9. How does the pilot actually worked once someone is signed up/enrolled?

The individual will be contacted by the organisation delivering the support scheme who will arrange for them to have an occupational health assessment and also meet a coach. The occupational health assessment was introduced on the unanimous recommendation of the panels, which included whistleblowers.

The participant will then have an exploratory meeting with the coach to work out what support they want/need aligned with what the individual is choosing as their preferred next step. Their preferred next step might include employment in the NHS. The individual and WT will then agree a learning package and WT will put the package in place.

Q10. Do people have to attend sessions at specific centres or do the coaches come to them?

It varies dependent on individual need. Usually it will be a mutually agreed location

Q11. One of the elements of support includes 'mediation'. What will this include?

The mediator will work with the individual and former employer to try to agree a mutually agreed outcome. It may be feasible that the mediator carries out the entire liaison, and no direct contact is necessary. It will depend on each individual case.

Q12. Will participants be found employment within the NHS?

NHS England will be helping participants as much as we can to find suitable work placements and work experience, including within NHS England. Our review of existing return to work schemes found that there is more support for some professional groups than others. We will be making use of these schemes where we can but NHS England is also working with NHS Improvement and employers on a work placement programme for participants to access as part of the support once they have agreed that they are ready to get back into the workplace. We are engaging both public and private sector employers across the country to rapidly develop a work placement programme. We are also talking to the devolved nations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to try to arrange reciprocal placements where it is geographically practicable.

Q13. Is there a target number of people we want to help?

No

Q14. How many applications from NHS whistleblowers has this pilot scheme received?

Eight

Q15. Of the total applicants, how many met eligibility criteria, how many were rejected and what was the reason for this?

All eight have met the eligibility criteria

Q16. What is the matrix that was used to determine pilot scheme applicant eligibility?

The eligibility criteria were set out in the final Francis Review report. The following three criteria apply to the scheme:

- i. Is the applicant an NHS Whistleblower?
- ii. Are there 'significant' and 'justifiable' concerns about their performance;
- iii. Have they faced difficulty in finding suitable employment?

Q17. Do people have to have lost their job to access this or can they still be in their current employment?

No. Some applicants have lost their job but others are working within the NHS, albeit not in their chosen role or in permanent employment.

Q18. What is the process for evaluation and discussion, to determine whether a second cohort will be recruited? When will these meetings and discussions take place?

The scheme is being evaluated and the learning from the evaluation will inform future iterations of the scheme. Upon receipt of the evaluation report a decision will be taken as to how to proceed for future cohorts and what format that will take. The time frame for this is yet to be determined. We will share the key findings and recommendations from the evaluation with stakeholders

Q19. Is there a similar scheme for non-primary care workers that this is based on?

NHS Improvement is developing a similar scheme for secondary care.

Q20. What is the approach to the evaluation process?

The evaluation will engage directly with stakeholders to explore both the process of developing the pilot and the utility of the support to clients. Because of the involvement of stakeholders it is particularly important that

they feel valued as partners. The evaluation will therefore be done with participants (not imposed 'on' them) ensuring they have a say in determining the aims and objectives of the pilot and its evaluation.

Participants and those who expressed an interest* will be contacted in the next three weeks to talk through their experience of the application process and their participation to date. They will also be contacted towards the end of their participation to see how successful the experience has been for them, and if they feel there are any parts of the scheme which were not necessary, or anything which they feel should be included. Those who chose not to apply will be asked for feedback on their reasons for this and if any part of the application process felt too difficult or prohibitive. All participants will have had first contact with the evaluators by the end of September. Working Transitions and the Scheme panel members will also be interviewed about their thoughts on the processes and their involvement. NHS England will use this information to inform development of future iterations of the scheme.

A full description is detailed in the attached plan.

* For people who expressed an interest in the scheme but did not apply, NHS England has only passed onto the evaluation the names and contact details of those who agreed that we could do so.