



Healthy Workplace Toolkit for an Agency Workforce



Healthy workplace, healthy you

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Forewords

Recruitment & Employment Confederation

Nursing staff are at the very heart of health care; without their dedication, commitment and professionalism, the health sector simply wouldn't survive. Patients rely on a caring and compassionate nursing workforce who are motivated and supported. In recent years agency nursing staff have played an increasingly important role in supporting the NHS, particularly in times of increased demand. Agency staff are well-trained – often with many decades of service within the NHS – and provide an essential lifeline. They can also be deployed at very short notice to fill gaps in rotas and ensure high quality patient care and safety.

Whether working substantively or as agency, all evidence suggests that well-supported nursing staff – operating in a healthy workplace – reduces staff absence, increases motivation and improves patient outcomes. This toolkit provides an essential guide for NHS organisations as well as other independent sector employers and the specialist employment agencies who provide a 24/7 staffing support to the NHS. The core aim is to ensure that the crucial work being taken forward by the RCN to promote healthy workplaces includes a specific focus on the needs of agency nursing staff.

As the professional body for the UK recruitment industry, the REC is proud to endorse this toolkit which covers five key domains that make up a healthy workplace; work-life balance, dignity at work, health and safety, job design and learning and development. We will work with our members in the health care sector to drive awareness and actively promote the toolkit to the employers they recruit for and to the nursing staff they supply.

Tom Hadley, Director of Policy, Recruitment & Employment Confederation

The Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) is the professional body for the UK's recruitment industry, representing over 3,000 employment agencies and employment businesses. The REC represents over 800 recruitment agencies who supply clinical and non-clinical health and social care professionals to the NHS, as well as to local authorities and the private sector. Our diverse membership includes the NHS's ten biggest staffing suppliers as well as hundreds of SMEs; what unites them is their commitment to robust compliance standards (as required through REC membership), and their dedication to providing 24/7 staffing solutions to the NHS.

Royal College of Nursing

Times are tough for nursing staff, what with ongoing pay restraint, and a shortage of nurses across the UK, many members of the nursing community are taking on 'top up' agency shifts in addition to their substantive post. Many more of our members choose the flexibility of agency shifts as a means of balancing work and life, particularly those with caring responsibilities outside work.

The RCN recognises the value of agency nursing staff and their contribution to the care and safety of patients, but we know that many agency staff are not afforded the same respect as directly employed staff.

The RCN warmly welcomes partnership working with the Recruitment & Employment Confederation to develop a healthy workplace toolkit to address our shared concerns and objective of a healthy working environment for both nursing staff and the patients they care for.

This essential RCN toolkit provides a clear framework for employment agencies and host organisations, both in the NHS and the independent sector, to address the issues identified by the agency nursing workforce and provide a healthy and safe working environment for staff and the patients they care for.

Nursing staff carrying out agency work also need to be aware of their own professional responsibilities to practice safely. This toolkit provides guidance to support individual nursing staff to meet these responsibilities.

Janet Davies, Chief Executive & General Secretary, Royal College of Nursing

Introduction

In 2015, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) launched its healthy workplace campaign to support health and social care employers to implement healthy working environments with high quality employment practices. In 2016, following discussions with the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC), the RCN agreed to develop a bespoke healthy workplace toolkit to support both employment agencies and host organisations in the creation of healthy workplaces.

This toolkit has been developed following focussed discussions with employment agencies and agency nursing staff. It provides a voluntary framework for organisations to follow in order to support the development and promotion of a healthy workplace.

As well as supporting the creation of healthy workplaces, the toolkit can support compliance with various standards and legal requirements including the REC code of professional practice.

What is a healthy workplace?

The RCN defines healthy workplaces as those which offer fair pay and rewards and have high quality employment practices and procedures which promote a good work-life balance; dignity at work; protect and promote employees' health and safety at work; design jobs which provide employees with a degree of autonomy and control and provide equitable access to training and learning opportunities for all employees.

The toolkit

The toolkit is divided into five domains:

- Work-life balance
- Dignity at work
- Health and safety
- Job design
- Learning and development.

Under each category there is a set of indicators which can be used to do a health check and identify areas for improvement. There are a set of signposts to further resources to support the implementation of improvements. The toolkit is underpinned by four key principles:

- Recognition by health care employment agencies and host organisations of the positive impact of safe, secure and healthy working environments on both agency nursing staff and patient outcomes.
- Recognition that agency nursing staff also have their part to play, in both taking care of themselves and following policies and procedures correctly.
- Recognition of the importance of good communication and cooperation between host organisations and employment agencies in creating a healthy working environment for agency staff.
- A commitment to work in partnership with the RCN to promote a healthy workplace.

Who can use the toolkit?

The toolkit is aimed at all health and social care employment agencies and host organisations small or large, whether in the public or independent sector. Where relevant, we have developed a further section for agency nursing staff who work either occasionally or permanently through an employment agency.

This toolkit complements the RCN's core toolkit which sets out a framework for promoting healthy workplaces for permanent employees.

How to use it

The indicators under the five domains within the toolkit can be used to carry out a health check of your respective organisation, be it a host or an employment agency. The findings also have the potential to be used to facilitate communication between host employer and agency. Once a health check has been carried out, an action plan can be developed to address areas where improvements are needed. Key resources are detailed within the toolkit as signposts to support the development of improvements.

Pledge or celebrate

Employment agencies and host employers are encouraged to pledge to act on an area within the toolkit that they would like to improve. We also welcome organisations to share good practice with us so we can celebrate efforts made to improve the working environment for agency nursing staff.

Domain 1: Work-life balance

The Work Foundation define a work life balance as:

Having sufficient control and autonomy over where, when and how you work to fulfil your responsibilities within and outside paid work (Work Foundation 2006).¹

For many health care staff, having control and autonomy over their working patterns is the reason they work through an agency. This may be particularly true for those with caring responsibilities or older workers who may want less intense working hours and the associated physical and emotional demands, or simply to pursue personal goals or have more leisure time.²

Health check

Do you protect and promote a good work-life balance by:

Agency employers:

- ensuring compliance with the Working Time Regulations 1998 including the voluntary opt out?
- scheduling agency workers onto shift patterns that ensure safety and adequate rest periods between shifts, allowing workers to rest and recuperate, such as avoiding continuous shifts (going on night/twilight shift too early)?
- building shift patterns around staff availability and respecting employees' time off (for example, by having protective family time, and agreeing on what days a worker is not available)?
- being tolerant of emergency situations e.g. child care or sickness (especially infection risk where agency staff are required to adhere to infection control policies)?

Host organisations:

- on the agency's behalf, as far as is reasonable ensure compliance with the Working Time Regulations 1998?
- ensuring agency staff are able to take their in work breaks?

Agency workers:

- ensuring the safety of patients, yourself and your colleagues and adherence to the NMC code by not working excessive hours and having adequate rest in between shifts?

Further information and resources

ACAS *Working Hours*. Available www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1373

RCN (2012) *A Shift in Right Direction – RCN Guidance on the Occupational Health and Safety of Shift Working in the Nursing Workforce*. London: RCN Available at www.rcn.org.uk/publications

RCN *Healthy You self-care resources* <https://www.rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplace>



¹ The Work Foundation (2006) *Work-life Balance: Rhetoric Versus Reality?* London: The Work Foundation

² Recruitment and Employment Federation, *Flex Appeal: Why Freelancers, Contractors and Agency Workers Choose to Work this Way* https://www.rec.uk.com/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/155562/Flex-Appeal-2014.pdf

Domain 2:

Dignity at work

Dignity is concerned with how people feel, think and behave in relation to the worth or value of themselves and others. To treat someone with dignity is to treat them as being of worth in a way that is respectful to their diversity. Treating patients and clients with dignity is essential in nursing practice but, in order to do this effectively, nursing staff including those who work as agency staff, must also be treated with dignity by their employers, managers and colleagues.

Adopting a workplace culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and everyone feels valued will reap the benefits of a more motivated, harmonious, willing and loyal workforce which in turn will impact positively on patient outcomes.

There is some evidence to suggest that agency workers can sometimes feel isolated or even ostracised when in a workplace. Team relationships are recognised as a human factor which can impact on patient outcomes so it is important that the nursing team is inclusive of agency staff.³

The *Freedom to Speak Up* report identified agency nurses as among vulnerable groups who may find it harder to raise concerns. The report recognised the value of agency staff in raising concerns, acting as a fresh pair of eyes and having the benefit of working in a range of environments.⁴

Health check

Do you promote dignity at work by:

Agency employers:

- advocating on the behalf of the agency worker when concerns are raised?
- responding promptly to complaints of bullying?
- providing support for those who feel their dignity at work has been compromised?
- complying with the requirements of the Equality Act provisions such as employees with disabilities?

Host organisations:

- demonstrating and encouraging respectful relationships between all staff including agency workers?
- ensuring dignity at work policies include a reference to agency workers being treated with dignity and respect?
- responding promptly to concerns raised by agency workers?
- ensuring a safe environment/culture for agency staff to raise concerns without fear of reprisal and providing appropriate support for those who do?
- ensuring agency workers are aware of relevant policies and local incident reporting procedures?
- ensuring line managers facilitate and encourage positive workplace interaction between permanent and agency staff?
- ensuring line managers communicate and give constructive feedback to agency workers?
- ensuring the fair allocation of work and optimal use of agency workers' skills?

Agency workers:

- Raising concerns on issues of dignity at work which impact on you and or patients in your care and in accordance with the NMC Code.

³ RCN 2017 *Patient Safety and Human Factors* <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/patient-safety-and-human-factors>

⁴ Sir Robert Francis (2015) *Freedom to Speak Up*. Available at www.gov.uk

Signposts

Equality resources:

ACAS (2017) *Equality and Discrimination resources*. Available at www.acas.org.uk

Equality and human rights commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Equality Commission Northern Ireland
www.equalityni.org.uk

Raising concerns resources:

RCN (2017) *Raising Concerns*. Available at
www.rcn.org.uk

All Wales Raising Concerns (whistleblowing) policy
www.wales.nhs.uk

Bullying resources:

RCN (2015) *Bullying and Harassment: A Good Practice Guidance on Preventing and Addressing Bullying and Harassment in Health and Social Care Organisations*. London: RCN. Available at
www.rcn.org.uk/publications

RCN (2015) *Working with Care*. London: RCN.
Available at www.rcn.org.uk/publications

ACAS (2014) *Bullying and Harassment at Work – A Guide for Managers and Employees*. Available at
www.acas.org.uk

ACAS (2014) *Bullying and Harassment at Work – A Guide for Employees*. Available at www.acas.org.uk

Healthy You resources:

RCN Healthy You self-care resources
<https://www.rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplace>



Domain 3: Health and safety at work

All workers are entitled to work in environments where risks to their health and safety are properly controlled. This includes the provision of adequate welfare facilities such as toilets, and access to drinking water and comfortable working environments, including thermal comfort and adequate ventilation.

There is a robust legal framework that employers and host organisations need to follow to ensure the health and safety of agency workers. Health and social care workers are exposed to a number of work-related injuries and ill health related to slips, manual handling and sharps injuries and stress.

Work-related ill health and injury can present significant costs to an organisation in terms of sickness absence, loss of skilled workers. Defending personal injury claims can also present a significant financial and administrative impact to an organisation. Furthermore, injury at work can have a significant impact on an agency nurses ability to work and earn income.

Health check

Do you provide and promote a safe and healthy working environment by:

Agency employers:

- taking reasonable steps to identify any known risks and satisfy itself that the end user has taken steps to prevent or control the known risks before the start of work?
- not sending the worker to the job unless satisfied that their health and safety will be protected?
- responding to health and safety complaints and supporting workers to escalate concerns?
- providing occupational health advice and support (such as in cases of EPP, work-related vaccinations and health surveillance needs)?
- co-operating and communicating with the host organisation on all matters relating to health and safety?

- providing counselling/employee assistance support for workers?
- ensuring the worker has up-to-date health and safety training to carry out their job safely?
- ensuring that personal protective equipment (PPE) is provided free of charge to agency worker?

Host organisations (in addition to the requirements for substantive staff):

- providing a safety induction and orientation (especially issues of fire safety, emergency procedures and lone working)?
- co-operating and communicating with agency employer on risks to agency worker especially in the case of risks to pregnant workers?
- providing urgent follow up of agency workers following a needlestick/sharps injury?
- ensuring agency workers are made aware of incident reporting procedures and policies relating to issues such as needlestick injury or violence?
- taking responsibility for RIDDOR reporting when an incident occurs to an agency worker?
- ensuring agency staff have access to risk assessments, including those on lone working?
- ensuring a safe handover of patients

Agency workers:

- reporting health and safety concerns including near misses and accidents using incident report procedures
- seeking prompt follow up following a needlestick/sharps injury?
- keeping up to date with work-related vaccines (which should be provided free of charge)?
- when working alone, ensuring you are contactable during your shift.

Signposts

General health and safety issues:

Health and Safety Executive
www.hse.gov.uk

Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland
www.hseni.gov.uk

Work Boost Wales
www.workboostwales.com

Health and safety of agency workers:

Health and Safety Executive
www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/temporary.htm

Miscellaneous RCN guidance:

RCN (2013) *Sharps Safety – RCN Guidance to Support the Implantation of the Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare Regulations) 2013* London: RCN. Available at www.rcn.org.uk

RCN (2012) *Tools of the Trade – RCN Guidance for Health Care Staff on Glove Use and the Prevention of Contact Dermatitis* London: RCN. Available at www.rcn.org.uk

RCN (2012) *A Shift in the Right Direction – RCN Guidance on the Occupational Health and Safety of Shift Working in the Nursing Workforce*. London: RCN. Available at www.rcn.org.uk

NHS Staff Guidance:

Available at www.nhsemployers.org

- Sharps safety
- Health and safety competencies for NHS Managers
- Prevention and management of work related stress
- Partnership working on health and safety
- Lone worker safety
- Workplace health and safety standards
- The 'Back Pack' (musculoskeletal injuries)



Domain 4:

Job design

Job design is how tasks or jobs are organised within the work environment to ensure they are well-matched to workers. In other words, fitting the job to the worker not the other way round. Poorly designed jobs can lead to psychological and physical ill health.

According to the European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (2015)⁵, the way in which a job is designed has great impact on attitude, beliefs and feeling of the employee. These include organisational commitment, work motivation, performance, job satisfaction, mental health, reduced turnover and sickness absence.

Health check

Do you provide well-designed jobs by:

Agency employers:

- ensuring the agency worker has the skills and competencies to work in the assigned area?
- communication with host organisations to make appropriate workplace adjustments for workers with disabilities?

Host organisations:

- avoiding moving agency workers to areas where they may not have the skills and competences?
- opening up work based training on issues such as use of new equipment?
- ensuring the fair allocation of work and optimal use of agency workers' skills?
- cooperating with agency employers on matters relating to workplace adjustments for agency workers with disabilities?

Agency workers:

- In accordance with the NMC code work within the limits of your competence and

ask for help from a suitably qualified and experienced health care professional to carry out any action or procedure that is beyond the limits of your competence.

Signposts

Stress and mental health:

RCN (2015) *Stress and You: A Guide for Nursing Staff*. London: RCN. Available at www.rcn.org.uk/publications

RCN (2009) *Work-related Stress: A Good Practice Guide for RCN Representatives*. London: RCN. Available at www.rcn.org.uk/publications

NHS Staff Council (2014) *Guidance on the Prevention and Management of Stress at Work*. Available at www.nhsemployers.org

HSE stress guidance: www.hse.gov.uk/stress

MIND resources: www.mind.org.uk

NICE (2009). *Promoting Mental Wellbeing Through Productive and Healthy Working Conditions (PH22)*. London: NICE. Available at www.nice.org.uk/guidance/settings/workplaces

All Wales Mental Health promotion network www.publicmentalhealth.org

Northern Ireland Promoting positive mental health at work: a guide for employers. Available online at www.publichealth.hscni.net

Job adjustments:

Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com

Fit for Work service <http://fitforwork.org/employer/supporting-an-employee-to-return-to-work>

Fit for Work Scotland <http://fitforworkscotland.scot/employers/supporting-an-employee-to-return-to-work>

HSE www.hse.gov.uk/disability/law.htm

⁵ European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (2015) *Definition of Work/Job Design*. Available at http://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Definition_of_work/job_design

Domain 5: Learning and development in the workplace

Learning and development is a good catch all term to describe the learning activities that take place in the workplace. These include training which is often described as mandatory or statutory and helps workers practice safely and develop their understanding and skills on a particular issue relevant to their work.

Health check

Do you provide access to training and development opportunities for all staff by:

Agency employers:

- providing regular feedback and appraisals to identify gaps in skills and knowledge?
- ensuring the provision of, and compliance with, mandatory and statutory training requirements relating to health and safety in the workplace and the training is fit for purpose?
- supporting registered nursing staff to meet the standards for continued professional development as set out by the Nursing and Midwifery Council's revalidation requirements?

Host organisations:

- opening up work based training/updates on issues such as IV and use of safety equipment?
- ensuring appropriate induction and orientation programmes are in place for agency workers?
- providing performance feedback to agency workers?

Agency workers:

- ensuring your knowledge and skills are up to date?
- attending learning and development opportunities as available?
- meeting the standards for continued professional development as set out by the Nursing and Midwifery Council's revalidation requirement?

Signposts

Statutory training

HSE (2012) *Health and safety training – a brief guide*. Available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.htm

RCN Advice on training for agency nurses
<https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/rcn-advice/training-statutory-and-mandatory>

General

RCN First Steps for Health Care Assistants
<http://rcnhca.org.uk>

Campaign for Learning www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/index.asp

Health Education England Care Certificate <http://hee.nhs.uk/work-programmes/the-carecertificate-new>

NHS Wales *Working Differently, Working Together* (2012) Available at www.wales.nhs.uk

Skills for Care: www.skillsforcare.org.uk

Skills for Health: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk

Revalidation

RCN advice for agency staff
<https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/revalidation/10-ways-agency-staff-can-prepare-for-revalidation>

Nursing and Midwifery Council (2015) *Revalidation Guidance and Resources*. Available at www.nmc.org.uk/standards/revalidation/revalidation-guidanceand-resources



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