

NHSScotland Career Break Policy

Equality Impact Assessment Results

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Title of Policy	NHSScotland Career Break Policy
Summary of aims and desired outcomes of Policy	<p>The aim of the policy is to enable employees to take an unpaid career break and return to work in the NHS.</p> <p>This is a refresh of the previous Model Career Break Policy within the extant Supporting the Work Life Balance PIN Policy (July 2015).</p>
Directorate	Health Workforce

1. Executive summary

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty (known as the Public Sector Equality Duty, or PSED) on public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and promote good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (Regulation 5) require public authorities to assess and review policies and practices against the three needs of the PSED.

The Scottish Government has undertaken national equality impact assessments (EQIAs) as part of the policy development process to refresh the extant NHSScotland Partnership Information Network (PIN) workforce policies. This EQIA Results Report provides a summary of the key findings from the EQIA Record prepared for each workforce policy.

The EQIA evaluates how a policy may affect different segments of the population both positively and negatively. If adverse effects are identified, efforts have been made to reduce or remove them. However, the focus is not solely on negating negative impacts, as there is also a proactive duty to promote equality. The development of the EQIA has been guided by equality legislation and addresses the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, sex, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

The NHSScotland Career Break Policy has been equality impact assessed, and it has been determined that there are no barriers to any of the protected characteristics. The NHSScotland Career Break Policy is expected to positively impact on eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation across all protected characteristics. Additionally, it will advance equality of opportunity in relation to age, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment and race. It may also promote good relations among and between disabled and non-disabled people. No evidence of negative impacts on people with protected characteristics has been found. The key findings section below provides a summary of the policy's impact on individuals with protected characteristics.

Scottish Government is committed to actively considering equality impacts during the implementation of the NHSScotland workforce policies. This EQIA will be subject to further review and revision to ensure that any negative impacts, whether direct or indirect, on individuals with protected characteristics are addressed and mitigated.

2. Background

The 'Once for Scotland' Workforce Policies Programme was commissioned by the Scottish Workforce and Staff Governance Committee to review and transform existing workforce policies [previously known as Partnership Information Network (PIN) Policies] in line with the following vision:

'Once for Scotland Workforce policies will promote NHSScotland as a modern, exemplar employer; showcasing our core values, and promoting consistent employment policy and practice that supports the implementation of the Staff Governance Standard and effective recruitment and retention.'

The refreshed NHSScotland Career Break Policy reflects feedback from regional engagement events pre-and mid-policy development formal consultation with a broad range of stakeholders. An invite to participate in the public consultation was sent to a wide range of stakeholders across NHS Boards and their staff networks, trade unions and professional organisations, and external protected characteristics equalities groups. Additional advice was sought from subject matter experts.

The policy, and associated supporting documents, set the standard for employment practice for all NHS Boards in Scotland, and are accessible through the [NHSScotland Workforce Policies website](#). These are adopted by NHS Boards, at a local level, to ensure a fair and consistent approach to the processes relating to employees requesting a career break.

The fair and consistent application of policy and treatment of staff working for the NHS in Scotland is the key driver for the move to a single policy position.

NHSScotland workforce policies support the requirements of the [Staff Governance Standard](#) (2012), in relation to the following five strands:

- well informed
- appropriately trained and developed
- involved in decisions
- treated fairly and consistently
- provided with a safe working environment

3. The Scope of the EQIA

On the basis that the policy and associated supporting documents set the standard for employment practice for all NHS Boards in Scotland to follow, a full EQIA was deemed appropriate.

The EQIA is based on a thorough analysis of existing evidence and data. Its purpose is to identify and understand the potential impacts that the NHSScotland Career Break Policy may have on individuals with protected characteristics, as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

Specifically, the EQIA assesses the impacts of applying the revised policy against the needs relevant to a public authority's obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The needs are to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity

- foster good relations

In addition to the stakeholder engagement noted above, evidence was gathered from a broad range of sources. Data was reviewed from the following national data sets:

- NHSScotland Workforce data
- The Scottish Household Survey
- Labour market statistics

During the consultation on the draft policy, there was a specific question aimed at gathering views on how the policy might impact on different equality groups.

In addition to the protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010, the exercise also considered broader socio-economic considerations in alignment with the commitment to the Fairer Scotland Duty. The findings are recorded in the Fairer Scotland Duty Results for the collection of Supporting Work Life Balance policies.

4. Key Findings

The EQIA has highlighted areas with potential impacts on different groups and opportunities for promoting equality.

The NHSScotland Career Break Policy is expected to have a positive effect in **eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation** across all protected characteristics. The Career Break Policy:

- is open to all eligible employees to undertake at any point in their working career. The reasons for taking a career break may vary depending on stage of life. For example, to care for a dependent. This may be a young child or an elderly relative.
- although a career break is not the normal route for an employee to manage a disability, the policy does offer a formal route to request a period of leave, which could be considered a reasonable adjustment. This would allow the individual to take leave and return to NHS employment.
- is open to all employees and offers potential benefits for males and females to take a period of leave to undertake caring responsibilities.
- guides have been updated to reflect that evidence shows that women disproportionately take on primary caring roles within the family. This is particularly important in NHSScotland given the predominantly female workforce (78.8%).
- can support an employee if they need to access a career break during gender transition.
- can support employees with overseas family connections who may wish extended leave for visits, or individuals seeking prolonged time off work for religious or belief practices. This policy can accommodate when the requested leave exceeds the employees annual leave entitlement.
- provides scope to take a break of up to 5 years, which means that employees do not have to leave employment to balance their other commitments. There is also the option to return to work after a career break on a part-time basis for up to 3 months to ease the transition back to work.
- reinforces compliance with the Equality Act (2010) and the [Principles and Values | NHS Scotland](#).
- is written to fulfil legislative requirements and comply with statutory responsibilities.

The NHSScotland Career Break policy has a positive impact in **advancing equality of opportunity**. This is particularly evident in relation to age, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race and intersectionality. The Career Break Policy:

- is open to all eligible NHSScotland employees. It enables them to take a career break and return to NHS employment.
- ensures that the employee returns from a career break at their existing contractual position, and is not therefore disadvantaged in career terms.
- provides flexible career breaks, allowing women better access to educational opportunities which can improve their working standard.
- the above points help to narrow the gender pay gap, and advance equality to different groups of women.
- the ability to take a career break and return to NHS employment on their existing contractual position may also support minority ethnic groups where data highlights a 12% pt gap in employment between white and minority ethnic groups.
- allows employees to request a career break to help manage a disability without it being categorised as disability related. The ability to request a career break for a range of circumstances is advantageous to employees.
- is accessible through a purpose built [NHSScotland Workforce Policies website](#). The website scores high on the System Usability Scale (universal usability scoring system). This may particularly support older staff or staff with certain disabilities, advancing equality of opportunity through accessibility.
- advocates a person-centred approach in the application of all NHSScotland Workforce policies. This is demonstrated across the policy and supporting documents.

The NHSScotland Career Break Policy may **promote good relations** among and between disabled and non-disabled people. Employees can request a career break for a range of circumstances, and the time off does not need to be categorised as disability related. The policy is open to all employees and managers are encouraged to take a person-centred approach.

Currently, there is no evidence of negative impacts on individuals with protected characteristics. Nevertheless, Scottish Government will continue to monitor and review this EQIA to ensure ongoing assessment of potential impacts on people with protected characteristics.

5. Recommendations and conclusion

NHSScotland's commitment to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and less favourable treatment is central to the [principles and values](#) that underpin these policies.

NHSScotland workforce policies should be applied fairly and consistently to any employee or worker regardless of:

- protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership or pregnancy and maternity)
- personal characteristics such as trans identities including non-binary, weight, social status
- offender status
- membership or non-membership of a trade union

- contractual status - part-time or fixed-term

The EQIA process did not identify indirect or direct discrimination through the policy intentions of the NHSScotland Career Break Policy.

It is anticipated that the policy will positively impact on eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation across all protected characteristics. Additionally, it will advance equality of opportunity in relation to age, disability, sex, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment and race. It may also promote good relations among and between disabled and non-disabled people. There is no evidence of negative impacts on people with protected characteristics.

The EQIA will be kept under review and updated based on new data, evidence or policy revision. Monitoring and review of this policy is an on-going process, involving iterative discussions with NHSScotland partnership groups. It will form part of the monitoring and review of Board's achievement of the Staff Governance Standard (2012) carried out through the Staff Governance Monitoring Framework. Further engagement with protected characteristic groups through staff networks and forums will form part of the ongoing review to ensure that the conclusions reached in the EQIA meet the needs of these groups.

Analytics from the website will allow collation of data related to use and accessibility of the policy, in addition to workforce data gathered through national datasets.



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