# SWAG Committee
# Tuesday 17 March 2026
# 10:00 – 11:30
# MS Teams

## Attendees List

Confirmation of members in attendance at the time of writing:

| Name | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Norman Provan (Chair) | Royal College of Nursing |
| Mary Morgan | NHS National Services Scotland |
| Jane Hamilton | Scottish Government |
| Christina Stokes | Scottish Government |
| Anne Armstrong | Scottish Government |
| Michelle McPhail | NHS Western Isles |
| Gordon Jamieson | NHS Western Isles |
| Alex Stephen | NHS Grampian |
| Christina Bichan | NHS Education Scotland |
| Elaine Watson | NHS Tayside |
| Samantha Thomas | NHS Orkney |
| Pamela Jamieson | NHS Dumfries and Galloway |
| Linda Carr-Pollock | GMB Scotland |
| Robin McNaught | The State Hospitals Board for Scotland |
| Fiona Higgins | The State Hospitals Board for Scotland |
| Jacqui Jones | NHS Lanarkshire |
| Matt Tucker | Chartered Society of Physiotherapy |
| Emma Currer | Royal College of Midwives |
| Lorna Low | Royal College of Midwives |
| Donna McComb | Royal College of Nursing |
| Eleanor Harvey | Unison |
| Steven Lindsay | Unite the Union |
| Gordon McKay | Unison |
| Lorna Robertson | Unite the Union |
| Claire Ronald | Chartered Society of Physiotherapy |
| Lyndsay Hunter | Royal College of Podiatry |
| Matt McLaughlin | Unison |
| Mary Mitchell | Unison |
| Tobias Kunkel | Royal College of Nursing |
| Jenny Alexander | NHS Tayside |
| Dawn McDonald | NHS Highland |
| Diane MacDonald | NHS Western Isles |

**Directorate for Health Workforce**

Workforce Practice Unit

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Additional attendees:

| Name | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Ronan O'Dowd (Secretariat) | Scottish Government |
| Zachary Deponio | Scottish Government |
| Catriona Hetherington | Scottish Government |
| Jenny Watson | Scottish Government |
| Laurie Whyte | Scottish Government |
| Erin Murphy | Scottish Government |
| Lauren Ross | Scottish Government |
| Rebecca Chalmers | Scottish Government |
| Robert Hamilton | Scottish Government |
| Laura Tait | Scottish Government |
| Katherine Tierney | Scottish Government |
| Alan Milbourne | Scottish Government |

Apologies have been received from:

| Name | Organisation |
|---|---|
| Fiona Hogg | Scottish Government |
| Jacqui Jones | NHS Lanarkshire |
| Jasmin Clark | Royal College of Nursing |
| Jennifer Wilson | NHS Ayrshire and Arran |
| Kathryn McDermott | Unison |
| Scott Anderson | British Medical Association (BMA) |
| Yvonne Stewart | Society and College of Radiographers |
| Karen Leonard | GMB Scotland |
| Keir Greenaway | GMB Scotland |
| Bob Summers | NHS Highland |
| Paul Bachoo | NHS Grampian |
| Simon Fevre | British Dietetic Association |
| Sam Mullin | GMB Scotland |
| Heather Gilfillan | Unite the Union |
| Karen Goudie | NHS Forth Valley |
| Niall Hermiston | British Medical Association (BMA) |
| Linda Carr-Pollock | GMB Scotland |

**Agenda item 1: Welcome, Introductions and Apologies**

- The Chair welcomed members to the first SWAG Committee of 2026 and confirmed the meeting was quorate.

- Minutes from the meeting on 18th November 2025 were agreed and members agreed to the recording of the meeting for note-taking purposes.

**Agenda Item 2: Standards of Business Conduct**

- LW advised that a proposal to introduce the Standards of Business Conduct had been considered by SWAG Committee previously. At that time, members were generally supportive but requested further work to be done around training materials for staff, clarity on the scope and how it would be implemented in practice.
- It was noted that the training materials included in annex have been through the HR Deputy Directors group alongside the main document.
- A phased approach was proposed. Phase 1 would focus on adopting the Standards of Business Conduct across Boards and collecting declarations of interest. Publication would be deferred to Phase 2 pending a national template for GDPR reasons.
- LW invited views on the readiness of the standards and any final points for consideration.

**Discussion**

- Members confirmed they were content to support the proposals.

- One member raised concerns about the limited detail on secondary employment, highlighting its particular significance on island communities, and queried whether this was being developed elsewhere.
- LW and the Chair confirmed that secondary employment is covered within an existing OfS policy, acknowledged the specific concerns raised relating to Island communities, and agreed that appropriate cross-referencing with the OfS policy is required.

| Decision | |
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| D17032026(1) | Members agreed that the draft Standards of Business Conduct are ready for publication, with the register of interests to be organised post-publication. |

**Agenda Item 3: Guiding Principles**

- EM advised that the 'Guiding Principles' were published by the First Minister in June last year.
- EM noted that the principles were presented to SWAG Secretariat in January, following an initial presentation the previous year, at which time Secretariat members were content to endorse them in principle, subject to wider NHS socialisation.
- In January, members confirmed they were satisfied with the progress made and supported recommending endorsement to the Committee.
- EM delivered a presentation summarising the 'Guiding Principles' and the work they have done to date.
- A key point emphasised was that the principles are not mandatory, rather they are intended as supportive tools for those who would benefit from them. There is no intention to place pressure to monitor uptake. They can be used alongside any frameworks that are already in place locally which was key to stakeholders who fed in during the development process.

- Socialisation to date has included engagement informed by the Workforce Expert Delivery Group (WEDG), which includes representation from across NHS Scotland, with a focus on ensuring it is led by clinical voices.
- There has been a sustained approach throughout the year, involving hosting various engagement sessions with NHS groups. Information on the principles has also be provided within the drugs and alcohol partnership and Royal College of General Practitioners newsletters.
- EM noted upcoming activity, which includes highlighting the principles alongside other drug and alcohol workforce resources, at the quarterly Scottish Government and Alcohol and Drugs Partnership meeting. They plan to continue to provide information through newsletters and will be attending the National Lifelines Scotland Conference in March to share the guiding principles alongside other workforce resources.
- EM invited Committee members to suggest additional groups, mailing lists or newsletters that may be helpful for further circulation of the principles. It was noted that the 'Guiding Principles' received endorsement from COSLA last year.
- EM noted that at the SWAG Secretariat meeting, a member had queried the expectation of SWAG following endorsement, given there is no mechanism to monitor adherence. In response, a member had suggested issuing a communication from SWAG to encourage employer endorsement. It had also been highlighted that the principles align with the Staff Governance Standard and could be reflected in Staff Governance Monitoring (SGM) returns, with HR Directors supporting consistent adoption.
- EM added that other organisations are also seeking to endorse the principles, and these will be listed on the Guiding Principles website.

**Discussion**

- The Chair welcomed the update and reminded members they were being asked to consider whether the principles should receive SWAG endorsement, reflecting on practical implications such as reducing stigma, promoting inclusion, and embedding the principles in local policies.
- SG noted alignment with the OfS Workforce Policy Programme, confirming the principles are referenced in the manager's guide and that consideration of their inclusion in the Staff Governance assurance process will be considered at a future meeting.
- One member supported the principles and highlighted existing Board support mechanisms. They cautioned what data could be gathered under the Staff Governance Monitoring and suggested focusing on examples of good practice and sharing learning across Boards.
- EM agreed that developing a good practice guide would be beneficial.
- The Chair recognised concerns about the lack of a formal monitoring mechanism and noted inconsistency across Boards in supporting staff with addiction issues, often due to confidence levels in handling such cases. They stressed the need to ensure the principles are meaningfully embedded and influence organisational decision-making.
- The Chair added that while some form of monitoring may be useful, the SGM return may not be the right route and that this should be considered at a future meeting. They cautioned against adding to the growing SGM reporting burden on Boards, noting that excessive reporting risks obscuring key issues, and suggested this wider discussion should form part of a future SWAG agenda.
- Another member emphasised the need for clarity on how SWAG will monitor implementation and set clear expectations for Boards, suggesting the Deputy HR Directors Group could be asked to consider how to support consistent application in partnership with staffside.
- One member added that education, awareness-raising, and case studies may be needed before considering data collection.

- The Chair sought agreement from the Committee to endorse the principles.

| Decision | |
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| D17032026(2) | Members agreed for the Guiding Principles to receive full SWAG endorsement. |

**Agenda Item 4: Essential Needs – Delayed**

- The Chair noted that Item 4 – Essential Needs has been delayed and will be presented at a future meeting.

**Agenda Item 5: Once for Scotland – Business as usual**

- CH outlined the proposed approach for managing NHS workforce policies now that the OfS Workforce Policy Programme has completed the refresh of the former PIN policies. Outstanding work, including the Equalities, Diversity and Transitioning Guide, will be taken forward under these proposed arrangements.
- A high-level framework was previously shared with the OfS Programme Board in September and October. As the Programme Board is being stood down, a more detailed proposal is now presented to SWAG for consideration and agreement.
- CH advised that the proposal sets out a business as usual arrangement which will include:
    - periodic review of existing NHS workforce policies (with the first tranche, published in 2020, now due for review)
    - policy maintenance, including updates for legislative changes and ongoing initiatives
    - completion of remaining Phase 2.2 policies

- It was noted that SWAG will continue to act as the governance group for this work, approving final drafts of new or revised documents and acting as the escalation route where agreement cannot be reached locally. The additional assurance process and Ministerial sign off will continue to apply for new and reviewed policies and guides. This process will be undertaken prior to SWAG sign off.
- CH noted that reviews will follow current processes, including stakeholder engagement, EQIA, a one-month consultation and a soft launch. Horizon-scanning will inform any policy updates and the need for any new documents to be produced
- Where there is a development of a new policy or guide, propose this would come to SWAG prior to commencement for sign off.
- SG will continue to lead the work in partnership, with any changes to this arrangement brought back to SWAG. Continued involvement of experienced policy development group members is sought, and stakeholder groups such as the Ethnic Minority Forum will remain engaged.
- Following SWAG approval, the proposal will be shared with the Cabinet Secretary, though action is unlikely before late May 2026 due to the pre-election period.

**Discussion**

- One employee representative fully supported the paper and advised Committee of concerns raised by the Ethnic Minority Forum (EMF) that had been linked to a recent employment tribunal. There were recommendations for policy changes that have been actioned. They assured members that this information has been shared with the Chief People Officer and that EMF is closely monitoring related work.

- One member sought clarity on future engagement with EMF. CH confirmed that EMF, along with other networks and subject-matter experts, will be engaged early in policy reviews and kept updated as part of ongoing stakeholder involvement. It was confirmed that EMF will consider the OfS approach at their meeting in May and input their views.
- Another member supported the review process and asked whether implications of the Employment Rights Act changes had been assessed. CH confirmed this work is underway, with policy updates due before 6 April, alongside a note to Boards highlighting forthcoming changes.
- One member asked how tribunal recommendations for policy improvements are fed into the review process and shared more widely.
- The Chair acknowledged that this is not currently a formal part of the process but agreed it should be considered. Tribunal decisions directly affecting NHS policy could be escalated for review, though routine monitoring of all tribunal outcomes would be challenging. Where tribunal findings relate to policy wording, rather than implementation, Boards should escalate through existing channels.
- Members agreed and emphasised the need for a clear mechanism to ensure tribunal-led recommendations feed into policy reviews.
- On policy review cycles, SG explained that the proposed 5–7-year timelines reflect workload and resource constraints, while reaffirming the commitment to keeping policies up to date.

| Decision | |
|---|---|
| D17032026(3) | Members agreed to the proposed policy review approach and ownership. |
| D17032026 (4) | Members agreed the proposed workforce policy review and maintenance process. |

**Directorate for Health Workforce**

Workforce Practice Unit

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**Agenda Item 6: iMatter Demographics**

- KT outlined two areas of work for consideration: publication of the demographic report and access to Board-level data.
- KT noted that a standalone demographic report was first produced in 2022 as an addition to the iMatter report. Funding has now been secured to repeat this analysis using the 2025 data, working with Webropol who run iMatter.
- The report will provide updated insights into staff experiences across protected characteristics and, for the first time, allow comparison with the 2022 findings. The work is nearing completion, but due to the pre-election period, publication will be delayed until May or June. KT confirmed they would be happy to return to SWAG to present the findings.
- Turning to Board-level data, KT noted increasing interest from Boards in accessing their own demographic and equality data to support local equalities work. The proposal is to fund this nationally to improve the quality of data available, which will support anti-racism plans and wider equality obligations.
- KT acknowledged the need to minimise survey fatigue and emphasised that this approach makes better use of existing data, reducing the need for additional local surveys.
- Privacy and data protection remain key considerations. The same safeguards used in the main iMatter report would apply: no reporting where numbers fall below 10, which may reduce available data for smaller Boards. Access would be restricted through password-protected systems to ensure appropriate data governance.

**Discussion**

- Members welcomed the proposal and confirmed their support, noting the value of Board-level data in advancing anti-racism work but highlighted

ongoing reluctance among some staff to self-report demographic information. It was questioned whether further action could help improve understanding of why this data matters and how it informs service delivery and workforce policy.

- SG acknowledged the importance of psychological safety in encouraging self-reporting and noted ongoing work to build trust in iMatter. Engagement with operational leads, EMF and other staff networks will be essential to better understand concerns and improve confidence in the process. They added that although iMatter achieves strong response rates, issues with demographic reporting remain and are a priority for improvement.

| Decision | |
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| D17032026(5) | Members agreed to the development and release of Board-level demographic dashboards to support local equality, diversity and anti-racism activity. |

**Agenda Item 7: SAS report – Paramedics in Community Urgent Care**

- RC explained that the Scottish Government had commissioned the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) to scope and develop a one-year pilot. This was to explore an expanded role for paramedics in primary and urgent care, supporting objectives within the Primary Care Route Map and enhancing care closer to home.
- SAS were asked to cost and design how paramedics could be deployed in NHS Dumfries and Galloway and NHS Forth Valley to support general practice, reduce avoidable admissions, and undertake home visits to help free up GP resource.

- A report has been received from SAS, and work is underway to secure funding for the one-year pilot. Several potential funding routes are being explored, but none have been confirmed.
- RC noted that the position remains unchanged from the previous meeting regarding potential impacts on existing multidisciplinary teams, including implications for nursing roles, training, and opportunities.
- Engagement with unions has improved. While local representatives have been supportive, previous issues with engagement at national and regional levels have been highlighted. SAS has provided assurance that strengthened engagement is now taking place.
- Work continues to refine deployment plans and establish an evaluation approach to assess the impact of the pilot and inform future paramedic workforce planning.

**Discussion**

- One employee representative welcomed the work, noting that their Board already resources two advanced paramedics within their unscheduled care team that has had highly positive results, particularly for care home visits. They confirmed they will be exploring further expansion with SAS.
- The Chair queried whether participation would be voluntary and whether paramedics could choose not to differentiate their paramedic role. RC confirmed SAS intends to use experienced paramedics for the pilot, with newly qualified staff backfilling crews on the road and in A&E. They expect it will take a volunteer-based approach, accounting for geography and personal circumstances, and agreed to seek further clarity from SAS.
- The Chair queried whether a new job description would be developed and evaluated for the expanded role, and whether there were plans to manage potential demand if the pilot is successful.

- RC advised that the immediate focus is securing funding. Capacity for wider rollout is not yet known. They have not seen a job description but expect this will be developed by SAS. RC will raise the point at their next engagement.
- The Chair noted the interest in the pilot and looked forward to hearing whether funding is secured.

**Agenda Item 8: Pilot for Census of the DDaT Workforce**

- AM explained that developing the DDaT workforce is a key aim of the Digital Health and Care Strategy and Delivery Plan. This is a wider health and social care ambition, with this specific project focused on NHS Scotland Boards.
- AM advised that the intention is to better understand the digital, data, design and technology (DDaT) workforce to support recruitment, retention, and ensure appropriate leadership and skills capacity.
- The work has been underway since 2023 and covers all DDaT professional groups. The DDaT Capability Framework, designed for government, provides the blueprint for this work. Its job families and sub-roles are fairly consistent across health and social care.
- Four Boards, NSS, SAS, NES and NHS Fife have carried out discovery work to explore how the DDaT Capability Framework aligns with existing roles, identifying where roles fit, where there are gaps, and how this can be brought together to support development.
- AM noted that findings from the discovery work on the Framework, along with results from the forthcoming Census, will inform wider recommendations for strengthening the DDaT workforce which will be taken to NHS Board HR Directors to assess ambition and national options.
- Feedback shows the four Boards agree the Framework provides greater clarity around roles and capability development, but national direction is needed - particularly on job evaluation and standardised job descriptions.

- AM advised that a stronger national approach is therefore recommended, alongside clearer articulation of the benefits of investing in the DDaT workforce to support wider transformation aims.
- AM explained that the DDaT Workforce Census will support the strategic DDaT aim to create a national baseline of the digital roles across Boards, help identify gaps and inconsistencies, define essential skills and capabilities, support greater role consistency, and inform a smarter national approach. The Census applies to all employed staff and agency/contractors.
- SWAG is asked to note the DDaT ambition, endorse and support the census during the pilot phase, and support wider rollout across Boards. The pilot Census will run with three Boards: NES, NHS Fife and SAS, and is expected to launch in May after the election period. The wider rollout of the census is anticipated to commence around mid-June/July.
- Communications will be issued for the three Digital Leads to cascade across their Boards for the pilot phase.

**Discussion**

- A member noted that this is an important area of work, highlighting long-standing challenges around job evaluation and remote nature of roles. They asked how the Census will capture information on contractors and agency staff, who are not NHS employees. AM confirmed that the template includes fields specifically for recording contractor information, and Boards should be able to provide this data without difficulty.
- One member also stressed the importance of this work, noting its links to the Service Renewal Framework (SRF) commitments on digital reform and the wider landscape review. They highlighted that the creation of Public Services Delivery Scotland (PSDS) on 1 April has presentational implications, as national digital workforce functions will sit within a single organisation. Clarity on whether references should be to NES or PSDS will be important.

- They also emphasised the need to ensure the Census captures the full digital workforce, which is often dispersed across multiple directorates and not always labelled consistently, in addition to contractor roles.
- AM confirmed that the digital-enabled workforce team currently in NES will transfer into PSDS, ensuring continuity of this work. He added that defining who is considered "digital workforce" is a key reason for piloting the Census, allowing gaps to be identified and the approach refined.
- A trade union representative noted that many digital roles are hard to identify because "digital" often does not appear in job titles, making posts effectively hidden. They asked for clarity on how the digital workforce will be defined and how far the Census will reach, as professional bodies and trade unions may be able to help identify staff who are otherwise missed at Board level.
- AM acknowledged this challenge and advised the pilot will help refine definitions and map skills and competencies, recognising that some anomalies are expected.
- One member emphasised the value of establishing a national baseline, as future challenges will centre on prioritisation, resourcing and ensuring the workforce has the capability to support digital ambitions. They highlighted the rapid growth of AI use, particularly in general practice, as both an opportunity and an area of concern, and expressed interest in how the Census findings will inform next steps.
- The Chair proposed that SWAG Secretariat consider the appropriate reporting route and bring this back to the Committee.

| Decision | |
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| D17032026(6) | Members agreed their support and endorsement for the proposed national DDaT Census approach. |

**Agenda Item 9: Protected Learning Time (PLT)**

**Directorate for Health Workforce**

Workforce Practice Unit

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- The Chair reminded members that this work has previously come to SWAG and originated from STAC (Scottish Terms and Conditions Group) as part of a pay negotiation.
- A major element of the programme involved harmonising statutory and mandatory module suites across all Boards to enable a training passport, allowing staff to take recognised learning with them when moving between employers.
- A further piece of work developed a methodology to assure, record and report that protected learning time is being achieved within the normal working week.
- The Chair noted that the paper outlines what has been completed and confirmed that the work now meets the aims originally set by STAC.
- The Chair highlighted that SWAG must close off this work so STAC can report completion back to Ministers as part of the pay negotiation commitments.
- SWAG is asked to confirm it is satisfied that the work has been completed, agree that the working group should now stand down, and note a small number of transitional actions required as the programme moves into PSDS Scotland.
- The Chair invited any final questions or comments.

**Discussion**

- One member welcomed the progress but noted that occupationally required learning is not reflected in the paper and appears not to be consistently cascaded within Boards. They asked for clarity on its status and future ownership.
- The Chair confirmed the occupational learning work is complete, previously issued via a CEL, and included in January communications to Boards. They will recirculate the CEL to SWAG. Boards are responsible for implementation

and reporting through Area Partnership Forum (APF) and annual returns to SG, with escalation if required.

- An employee representative noted that their Board is monitoring implementation locally but sought assurance that all system functions, such as self-declaration and reporting, are fully live.
- The Chair acknowledged some functions are still in progress due to two recording systems. Required technical updates, involving third-party suppliers, have been commissioned and will go live on both systems.

| Decision | |
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| D17032026(7) | Members agreed that the PLT programme is complete, with all core products delivered and the reporting methodology agreed. |

**AOB**

- The Chair expressed sincere thanks to Mary Morgan for her seamless leadership, thoughtful contributions, and positive impact as co-chair, noting that she will be greatly missed following her departure from the committee.
- Gordon Jamieson will be taking over as the employer's co-chair of SWAG.
- The Chair advised that the list of SWAG representatives across staff side, employers and Scottish Government will be refreshed and redistributed, as the current version is out of date.

**Next Meeting:** SWAG Committee Tuesday 23 June 2026, 14:00 – 15:30