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Dear Colleagues

## **PROTECTING LEARNING TIME FOR AGENDA FOR CHANGE STAFF – IMPLEMENTATION OF ONCE FOR SCOTLAND STATUTORY MANDATORY MODULES**

1. I am writing to provide an update on the national approach to statutory and mandatory training for Agenda for Change (AfC) staff. It outlines the process undertaken to identify a core suite of nine Once for Scotland modules, the timeline for implementation, and the roles of key stakeholders in supporting delivery and governance.

### **Background**

2. While AfC staff have always had the right to complete statutory and mandatory learning within working time, the work of the Protected Learning Time (PLT) Group builds on this principle by establishing a consistent national approach. This supports health boards to embed PLT more effectively into local delivery, helping ensure staff are enabled to meet their training requirements in a timely and supported way.

3. Please note that this circular follows on from the information contained in PCS(AFC)2024/01.

### **Selection and Implementation of the Modules**

4. A national suite of nine statutory and mandatory modules has now been selected for implementation across NHS Scotland. These modules have been chosen to align with the learning outcomes previously agreed by NHS Education for Scotland (NES), Scottish Executive Nurse Directors (SEND), Scottish Association of Medical Directors (SAMD), HR Directors, and SWAG. These learning outcomes, which were developed in 2016, reflect statutory obligations, national workforce priorities, and the core requirements applicable to all NHS Scotland staff groups

The module selection process was rigorous and collaborative. Learning and Development Leads and Subject Matter Experts from all NHS health boards were involved in reviewing all currently

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### **Addressees**

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Directors of Finance,  
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available content, and an extensive scoring and evaluation methodology was applied to ensure the preferred modules are relevant, accessible to all, and suitable for national adoption. This work builds on the principles set out in PCS(AFC)2019/03 and supports the Once for Scotland approach to statutory and mandatory training.

Subject to final assurance from NES Technology Services (NTS), the national suite of modules is scheduled to go live on **Monday 2nd March 2026**. NHS health boards are asked to begin preparations to ensure local systems, staff, and governance arrangements are ready to support implementation.

Staff will remain compliant with training topics they have already completed. For any module topics newly introduced to a health board, staff will have a six-month period from the go-live date to complete these modules and maintain compliance.

A phased communications plan will support the rollout of the modules.

Communications will be issued in:

**November 2025** to raise initial awareness and provide early guidance  
**December 2025** to support technical readiness and stakeholder engagement  
**January 2026** with a LMS integration updates  
**February 2026** to provide final reminders and launch support

### **Ownership and Module Maintenance**

5. For clarity, the suite of nine Once for Scotland statutory mandatory training modules are as follows:

	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Module Name</b>
1	Fire safety	Once for Scotland - Fire safety
2	Cyber security	Once for Scotland - Cyber security
3	Information governance	Once for Scotland - Safe information handling
4	Moving and handling	Once for Scotland - Manual handling
5	Equality and diversity	Once for Scotland - Understanding equality, diversity and human rights
6	Infection, prevention and control	Once for Scotland - Why infection prevention control matters
7	Counter fraud	Once for Scotland - Fraud awareness
8	Prevention and management of violence and aggression	Once for Scotland - Prevention and management of violence and aggression
9	Child protection and adult support and protection*	Once for Scotland - Child protection and adult support and protection

*\*Please note that, as outlined in PCS(AFC)2024/01, this topic was previously referred to as Adult Protection. However, following feedback from subject matter experts, it has since been revised to encompass Child Protection. Subsequently, both Adult and Child Protection modules were reviewed as part of the module selection process.*

In accordance with this mandate, the health boards currently responsible for the preferred modules formally agree to transfer ownership of the associated content to NES. The transfer of content reflects a shared commitment to a Once for Scotland approach.

NES will own and maintain the modules, ensuring quality and accuracy of content through appropriate engagement and governance, and alignment with required standards including accessibility and copyright. NES will host the modules on TURAS Learn and work with health boards to support access to all appropriate user groups, including through sharing with other Learning Management Systems (LMS). The Scottish Government and SWAG will oversee governance, policy alignment, and evaluation, ensuring the modules remain responsive to workforce needs.

Health boards wishing to propose additional modules should submit requests through the agreed governance process, which will be managed by the newly established National Statutory Mandatory Training Group (SMTG). This group, chaired by NES, with representation from Learning and Development Leads, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), Staff-side, HR Directors and Scottish Government, will coordinate expert consultation, resource evaluation, and stakeholder engagement before any proposal is submitted to SWAG for approval. The process includes identifying emerging needs, consulting SMEs and employers, and commissioning new modules if appropriate.

Health boards must not independently alter the content of the national modules. Any proposed updates to existing modules must follow the tiered governance process outlined by NES and the SMTG, which distinguishes between minor, moderate, and major changes. This ensures that all content changes are subject to appropriate scrutiny, SME input, and national oversight, and the suite remains truly once for Scotland. Full guidance on submitting proposals for additional modules, and further information on the agreed governance process for the Once for Scotland module suite, will be issued in due course.

## Refresher Periods

6. Health boards should follow the standard refresher periods set out in the Once for Scotland guidance for the nine statutory and mandatory modules. These refresher intervals have been nationally agreed by the PLT Implementation Group after consultation with SMEs and consideration of UK wide NHS standards, to ensure they are appropriate and proportionate across staff groups. The aim is to support consistency across NHS Scotland, reduce duplication, and enable portability of training records. The agreed refresher periods are attached in **Annex A**.

By exception, if a health board determines that staff should complete a module more frequently, this decision should be based on profession specific requirements. In such cases, health boards are expected to follow the relevant professional principles and governance processes to agree any additional completion intervals.

## Use of the Once for Scotland Modules

7. Health boards are expected to adopt the nine modules as the Once for Scotland standard for statutory and mandatory training. Whilst the basis of the PLT Implementation work was a result of the AfC 203/2024 pay deal, adoption of the Once for Scotland Statutory and Mandatory module suite is intended for all NHS Scotland staff across all NHS Scotland health boards. This will support consistency across NHS Scotland, reduce duplication, and enable portability of training records for staff moving between employers. The use of these modules is central to delivering the commitments made under the Protected Learning Time policy and supports the wider aims of workforce reform.

## OfS Compliance Reporting

8. The reporting of compliance with the statutory mandatory suite remains a key priority and as such extensive work has been undertaken to develop and agree a OfS approach to reporting. This has involved extensive collaboration and has informed the development of multiple levels of reporting including individual staff, line manager and at board level, supporting a shared responsibility for learning and development.

## PLT Assurance Reporting

9. In addition to compliance reporting, it is essential to ensure that staff can access their Protected Learning Time (PLT) within working hours. To achieve this, a structured reporting approach will be implemented that enables staff to provide direct feedback, while also establishing clear accountability at both managerial and board level.

At **staff level**, individuals will be prompted annually through an agreed platform or mechanism to confirm whether they have been able to complete their statutory and profession specific mandatory training within working hours. This will support consistent feedback and enable national analysis, though the format and level of anonymity are still being finalised.

At **line manager level**, Protected Learning Time (PLT) will be discussed during annual PDPRs, and guidance will be produced to support managers in having meaningful and consistent conversations. While individual responses are not recorded, PDPR completion rates will be used as a proxy to confirm that the conversation has taken place.

At board level, organisations will report bi-annually to Staff Governance Committees using a standardised national template. This will include aggregated data from staff self-declarations and PDPR completion rates. Boards will also submit an annual return to the Scottish Government, with low compliance triggering action planning and escalation.

## **Profession Specific Mandatory Training**

10. In line with the 2023/2024 Agenda for Change pay agreement, staff should be allocated time during working hours to complete both statutory mandatory and profession specific mandatory training. Boards will be expected to provide assurance that staff are receiving protected learning time, and further guidance on this will be issued in due course.

While the initial phase of PLT implementation has rightly prioritised achieving consistency in statutory and mandatory training across NHS Scotland - providing a standardised foundation for all learners – it is recognised that profession specific mandatory training is equally, if not more, critical in delivering the ambitions of the pay deal and the protected learning time commitment. Profession specific mandatory training benefits from a more localised and tailored approach, reflecting the unique needs, contexts, and regulatory requirements of different professional groups. As such, profession specific mandatory training will be supported through locally driven models, ensuring that the PLT framework enables meaningful, relevant development opportunities for each profession. To support this, the PLT Implementation Group has prepared a set of guiding principles to help local teams embed profession specific learning time effectively. This approach ensures that protected learning time is not only equitable but also impactful in supporting professional growth and workforce sustainability. The profession specific mandatory training principles are attached in **Annex B** and further guidance will follow.

## **Next Steps**

11. Please cascade this circular to relevant teams and ensure local implementation plans are aligned with the national timeline. Further updates will follow via the scheduled communications.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Russell  
Director of Health Workforce

## Annex A

### Once for Scotland Module Refresher Periods

Module	Refresher Period
Once for Scotland - Fire safety	2 years
Once for Scotland - Cyber security	1 year
Once for Scotland - Safe information handling	1 year
Once for Scotland - Manual handling	3 years
Once for Scotland - Understanding equality, diversity and human rights	3 years
Once for Scotland - Why infection prevention control matters	3 years
Once for Scotland - Fraud awareness	3 years
Once for Scotland - Prevention and management of violence and aggression	3 years
Once for Scotland - Child protection and adult support and protection	3 years

## Principles for Allocating Time for Profession Specific Mandatory Training in NHS Scotland

In October 2024, the Protected Learning Time (PLT) Implementation Group commissioned three workstreams to take forward implementation of the PLT Reforms as set out in the [2023/2024 Agenda for Change pay deal](#).

In addition to the standardisation of the nine statutory mandatory modules, the scope of Workstream One included identifying profession specific mandatory training requirements for each job family, to ensure training is proportionate and that there is agreed frequency for undertaking the training.

Profession specific mandatory training is the **minimum** standard of training - beyond core mandatory training for all staff - that a regulator, industry standards and/or health board considers to be necessary, for staff in a given job family, to deliver their role **safely and competently**, and allow the organisation to function effectively.

Given the scale and complexity of profession specific mandatory training, and the need to accommodate local variation, the agreed approach is to establish a set of guiding principles. These principles will support health boards in determining the appropriate range of protected learning time for staff, ensuring consistency across Scotland while preserving local autonomy and accountability.

### Profession Specific Mandatory Training Principles

#### **1. Training as a Core Component of Safe and Appropriate Staffing:**

- Profession specific mandatory training is essential for ensuring safe, high-quality care and must be treated as a core staffing requirement
- Health boards must allocate protected time within working hours for staff to complete profession specific mandatory training, in line with the [Health and Care \(Staffing\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#)
- In addition, arrangements for bank staff to complete training must be made
- Profession specific mandatory training should comply with regulatory requirements, industry standards and health board expectations. Local subject matter experts (SMEs) and education leads should have a role in validating this
- Training should be evidence based, and proven methods justified appropriate to setting and context

#### **2. Relevant and Proportionate:**

- Training must be tailored to the needs of each specific Agenda for Change job family, ensuring relevance to the role
- Training time should reflect the complexity and risk profile of the role. For example, direct care roles may require more frequent and intensive updates than administrative roles

- Health boards should use national frameworks where needed to guide the learning identified for profession specific mandatory training. National education frameworks are available to inform and guide discussions

### **3. Equity and Accessibility:**

- All staff, regardless of contract type, job role and location, must have equitable access to protected training time
- Training should not disadvantage staff with any protected characteristics, caring responsibilities or disabilities - for example in scheduling, and so on, in line with NHS Scotland's core values
- A person centred, inclusive approach should be taken when determining the time required for staff to undertake profession specific mandatory training
- Consideration must also be given to ensuring that required training is accessible to all staff, along with providing any necessary support to facilitate successful completion, for example digital access

### **4. Consistency and Integration with Workforce Planning:**

- Whilst recognising the diversity of services across health boards, collaboration through established professional networks – both formal and informal – is encouraged. This will support a reasonable degree of consistency, where feasible, in the allocation of protected learning time for staff across Scotland
- Training time must be embedded into workforce rotas, shifts and job plans, not added as an extra burden

### **5. Quality and Continuous Improvement:**

- Health boards should ensure appropriate support for staff to deliver safe and high-quality care, whilst providing adequate protected learning time for profession specific mandatory training
- Learning should evolve, continuously improve and align with organisational and professional needs, whilst supporting career planning development
- Feedback mechanisms must be in place to assess, review and monitor protected learning time and to identify barriers to completion
- In line with the 2023/2024 Agenda for Change pay deal, staff should be allocated time during working hours to complete both statutory mandatory and profession specific mandatory training. Boards will be expected to provide assurance that staff are receiving protected learning time, and further guidance on this will be issued in due course

### **6. Frequency and Flexible Delivery:**

- If appropriate, health boards should use digital platforms and e-learning to optimise time and increase flexibility, provided this format is suitable for the specific training
- Staff must still be given time within working hours to complete training, regardless of the delivery method, for example digital or in person learning
- Health boards should make arrangements for bank staff to complete training
- Digital literacy: staff should be equipped to be able to take part in all required training and supported if needed to access the technology
- Frequency for protected learning time should be set where possible, however health boards should be flexible when required in the event of for example an adverse event or delivery pressures

## **7. Partnership and Co-Design:**

- Profession specific mandatory training approaches should be developed in partnership with education leads, staff, and trade unions referring to regulatory guidance where appropriate
- Boards must consult with staff when implementing training plans, as required by the [Once for Scotland Workforce Policies Programme](#)

## **8. Assurance and Alignment with National Standards:**

- Health boards must align training time with these principles and the subsequent guidance provided by Scottish Government (to follow), in order to align with the requirements of the [2023/2024 Agenda for Change pay deal](#)
- Where there is any deviation from national frameworks – which is expected to be in exceptional circumstances only – this must have clear rationale and be clearly documented with appropriate local governance sighted
- Health boards hold a responsibility to ensure staff are provided with allocated protected learning time. To support this, this principles-based framework has been developed, enabling a locally tailored delivery approach whilst maintaining national consistency
- It is expected that this guidance will be implemented through effective partnership working with empowered health boards, supported by engaged line managers and individuals