



Dear Colleague

**REDUCTION OF THE WORKING WEEK FOR
AGENDA FOR CHANGE STAFF TO 36 HOURS**

1. This circular confirms the way forward with regard to the reduction of the working week for Agenda for Change staff in NHS Scotland. A letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to all NHS Scotland staff is attached at Annex A and NHS Boards should take the necessary steps to ensure this is distributed through local communication channels.

2. NHS Circular [PCS\(AFC\)2024/2](#) confirmed the intention to reduce the full time working week for Agenda for Change staff in Scotland to 36 hours, in line with the commitment made as part of the 2023-24 pay settlement. It further indicated that the first half hour of that reduction would take effect from 1 April 2024.

3. Staff Side and Employers have been working in partnership at both national and local level to deliver that first half hour reduction and it has now been possible to conduct an evaluation of this process to inform how best to move forward.

4. Various strands of evidence have indicated that delivering the remaining hour in one tranche would be the safest approach. This will mean rosters and broader working schedules will only need to be re-configured once more to reach their final form.

5. In addition, the Cabinet Secretary has noted from the above that NHS Boards would benefit from sufficient lead in time to allow them to plan for the change. It is crucial that we deliver this change in a way that is safe for patients and staff, supports the continued recovery of services and avoids any extra burden for our workforce.

6. For these reasons, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has concluded that the further hour reduction in the standard working week required to deliver the 36 hour commitment for Agenda for Change staff in Scotland should be effective from 1 April 2026.

18 February 2025

Addressees

For action

Chief Executives,
Directors of Finance,
Directors of Human Resources:
NHS Boards and Special Health
Boards, NHS National Services
Scotland (Common Services
Agency) and Healthcare
Improvement Scotland
Employee Directors/Chairs of
APFs
NHS Board Communication Leads

For information

Members, Scottish Partnership
Forum
Members, Scottish Terms and
Conditions Committee
Members, Scottish Workforce and
Governance Committee

Enquiries to:

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EDINBURGH EH1 3DG

E-mail:

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7. All NHS Scotland Health Boards should now begin working towards the effective date indicated above with a view to having outline plans for implementation by 1 May 2025 and a full and final Implementation Plan by 1 October 2025 at the latest, both of which should be agreed by the Area Partnership Forum. This Plan should ensure that all Agenda for Change staff will be able to transfer to a 36 hour working week on 1 April 2026. This process will be overseen by the Scottish Terms and Conditions Committee and further communication on this will be sent to Boards shortly.

Action

8. NHS Boards and Special Health Boards should note information provided above and begin planning accordingly.

9. This circular is available online at:

www.publications.scot.nhs.uk.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jane Hamilton'.

JANE HAMILTON

Deputy Director, Health Workforce
Pay, Practice and Partnership Division



**NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE
APPROVAL OF REMUNERATION AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE**

In accordance with regulations 2 and 3 of the National Health Service (Remuneration and Conditions of Service) (Scotland) Regulations 1991 (S.I. 1991/537) the remuneration and conditions of service set out in the attached Scottish Government Health Workforce Directorate circular of 18 February 2025 – PCS(AFC)2025/1 – in respect of the reduction of the working week for Agenda for Change staff in Scotland to 36 hours are hereby approved for the purposes of the said Regulations.

JANE HAMILTON

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18 February 2025

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All NHS Scotland Staff

18 February 2025

REDUCTION OF THE WORKING WEEK FOR AGENDA FOR CHANGE STAFF TO 36 HOURS: LETTER FROM THE CABINET SECRETARY FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TO ALL STAFF

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to tell you how we are going to take the next step to reduce your working week – in a way that you told us will work best for you and the patients of NHS Scotland.

Reduced Working Week for Agenda for Change Staff

I want to tell you directly that I am committed to implementing the 36 hour week for Agenda for Change staff, alongside taking bold and ambitious steps to reform and renew our health service and deliver the change that people in Scotland need now.

You will be aware that when we announced plans to reduce the working week for healthcare staff, the working group recommended we implement it over three stages.

The workforce is core to NHS Scotland and based on what you have told us about the first stage, we now intend to roll-out one final stage – a single reduction of one hour in 2026.

Feedback and assessment of the first 30 minute reduction, which included hearing the views of staff, staff side and NHS leaders, told us that there is a strong desire to implement the remaining reduction as a one-off exercise, minimising the number of system and rota changes required, and allowing sufficient lead-in time to support staff and services to plan effectively.

For those reasons, I have agreed that the final reduction will be implemented as a single 60-minute block of time on 1 April 2026, with NHS Boards working in partnership to put delivery plans in place by October 2025.

It is crucial that we deliver any further change in a way that is safe for patients and staff, and which supports the continued recovery of services, avoiding any extra burden for our workforce.

I recognise the tremendous pressures you have been working under and changes you are facing – something our vision and actions aim to address, bringing about positive change. NHS renewal and recovery will be delivered by you, but it must also work for you.

Staff wellbeing is central to this and implementing the final stage of the reduced working week is an important part of our overall approach to wellbeing.

We have also just published the Ministerial Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce (NMT) and its Listening Project reports which were produced through strong collaboration with staff side colleagues and wider stakeholders. A number of the NMT recommended actions will have relevance to all staff and is a great example of how we can work together to renew and modernise service delivery.

Renewal and Modernisation

Alongside the changes to your working week that I am committed to delivering, I also recognise that we need to improve health and social care performance to make it easier for you to do your jobs well.

That is why the First Minister and I have set a clear trajectory for health and social care delivery over the coming year, backed by the record investment of £21.7 billion from the budget.

Health and social care staff are critical to effective services, we could not have these services without your incredible efforts. It is important that, as we take forward improvements, this also improves the experience for staff. I want to work with you to deliver the services for the people of Scotland that I know you want to see too.

Our vision aims to alleviate current pressures while driving long-term, systemic improvements to ensure a sustainable health service. This is with the aim of reducing immediate pressures across the NHS, improving access to treatment, shifting the balance of care from acute services to the community, and improving access to health and social care services. Digital and technological innovation as well as prevention will support new ways of working and supporting people across Scotland.

I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure we can continue to deliver the best care for the patients of NHS Scotland. Thank you for your service and for the work we will be delivering together over the coming year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Neil Gray', with a stylized, flowing script.

NEIL GRAY