



Dear Colleague

REDUCTION IN THE WORKING WEEK FOR AGENDA FOR CHANGE STAFF IN NHS SCOTLAND

1. NHS Scotland circular [PCS\(AFC\)2024/2](#) set out overarching principles and guidance in relation to the reduction of the working week which had been agreed as part of the 2023-24 Agenda for Change pay deal, specifically with regard to the first 30 minutes which was effective from 1 April 2024.

2. This circular refreshes that guidance, re-emphasises key points to bear in mind in relation to the further 60 minute reduction effective from 1 April 2026, and addresses new questions which have arisen. It will remain a live document with additional elements added as and when these are deemed necessary or helpful following partnership discussion and agreement by the Scottish Terms and Conditions Committee.

3. Attached are the following sections:

Annex A – Overarching Guidance and Key Principles

Annex B – Increase to Hourly Rates (Updated to take account of the 2026-27 AfC pay settlement)

Annex C – Frequently Asked Questions

Cabinet Secretary Approval

4. The provisions of this circular have been approved by Scottish Ministers under Regulations 2 and 3 of the National Health Service (Remuneration and Conditions of Service) (Scotland) Regulations 1991 (SI 1991 No 537). A copy of the formal approval is attached.

8 December 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

For information

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

Enquiries to:

E-mail:
hwfpaytermsandconditions@gov.scot

Action

5. NHS Boards and Special Health Boards should follow the procedures, advice and timescales set out in the guidance.


Enquiries

6. Employees should direct their personal enquiries to their employing NHS Board or Special Health Board.

7. Employers should make their own arrangements for obtaining additional copies of this circular, which can be viewed at:

<https://www.publications.scot.nhs.uk/>

Yours sincerely

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

Deputy Director
Health Workforce: Culture, Pay 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 8 December 2025 – PCS(AFC)2025/8 – in respect of reduction of the working week for Agenda for Change staff in NHS Scotland are hereby approved for the purposes of the said Regulations.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Jane Hamilton".

Deputy Director
Health Workforce: Culture,
Pay and Partnership Division
8 December 2025

REDUCTION IN THE WORKING WEEK FOR AGENDA FOR CHANGE STAFF IN NHS SCOTLAND OVERARCHING GUIDANCE AND KEY PRINCIPLES

As part of the collectively agreed 2023-24 Pay Deal for Agenda for Change staff, it was agreed that we would explore the feasibility of the reduction in working hours with the overall aim to reducing to 36 hours.

Following partnership discussion, the first 30 minute reduction was implemented on 1 April 2024. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care subsequently confirmed on 18 February 2025 that the remaining hour reduction will come into effect on 1 April 2026. This will see full-time hours for Agenda for Change staff reduce to 36 per week (pro rata for part-time staff), without loss of earnings.

KEY PRINCIPLES

1. **Aim** – Agenda for Change full-time staff will reduce from 37 to 36 hours from 1 April 2026 without loss of earnings (pro rata for part-time staff).
2. **Delivery** – The Implementation Plans developed in partnership by Area Partnership Forums will be used to ensure Boards implement the reduction to 36 hours from 1 April 2026.
3. **Earnings** – New hourly rates based on 36 hours are set out at **ANNEX B**. Staff will see no loss of overall earnings as a result of the reduction in hours.
4. **Reduction in hours and flexibility** – Decisions on how a staff member individually reduces their working week will be made locally. It is expected that changes will be made by mutual agreement, taking into account service requirements, supporting the aim of an effective work life balance and flexibility within the working week.
5. **Innovative thinking** – Managers and staff are encouraged to think innovatively when reducing hours across all working patterns. There is no one size fits all model and each service is encouraged to find a solution that works for them, and provides all staff with the benefit from reducing the working week.

Note: The remaining one hour reduction cannot be accumulated to be taken as extra annual leave. However, where applicable, time can be taken back. The time, however, can be accumulated and taken from the roster/shift pattern where it is mutually agreed and on a pre-planned basis. It is not within the spirit of the agreement to reduce time in amounts that are so small that the member of staff does not benefit from an improved work life balance; or to extend unpaid breaks.

6. **Part-time staff** - Will be reduced on a pro rata basis.
7. **System effects** - National Guidance on how current national systems will operate must be followed. Advice has been issued and will continue to be updated. Local arrangements must be made for systems that are outwith the national platforms. National platforms in this context are: eEss, ePayroll, SSTs, Allocate Optimia and Job Train.

8. Private Provider Staff – Under NHS Scotland's Two-Tier Agreement, most recently issued as [STAC\(TCS03\)2018](#), those staff working for private providers contracted to NHS Scotland Boards, and falling within the remit set out in the agreement, are entitled to terms and conditions no less favourable than directly employed staff. This being the case, those Boards where Two-Tier staff are working should take the necessary steps to facilitate the equivalent reduction in working hours for those staff also.

Annual and other Leave / Public Holidays – This will align with the current annual and other leave calculations as set out of the Agenda for Change Handbook and the online calculator - [Annual leave calculator | NHS Workforce Policies](#).

On Call – Further guidance on the impact of the reduced working week on the existing On Call Allowance will be circulated in due course.

REDUCTION IN THE WORKING WEEK FOR AGENDA FOR CHANGE STAFF IN NHS SCOTLAND INCREASE OF HOURLY RATES

From 1 April 2026, pay will be worked out on the basis of a 36 hour week, meaning hourly rates will increase. This will include unsocial hours enhancements and any other aspect of pay which is linked to hourly rates. The table below sets out the implications of this increase. Given the 2025-26 / 2026-27 pay settlement included a guarantee that the increase in pay each year will be at least 1 percentage point above CPI inflation, the table will be updated in the event the guarantee is implemented.

Band	Pay Point	Scottish Pay Settlement for 26-27	Hourly Rates for 37 Hour Contract	Hourly Rates for 36 Hour Contract	Hourly Rate for Work Beyond 36 Hours
Band 1	1	£26,519	£13.75	£14.13	£21.19
Band 2	1	£26,658	£13.82	£14.20	£21.30
	2	£28,947	£15.00	£15.42	£23.13
Band 3	1	£29,061	£15.06	£15.48	£23.22
	2	£31,364	£16.26	£16.71	£25.06
Band 4	1	£31,492	£16.32	£16.78	£25.16
	2	£34,254	£17.75	£18.25	£27.37
Band 5	1	£34,494	£17.88	£18.38	£27.56
	2	£36,857	£19.10	£19.63	£29.45
	3	£42,977	£22.28	£22.90	£34.34
Band 6	1	£43,169	£22.38	£23.00	£34.50
	2	£45,070	£23.36	£24.01	£36.02
	3	£52,603	£27.27	£28.02	£42.03
Band 7	1	£52,769	£27.35	£28.11	£42.17
	2	£54,784	£28.40	£29.18	£43.78
	3	£61,377	£31.81	£32.70	£49.05
Band 8a	1	£65,032	£33.71	£34.64	£51.97
	2	£70,202	£36.39	£37.40	£56.10
Band 8b	1	£76,778	£39.80	£40.90	£61.35
	2	£82,133	£42.57	£43.75	£65.63
Band 8c	1	£90,678	£47.00	£48.31	£72.46
	2	£97,199	£50.38	£51.78	£77.67
Band 8d	1	£107,655	£55.80	£57.35	£86.03
	2	£112,264	£58.19	£59.81	£89.71
Band 9	1	£127,338	£66.00	£67.84	£101.75
	2	£132,853	£68.86	£70.77	£106.16

Hourly rates on payslips are shown to 4 decimal places but have been rounded to 2 here for the sake of clarity.

REDUCTION IN THE WORKING WEEK FOR AGENDA FOR CHANGE STAFF IN NHS SCOTLAND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

From 1 April 2026, full-time hours for Agenda for Change staff will be reduced from 37 to 36 hours, without loss of earnings.

This document has been created in order to answer questions that have been raised.

This is a live document which will be updated on an ongoing basis as required. If there are any questions you feel could be added to this then please email hwfpaytermsandconditions@gov.scot, or speak to your local HR Department or union representative.

Reduction in hours and flexibility

Q1: What will happen to my pay on 1 April if I am on an Agenda for Change contract?

A: All NHS staff employed on an Agenda for Change contract will see a benefit from the decision to reduce the standard working week to 36 hours. The reduction of the working week will show as a 2.78% increase in hourly rates, but staff will earn the same basic salary. Some staff, such as part-time workers who do not reduce their working contracted hours will see a slight benefit in terms of increased overall pay.

Q2: What happens to my hours if I am part-time?

A: Hours will be reduced pro rata from 1 April 2026. New part-time hours should be calculated in the following way (current part-time hours/37)x36 = new part-time hours. A table setting out what the reduction will mean for any given working time can be found on the Agenda for Change Review page of the STAC website: <https://www.stac.scot.nhs.uk/agenda-for-change-pay-and-reform>.

You may however be able to retain your original part-time hours following discussions with your line manager. This will be subject to service requirements. If this is agreed, you will be paid the improved hourly rate.

Q3: I am a term-time worker. How does the reduction in the working week impact me?

A: Term-time workers (incl part-time weekly workers and full-time weekly workers) should be treated no less favourably than any other member of staff who benefits from the reduced working week. In circumstances where the hours worked need to be recalculated (subject to the other provisions of this circular) the calculation set out at Question 2 above (i.e. divide 37 and multiply by 36) will be applied to the total number of hours you work per year to give a new reduced yearly total. Similar to other NHS Scotland Agenda for Change colleagues, discussions will occur at a local level to agree the hours of work and rostered working pattern that will take effect from 1 April 2026.

Q4: What happens if I start working on an Agenda for Change contract on 1 April?

A: The whole-time contractual hours will be 36. Any member of staff who joins part-time will be paid as per the new hourly rate based on the new whole-time equivalent of 36 hours.

Q5: Will all adverts posted after 1 April 2026 show a full-time working week of 36 hours?

A: Yes.

Q6: What is the new whole-time for NHS Agenda for Change staff in the tax year 2026-27?

A: 36 hours.

Q7: I am a Bank worker only and don't work regular hours – will the increase in the hourly rate apply to me as well?

A: Yes.

Q8: What happens if my manager and I can't agree on how the working time is reduced?

A: Any disputes should be resolved through local partnership arrangements. You will be entitled to be represented by your trade union or professional organisation.

Q9: Will my Pension be affected?

A: No. The NHS Scotland Pension scheme is based on pensionable pay and because this will not fall as a result of this change your pension arrangements will stay the same.

Q10: What will happen to my current annual leave entitlement?

A: There will be no change to annual leave entitlement as outlined in the Agenda for Change handbook. Calculations in hours will reflect the normal hours for a working day, which will now be 7.2 hours (36/5) instead of the current 7.4 hours (37/5).

Entitlement can be worked out using the online annual leave calculator:

<https://workforce.nhs.scot/calculators/annual-leave-calculator>.

The calculator provides the option to work out leave based on a 37.5, 37 or 36 hour full time working week. Staff wishing to ascertain their leave entitlement for the 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 leave year should be careful to choose the "My hours are based on a 36 hour contract" option to ensure the calculator provides an accurate response. Any staff unsure of what their working hours are in the 2026-27 leave year may wish to check with their manager or HR department.

Q11: Does this apply to all NHS Contracts?

A: No, this agreement is for Agenda for Change staff only.

Q12: Will staff be issued with a change in contract as a result of the change in working hours?

A: No, a change in contract will not be required. However, the Agenda for Change handbook will reflect the new whole-time equivalent.

Q13: Does it attract organisational change protection if my service changes?

A: No. This is a negotiated national change to terms and conditions and not a service change being made by your employer. However, the expectation is that in circumstances where services are changed, the requirement to comply with the new standard working week will be resolved as part of the planned change.

Q14: What happens if shifts are re-arranged, and people end up earning less because they are doing fewer unsocial hours?

A: Managers will be expected to re organise shifts in a way that minimises this possibility, up to and including reviewing start/ finish times to minimise any impact on additional allowances such as unsocial hours. However, where staff suspect this has happened, they should bring it to the attention of their manager and human resources department so that it can be looked into and mark time pay protection will be applied where this proves to be the case.

If the reduction in the working week adversely impacts on earnings due to reduced unsocial hours then marked time protection will apply based on an agreed reference period and or actual shifts worked (where the employee works a set roster).

If the reduction in the working week adversely impacts on earnings due to a reduction in unsocial hours BUT the change coincides with a pay uplift (i.e. on 1 April) this could lead to the mark time protection being overtaken immediately. For the purposes of the reduction in the working week, therefore, the pay uplift should be applied to a staff member's existing working pattern (pre RWW implementation, excluding the reduction in part-time hours as this is dealt with separately under the RWW agreement) and if their new working pattern would result in a loss of earnings, the monetary value of the earnings under the previous working pattern should be protected on a mark time basis.

Application of this principle may necessitate the use of a notional reference period rather than the actual retrospective reference period which would normally be applied. The parameters of this will need to be agreed on a case by case basis locally and in partnership.

Q15: What happens if I currently work contractual overtime?

A: Contractual overtime that you currently are required to work will not be affected by this additional hour that may be required in the interim.

Q16: What happens if I am asked to work more than my newly reduced contracted hour?

A: From 1 April 2026, the standard working week for all full time Agenda for Change staff is 36 hours (pro rata as per individual contracts for part-time staff). Any member of staff who works beyond the standard working week or their part-time hours should be paid as per existing Terms and Conditions. In the event you work more than the new full time weekly contracted hours you will be paid overtime as noted in Section Three of the Agenda for Change Handbook (<https://www.msg.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/Agenda-for-Change-Handbook-Master-Scottish-Copy-April-2025.pdf>).

Q17: I regularly do overruns. How does the reduction work, and how does the payment work?

A: There will be a number of areas across the Health Service that work alternate arrangements/rosters where overruns occur. Please contact your manager or local HR department on how this is being managed at a local level.

Q18: I have annual leave which has been carried over from the 2025-26 leave year. Will these hours be reduced proportionately in line with the 2026-27 leave allocation?

A: No. Any hours carried over from 2025-26 should simply be added to the 2026-27 entitlement.

Q19: What is the length of a normal day now? Is it now 12 minutes shorter?

A: Whilst technically as a result of this change a day will reduce from 7.4 hours (7 hours, 24 minutes) to 7.2 hours (7 hours, 12 minutes), it should be emphasised that simply reducing a working day by 12 minutes should not be the default approach. How shifts are re-arranged to accommodate the reduction will require local discussion. In doing so, the service will need to bear in mind that the intention is to implement the change in a way that allows staff to improve their work life balance.

Q20: What happens if my benefits are impacted by the Reduction in the Working Week?

A: Please discuss any financial impact that reducing your contracted hours may have on appropriate benefits. The purpose of the RWW is to improve work life balance. If your benefits are affected, please discuss this with your local line manager in the first instance, it is expected that Boards will take a supportive approach in such instances (subject to service delivery needs). The existing provision for part-time workers to keep their current hours and benefit from the small increase in hourly rates is an approach aimed at facilitating a positive solution.

Q21: Should I be involved in how the introduction of the Reduced Working Week is implemented in my service area i.e how my working pattern is arranged?

A: Yes, you should be consulted. Agreement should be reached within the spirit of partnership working ensuring the existing collective agreement to the new contractual hours.

Q22: How should long shifts, over variable roster periods, be managed in the context of the reduction?

A: The reduction should be the priority and occur within the working week where it is possible to do so. In circumstances where it is agreed that patient care would be adversely affected, local partnerships and services have some flexibility to reduce worked hours over the period of the scheduled roster or normal pay cycle. In these circumstances there should be agreement with staff.

Q23: Will the roster changes made during the initial 30 min reduction be honoured once the additional 1 hr reduction is in place?

A: It is recognised that the reduction in the working week by an additional hour may require changes to existing rostered working patterns. If this occurs, it should be clearly communicated, recognised and agreed by all parties concerned.

Q24: What is the correct approach when a staff member has more than one contract?

A: Each contract should be treated separately, and each should receive the appropriate amount of time reduction for the weekly hours originally specified in the contract before 1 April 2026.

Q25: I work on the NHS Bank only, what are the new hours I need to have worked to receive my next pay increment?

A: Whilst the principles around increments for bank workers remain as set out in [PCS\(AFC\)2015/2](#), from 1 April 2026 the working week moving to 36 hours means the number of hours a bank worker, who only has a bank post, is required to work to qualify for the next pay increment will reduce from 385 hours in a year to 375 hours in a year. The calculation of hours to be worked in a year should be pro rata where the increment year spans 1 April. Also, any reference to a 7.4 hour shift in PCS(AFC)2015/2 should be read as 7.2 hours in the context of the reduced working week from 1 April 2026.