

Roles and forums

To help understand how joint partnership structures can support staff networks we have included an outline of key roles and forums.

Staff networks

Staff networks are a group of colleagues, often with a shared heritage, experience or a characteristic, that come together to support each other and work with the organisation to improve staff experience. They exist in many different formats across organisations in the public, private, third sectors and the forces and are known by many different names and acronyms.

For example, in Parliament, they are called workplace equality networks (WENs). The most popular networks in most organisations are affinity groups that are linked to the protected characteristics of the Equality Act (2010) covering age, disability, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation.

EDIG's research found that the top five main areas of focus for staff networks in the NHS were:

1. being a safe space to raise concerns
2. the experience of staff at work, analysis of data, for example, local NHS Staff Survey results, Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) and Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) (England sources)
3. action planning
4. peer support
5. disseminating best practice.

Joint negotiating committee (JNC) or joint partnership group

This is a body within an NHS organisation that is made up of elected, recognised, trained independent trade union representatives known as the staff side and management side representatives including HR. The JNC meets to discuss and consult on issues relating to staff, to negotiate and agree local policies and the implementation of nationally agreed terms and conditions of employment.

Trade union representatives have a range of legal rights to protect their independence and employers have a range of legal and collective agreement obligations to consult and negotiate with their recognised unions. The joint negotiating or partnership forum is the main vehicle for this.

It is good practice for JNCs to include a regular EDI agenda item and to analyse data, including local NHS Staff Survey results and equality data such as the WRES and WDES in England, and support action planning to improve the experience of staff at work.

EDI steering group/committee

This is a free-standing committee that brings together stakeholders such as staff side trade unions, EDI leads, network chairs and board members to advise on and co-ordinate the organisation's EDI strategy.

Trade union (TU) self-organised group

A network within an individual trade union which enables members with experiences in common to have a voice within the union, and to come together to support and work with each other to challenging discrimination and promoting equality in the workplace.

The health and safety committee is a formal committee that includes, managers and trade union safety representatives, working together to keep staff safe and healthy at work, removing potential hazards and reducing incidences of injuries, sickness absence and stress in the workplace.

The board

The board is an organisation's senior decision-making body, made up of executive and non-executive directors and charged with the effective stewardship of the organisation.

Staff-side chair

A staff-side chair is a leader elected for a set period of time by the recognised trade union representatives who form the staff-side. Most staff-sides will have their own terms of reference and constitution. The role of the staff-side chair is to act as the spokesperson for the trade union group, providing leadership and representing the views of the group and their members fairly and leading negotiations and engagement with the organisation's management. They also support effective partnership working, engaging with stakeholders and staff to ensure a diverse range of voices are engaged and that negotiation and consultation processes are properly followed.

Trade union (TU) equality representative

An elected representative in individual trade unions who focuses on equality. The role involves promoting fairness at work by encouraging

Freedom to speak up ambassador/guardian

A role employed in all NHS trusts in England to provide an alternative way for staff to raise concerns, acting as an independent source of advice. They are supported by voluntary freedom to speak up ambassadors who act as champions for the agenda. They also ensure issues are raised at a senior level of an organisation. The freedom to speak up role was introduced as a result of recommendations from the Francis review of Mid Staffordshire Hospital.

Facility time

This is time off from an individual's job, granted by the employer, to enable an elected trade union representative to carry out their role. Trade union workplace representatives have a legal right to paid time off for the purpose of carrying out their duties. Duties include collective bargaining on terms and conditions of employment, redundancies, job evaluation, policy development, disciplinary or bullying and harassment as well as representing individual trade union members in disciplinary and grievance proceedings, information and consultation, meeting with management and keeping trade union members informed about negotiations.