

# Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy Implementation Toolkit



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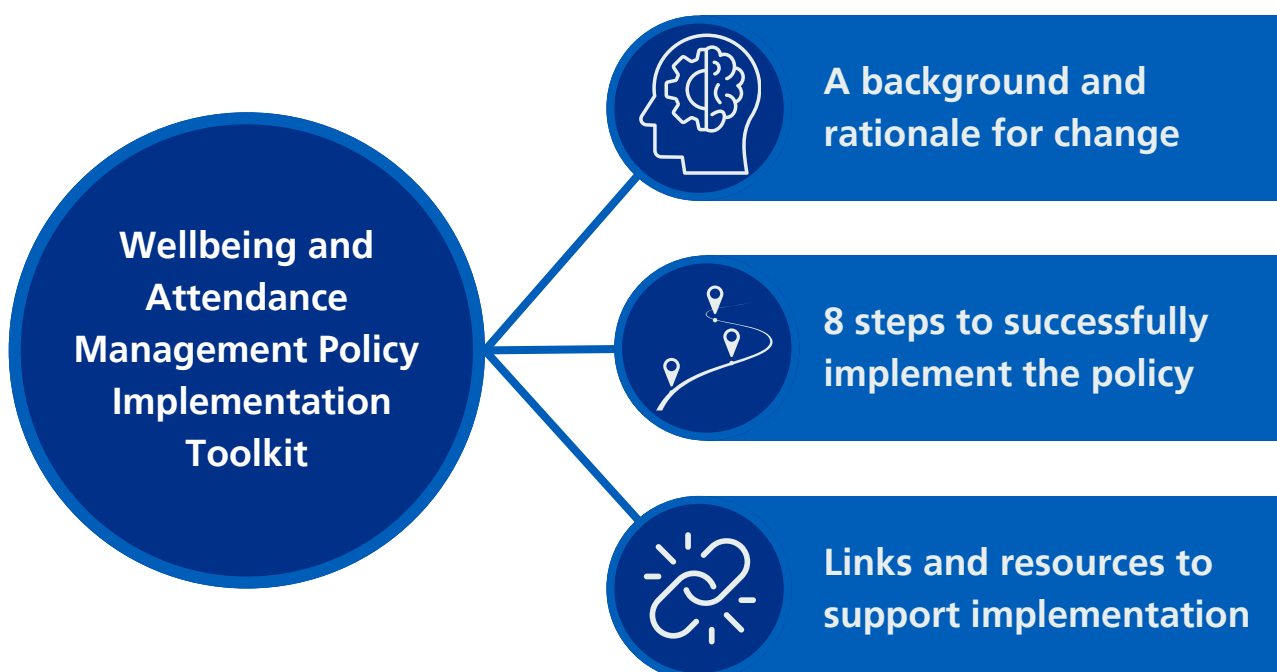


# How to use this toolkit

This Toolkit was developed by the **Northern Care Alliance**, **Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust** and **UNISON** in partnership with the **NHS North West Leadership Academy**.



The toolkit has been designed to support **any organisation** that wants to implement a **holistic person-centred wellbeing and attendance management policy**. It provides organisations with:



# Background

## Rationale and what the early adopter sites did.

**“Managers have just as much of an impact on peoples mental health as their partner (both 69%) – and even more of an impact than their doctor (51%) or therapist ( 41%)”**

**Mental Health At Work, UKG Workforce Institute, 2023**

Sickness rates in the North West have remained the highest in the country, despite previous employer policies aimed at addressing the issue. Personal stories linked to these policies have highlighted the pressing need for a new approach. Research by [RAND Europe](#) on why people do and don't come to work found:



### **Productivity**

The impact of presenteeism is at least 10 times higher than sickness absence in terms of productive days lost.



### **Patient safety**

Colleagues who are struggling with well-being and remain in work, struggle to focus. This is when mistakes happen.



### **Impact of the pandemic**

Both sickness absence and presenteeism have increased. Colleagues have had no respite and burn out is becoming common.



### **Drivers of presenteeism**

Include [MSK](#) and mental health, financial well-being, relationships and lack of sleep.



The NHS has spent a disproportionate amount of time managing sickness absence rather than fostering a culture of well-being for all staff.

In recognition of the limitations of a sickness-absence-focused approach, a [new Wellbeing and Sickness Absence Policy](#) has been developed in collaboration with [NHS Employers](#) and the [Social Partnership Forum](#).

Four Early Adopter Sites have committed to implementing this policy to support colleagues and promote well-being. They have chosen to refer to this as a **Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy** to acknowledge its holistic approach.

# Aim of introducing the Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy.

The new Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy aims to drive a significant cultural shift in managing sickness absence and prioritising colleagues' well-being. This policy emphasises **greater autonomy, responsibility, and accountability** for both managers and colleagues, fostering a collaborative approach to maintaining well-being in the workplace.

Adopting a person-centred, individualised focus, the policy seeks to better support our people throughout their professional journey, responding to their evolving needs in a timely and compassionate manner. It encourages managers and colleagues to work together, promoting a proactive approach to staying well at work and creating an environment where staff can thrive. This involves shifting the focus to providing comprehensive support for well-being, including prevention activities, health promotion, self-help, and assistance for colleagues with complex needs with the aim of:





# How this policy has been designed to be more person centred.

## **Triggers**

The traditional 'Return to Work' interviews present a risk of solely focusing on absence triggers and missing the critical opportunity of talking through and understanding what is impacting on a colleagues wellbeing and what support can be provided through compassionate leadership, to help colleagues return to work and feel truly supported. The historical cycle of trigger management has been removed and the focus is now based on a wellbeing culture within work environments, building trusting supportive relationships between the manager and colleague, understanding the pressures on colleagues health and wellbeing, knowing what support can be provided and working together with a joint commitment to improve individual and team wellbeing.

## **Welcome Back Meetings**

Welcome Back Meetings are replaced and designed to support a person-centred case management approach to a colleague returning to work and mutually agreeing actions where required in order to help improve wellbeing and attendance.

## **Personalised Improvement Action Plans**

Wellness in work is achieved through mutually agreed action plans.

## **Disability Leave**

Disability leave is a period of time off work which has been approved by a manager for a reason related to a colleagues' disability. For example, to attend a hospital appointment or to receive treatment.

# How this policy has been designed to be more person centred.

## **Dying to Work Charter**

The charter is about choice in the event of a terminal diagnosis. It's about giving an individual options around how they want to proceed at work.

## **Informal Stage to Absence Management Process**

This is a manager led meeting, with the aim to talk through what support has already been established, to ensure all support opportunities have been considered before progressing onto the absence management process.

## **Reasonable Adjustments Policy**

The understanding and greater application of the Personalised Workplace Adjustments Plan and the policy.

## **Some other important differences**

- Time off for attending medical appointments
- Sickness part way through a shift
- Sickness whilst on annual leave

# High level policy process outline.

When someone's absences raise concerns, it's important to handle the situation with care and understanding. A **welcome-back health review** is a supportive meeting led by a manager. The goal is to have an open conversation about the support that has been provided so far, to ensure that all possible resources have been explored, and to discuss any additional help that could be beneficial in preventing future absences.

This meeting is an opportunity to work together for their well-being.

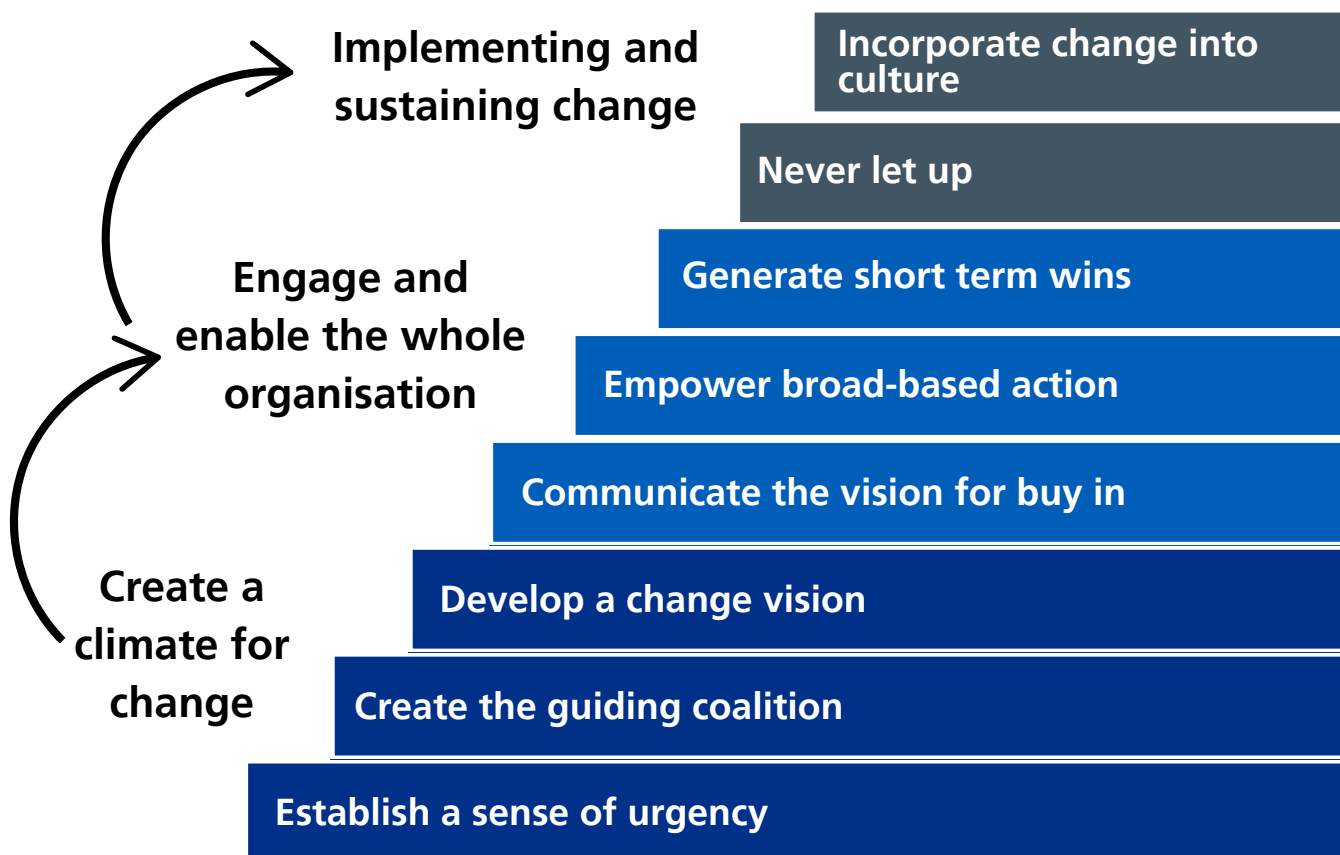


when all other options have been exhausted the following meetings may take place:

- First Formal Attendance Management Meeting
- Second Formal Attendance Management Meeting
- Final Formal Attendance Management Meeting / Capability Hearing

# Framework for this toolkit

This toolkit employs [Kotter's 8 Steps for Change](#) as its guiding implementation framework, structuring the process to facilitate successful and sustainable change. Each step in Kotter's model serves as a crucial principle to guide actions, build momentum, and ensure a clear pathway for achieving desired outcomes.





# Toolkit

## Before you start.

### Planning and Timeline

**Allow Ample Time and Resources:** Designing, ratifying, and implementing the policy, along with developing practical, organisation-specific documentation, training managers, and evaluating outcomes will require significant time and resources. The process may span over a year, so it is important to plan accordingly.

### Policy Flexibility and Finalisation

**Clarify Flexibility and Parameters:** When adopting the North West Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy, be clear about the degree of flexibility your organization has. You may need to negotiate aspects of the policy to reach a consensus and remember that it doesn't need to be perfect before implementation. Avoid over-tweaking.

### Engage Key Stakeholders

**Involve the Right People Early:** Engage senior managers, staff-side representatives, HR, Executive/Board members, an Influential Executive Sponsor, and a Wellbeing Champion from the beginning. Their involvement throughout the implementation will be essential to ensure the policy's success and alignment with organisational needs.

### Resource Requirements for Training

**Assess HR Capacity:** HR will likely lead the training for managers, which could be high volume and demand significant capacity. Plan to train managers on the policy as swiftly as possible to promote consistent application and understanding across the organisation.



## **Anticipate Stakeholder Challenges**

**Prepare for Pushback:** Expect challenges from stakeholders, during the training process. Address potential concerns proactively and equip HR with strategies to manage these challenges effectively.

## **Communicate with Executives and the Board**

**Set Realistic Expectations:** Inform Executives and the Board that certain KPIs may appear to decline in the short term as the policy is implemented. Emphasise that this is a natural adjustment period, with anticipated improvements over time as the policy takes effect.

# Step 1: Establish a Sense of Urgency.

Build a strong case for developing and implementing a new policy. This policy takes a person-centred approach to proactively support staff health and wellbeing.



## **Encourage Better Conversations**

Facilitate more meaningful health and wellbeing conversations between managers and staff.



## **Develop a Culture of Wellbeing**

Shift the organisational culture to prioritise wellbeing.



## **Increase Signposting to Support**

Encourage early signposting to support resources.



## **Promote Compassionate Leadership**

Equip managers to lead with more empathy and compassion.

## **Expected Long Term Benefits**

The policy is expected to, reduce the number of formal processes initiated, improve overall staff support, helping people feel wellbeing is genuinely prioritised. This can positively impact KPIs such as:

- A healthier workforce
- Reducing sickness and absence
- Increasing productivity
- Reducing presenteeism
- Enhancing safe care
- Improving the workplace environment
- Lowering stress cases
- Boosting recruitment and retention

# Step 2: Create the guiding coalition.

## **Executive Support and Sponsorship**

Executive support, ideally with a committed Chief People Officer, will provide strong sponsorship for the policy, helping to secure buy-in, resources, and alignment with organisational priorities.

## **Staff Side**

Staff side partnership is crucial throughout policy development, ratification, implementation, manager training, and evaluation. Staff side involvement supports each phase, ensuring the policy is practical and aligned with real needs. Staff-side representatives play a direct role in supporting managers with implementation.

## **Human Resources**

HR will work in close partnership across all stages: development, ratification, implementation, and evaluation. As leaders in training managers, HR will need capacity to handle high volumes, quickly equipping managers to apply the policy. HR also has a direct role in supporting managers through implementation.

## **Wellbeing Champion**

Wellbeing Champions or individuals in your organisation with an equivalent role e.g. Wellbeing Leads, will help lead the policy's development, ratification, and implementation stages, ensuring momentum. They coordinate training, support the implementation process, and drive evaluation efforts, keeping wellbeing a visible priority.



## Senior Leaders and Managers

Senior leaders and managers play a vital role by encouraging and supporting their teams to adopt and apply the policy, helping embed wellbeing into the organisation's culture.

## Community of Practice

Establishing or joining a community of practice offers a valuable forum to share learning and insights with others involved in policy development and implementation.



# Step 3: Develop a change vision.

## **Acknowledge Changes**

Under the new wellbeing policy, staff will experience greater autonomy, responsibility, and accountability. While triggers for absence management may be removed, it's important to note that absence will still be managed effectively. Managers will face the challenge of balancing the support of employee wellbeing with the need to manage performance and service. Changing mindsets within the organisation will take time, and some areas, may require creative engagement strategies.

## **Encouraging Manager Mindsets**

Managers are encouraged to reflect on how they would want to be supported in managing their own wellbeing. It's essential to recognise that we are all human and will inevitably need to take sick leave. The policy aims to treat colleagues with the same compassion and care we extend to patients. Managers should think about the patients they care for and apply those transferable skills to have meaningful conversations with their teams.

## **Empowering Staff Ownership**

It's important to support individuals in taking ownership of their own wellbeing. While managers can assist and signpost resources, ultimately, everyone is responsible for their own health and wellbeing.

## **HR Support and Transition Guidance**

HR will collaborate closely with managers to implement the policy effectively. Clear guidance on transitioning from the old to the new policy should be developed, including transition guidance resources. Click here for an [example transition guide](#).





## Launching and Training Rollout

Be clear about the approach to launching the new policy and rolling out manager training. Launching the policy simultaneously with training can encourage greater attendance and engagement from managers.

# Step 4: Communicate the vision for buy in.

## **Multi-Channel Communication Strategy**

Develop a campaign using diverse channels: emails, intranet, training sessions, newsletters, staff networks, team meetings, to reach different learning styles.

## **Phased Messaging Approach**

Begin with a soft introduction to build awareness, and increase messaging intensity during the implementation phase. Focus on explaining the “why” and highlighting the benefits, particularly to ease any concerns about removing existing triggers.

## **Email Notification**

Send a comprehensive email to all employees detailing the new policy to ensure everyone is informed.

## **Centralised Resource Hub**

Store all policy-related materials, including supporting documents and templates, in one accessible location on the intranet.

## **Digital Inclusion Awareness**

Recognise that not everyone has equal digital access. Ensure communication reaches all employees through a regular multi channel approach.

## **Policy Integration**

Clearly link this policy with other related policies to maintain a consistent message.





## **Educational Videos**

Create and share videos explaining the policy changes and their intended impact.

## **Manage Concerns and Rumors**

Address potential nervousness and manage rumours prior to the policy launch to facilitate smoother implementation.

# Step 5: Empower broad based action.

## Policy implementation team

### Train-the-Trainer Program

Develop and roll out a "train-the-trainer" initiative for HR colleagues, enabling them to effectively facilitate policy training for managers. Consider including details of the policy rationale to help win hearts and minds.

### Manager Training

Provide targeted training for managers to ensure they understand the policy and are equipped with practical skills for implementation. You may include practical guidance.



#### **Holistic Training**

Include wellbeing, mental health, and goal setting to help managers provide proactive employee support.



#### **Department Focus**

Roll out training in specific departments for a tailored, impactful approach.



#### **Case Studies**

Use real-life examples to make the policy relatable and show practical applications.



#### **Community-Based**

Offer training in community venues to reach staff across diverse locations.

## **Stakeholder Feedback Mechanisms**

Establish clear channels for stakeholders to provide input on policy development and resources, ensuring continuous improvement.

## **Wider Training**

Review broader training options to support manager development and ensure they know how to access these resources.

## **Transition Guidance**

Develop clear guidelines to help employees and managers transition smoothly from the old policy to the new one.

## **Action Plan Crib Sheets**

Provide crib sheets with action plans, detailing available support and reasonable adjustments. Click here for an example [short term](#) and [long term](#) action plan.

## **Involve Wellbeing Support Teams**

Engage teams like chaplaincy, EAP, occupational health, and equality and inclusion colleagues to offer comprehensive support during implementation.

## **Enhanced HR Access**

Ensure managers have easy access to HR touchpoints to address questions and challenges as they implement the new policy.

## **Personal Action Plan Guidance**

Create guidance materials to help managers develop individual action plans for their teams, ensuring a tailored approach to implementation.

- Make sure managers know their responsibility in conducting welcome back reviews for all returning staff.
- Help managers set SMART goals and action plans to enhance implementation.

# Support for HR

## HR Capacity for Support and Training

Ensure HR has the resources and time needed to effectively support managers and deliver training.



### Consistent Trainers

Use the same HR colleagues to deliver training for familiarity and consistency.



### Post-Training Debriefs

Schedule debriefs for HR to reflect on training experiences and challenges.

## Touchpoints and FAQ Channel

Establish regular check-ins for trainers, and set up an MS Teams channel to share frequently asked questions and provide support.

## Case Study Review Cycle

Build in time for case study reviews during your implementation. Consider using your daily huddles to identify opportunities.

## HR Peer Review Session

Hold regular sessions where HR peers can share insights and discuss common questions, beginning before manager training to prepare for potential scenarios.

## Coaching Approach

Support HR in transitioning from strict advice-giving to a more coaching-focused approach, helping them become more confident in flexible guidance.



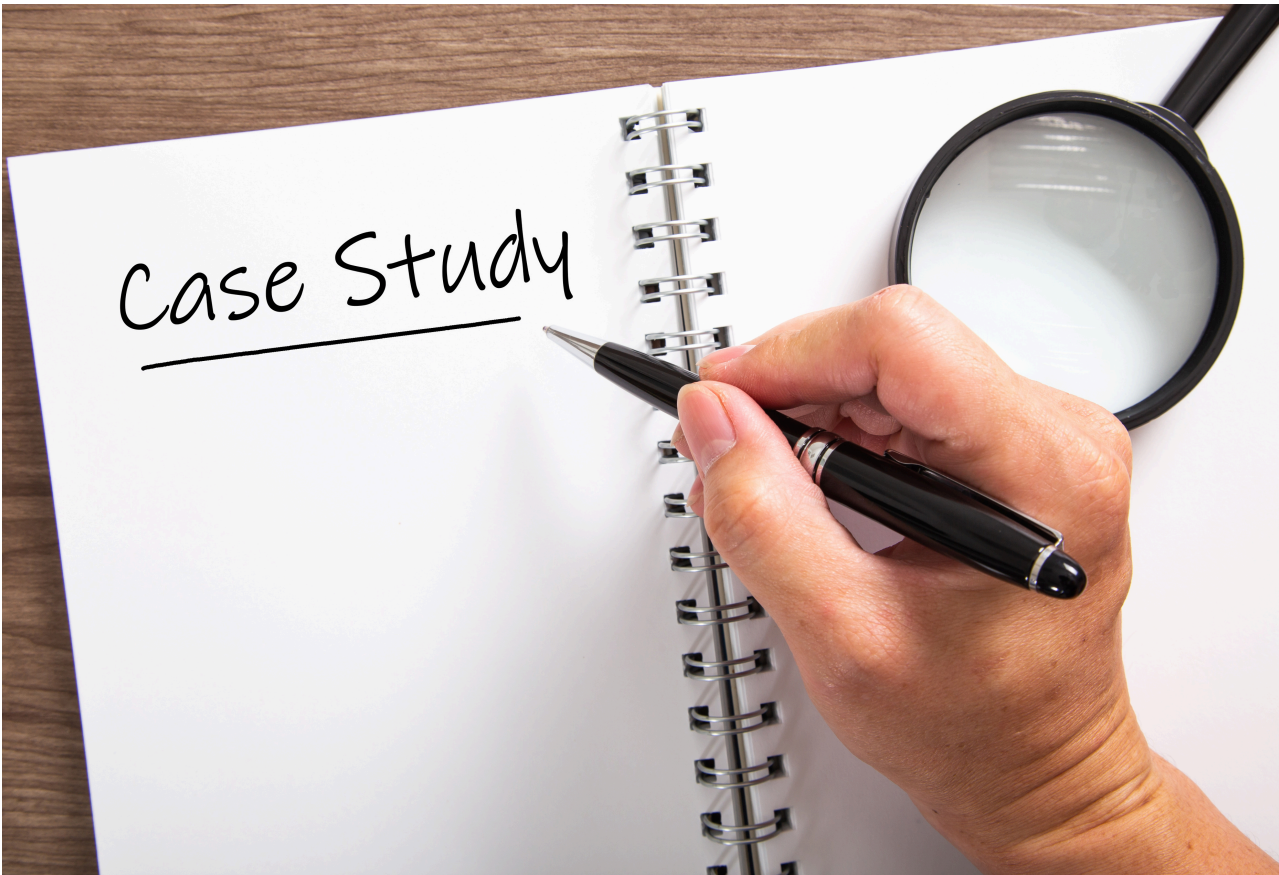


## Empowering Managers

Encourage HR to prompt managers to find their own solutions, building managers' confidence and problem-solving skills, rather than feeling as though they have to be the progenitor of all ideas.



## Step 6: Generate short term wins.



### **Share Success Stories**

Highlight real-life examples of positive outcomes to illustrate the policy's benefits and inspire confidence.

### **Evaluate and Share Feedback**

Conduct evaluations of the training, and share feedback to demonstrate continuous improvement and responsiveness.

### **Demonstrate Policy Impact with Data**

Provide data on the policy's impact, showing evidence to address concerns, such as potential increases in sickness absence without triggers.

# Step 7: Build on the change.

## Oversight Group KPI Review

Regularly review data and KPIs, such as staff survey results, reasons for leaving, sickness absence, and retention rates. Monitor these metrics over the long term to identify trends.

- [Example: NCA Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy Manager/HR/Trade Union Feedback Form](#)
- [Example NCA Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy Feedback Form \(Colleagues\)](#)

## Capture Lived Experiences

Develop anonymised surveys for staff, managers and HR to gather insights on policy implementation. Focus on questions like "Does the process feel improved?", "How confident are managers?", and "How compassionate is the implementation?".

## Compare KPI Outcomes

Analyse KPI differences between teams implementing the new policy and those using the old one to assess impact.

## Revisit Equality Impact Assessment

Regularly review the EIA to identify and address any unintended effects of the new policy.

## Ongoing HR Audits

Conduct consistent HR audits with standardised templates to ensure policy adherence and effectiveness.

## Integrate Policy Principles in ESR Review

Embed the core principles of the new policy as part of the ESR review process for alignment.

# Step 8: Make it stick.

## **Align Policies and Tone**

Review and adapt related policies to ensure they align with the new wellbeing policy. Shift the tone to reflect a coaching, supportive approach rather than a directive one.

## **Induction Updates**

Incorporate the wellbeing policy and its principles into inductions to instil its importance from the start.

## **Wellbeing Plans**

Regularly assess the effectiveness of individual wellbeing plans and refine as needed to support ongoing health and engagement.

## **Ongoing Manager Engagement**

Continuously encourage managers to keep the policy active in daily practices and discussions, especially with new starters.

## **Streamline Reasonable Adjustments**

Make processes for reasonable adjustments quick and straightforward to support timely returns to work.

## **Comprehensive Training Scenarios**

Ensure all training covers various scenarios, such as mid-shift absences, time off for appointments, and managing sickness during leave.

## **Centralised Wellbeing Resources**

Place all wellbeing resources in a single accessible location for ease of use by managers and staff.





## **Celebrate Successes**

Share success stories and case studies to reinforce positive outcomes and inspire continued commitment to the policy.

## **Justification for Decisions**

Maintain clear, documented rationales for decisions to ensure transparency and consistency.

## **Support for Middle Managers**

Recognise the vital role of middle managers in absence management, providing long-term support and development as they handle these responsibilities.

# Links to resources and key contacts

## Resources.

### [Example: NCA Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy Manager/HR/Trade Union Feedback Form](#)

A feedback form for managers, HR and Trade Union colleagues to provide them with the opportunity to feedback on their experience of the new NCA Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy.

### [Example NCA Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy Feedback Form \(Colleagues\)](#)

A feedback form to provide colleagues with the opportunity to feedback on their experience of the new NCA Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy.

### [Long Term Action Plan Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy](#)

A long term action plan to help your policy implementation group work through the process of launching and integrating this policy.



## [Short Term Action Plan Wellbeing and Attendance Management Policy](#)

A short term action plan to help your policy implementation group work through the process of launching and integrating this policy.

## [Northern Care Alliance GM Wellbeing Video](#)

An example video for Northern Care Alliance explaining the policy changes and their intended impact.

## [New NHS, NHS Employers and Social Partnership Forum Wellbeing and Sickness Absence Policy](#)

A new Wellbeing and Sickness Absence Policy developed by the NHS, NHS Employers and Social Partnership Forum.

## [Example Policy Transition Guide](#)

An example of a coproduce transition guide between managers and HR designed to provide clear guidance on transitioning from the old to the new policy.

## [Example Policy Training](#)

An example of a training delivered to managers and leaders on the new policy and its processes and aims.

## [Example Wellbeing and Attendance Management Process Tree](#)

An example of a decision making process for the new policy.

# Training, the detail.

## Regional HR and Staff-Side Training

**Format:** Virtual "Train the Trainer" sessions via Microsoft Teams, resources shared on the Futures platform.

**Duration:** 3.5 hours.

**Capacity:** Up to 75 participants per session.

## Local Manager Training

**Format:** Conducted by each pilot organisation for managers and aspiring managers, both face-to-face and online.

**Duration:** 2 hours.

**Capacity:** Ranged from 25-100 participants, depending on Eventbrite limits.

**Resources:** Supporting documents accessible on the intranet.

## Training Content

- Background and policy rationale
- Chief People Officer message
- Case studies
- Comparison of old vs. new policy
- Welcome back health reviews
- Organisational support
- Reasonable adjustments
- Personalized action plans
- Detailed policy stages
- Supporting video developed by staff-side teams (Staff Side Only)

# Contacts.

## Key Contacts

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- Ruth Barker
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