

People, Safety and Culture Matters 2025 - 2030



NHS Ayrshire & Arran People Strategy

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Foreword

Over the past five years, NHS Ayrshire & Arran has navigated extraordinary challenges – from the COVID-19 pandemic to financial pressures and rising service demands. These events have tested our systems and deeply affected the wellbeing of our workforce. In response, we've recognised that culture must be central to how we lead, connect, and care.

Our 2025–30 People Strategy – People, Safety and Culture Matters is rooted in the belief that a thriving culture is essential for wellbeing, performance, and innovation. It builds on national frameworks and local values, placing people at the heart of our vision for the future. We are committed to creating psychologically safe, inclusive environments where compassion and continuous learning are part of everyday life.



This strategy outlines how we will plan, attract, employ, retain, develop, and support our workforce, while embracing digital transformation and new care models. It acknowledges the complex challenges we face, including staffing shortages, an ageing workforce, and rising mental health concerns, and sets out clear objectives to address them.

Together, we can shape a culture where people feel valued, supported, and empowered to thrive. This is our opportunity to re-imagine NHS Ayrshire & Arran as a place where people grow, contribute, and find meaning in their work.

Professor Gordon James, Chief Executive



Opening statement

Our People Strategy – People Matter was first published in 2015, setting four objectives: to retain, develop, support, and attract the right people to NHS Ayrshire & Arran. This was aligned with our pillars of People, Quality, Service, and Finance.

Since launching our 2020–25 strategy, we've faced the profound impacts of the global pandemic and financial crisis. These experiences shaped the **National Workforce Strategy (2022)**, which introduced five pillars: Plan, Attract, Train, Employ, and Nurture, with a strong emphasis on organisational culture and psychological safety, and validating our ongoing work in these areas.

From 2022, we refocused on core people management and Staff Governance commitments, including PDR uptake, statutory training, new roles like Band 4 Nursing Practitioners, international recruitment, and staff wellbeing. A key achievement has been the expansion of wellbeing support through collaborative efforts.

Our 2025–30 People Strategy – People, Safety and Culture Matters builds on past progress and lessons learned, guided by the national framework. Despite ongoing financial and workforce pressures, our ambition remains: to foster an engaged, empowered, and resilient workforce within a culture of appreciation, fulfilment, and health.



This third strategic review introduces frameworks for Culture and Staff Health, Safety and Wellbeing, and explores opportunities in digital transformation and AI to enhance work experiences and service delivery.

Delivered in partnership with our leaders, Area Partnership Forum, and Trade Unions, we remain committed to building a thriving workforce for our citizens, collaborating locally, regionally, and nationally to share, learn, and improve together.

Sarah Leslie, Director of People, Safety and Culture

**“Our ambition remains:
to foster an engaged,
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Introduction

Over the past five years, Scotland's health and social care system, as well as in Ayrshire and Arran, has faced immense challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, financial pressures, and rising service demands. These have impacted both organisational operations and individual wellbeing.

Culture needs to be at the heart of our response. It shapes how we work, connect, and lead. We view a thriving culture as essential not only for wellbeing but also for performance, innovation, and sustainability. As we adopt new care models, embrace digital transformation, and integrate a global workforce, we nurture curiosity, adaptability, and continuous learning. We need to create environments where psychological safety, compassion, and inclusion are part of everyday life.

We must prioritise relational leadership, strengthen team cohesion, and foster a shared sense of purpose. Our leaders should be equipped to lead with empathy, hold space for honest conversations, and model the behaviours we want to see.

Ultimately, we shape our culture, and in doing so, we shape how people experience change. When we get culture right, it becomes our strength. Together, we can reimagine NHS Ayrshire & Arran as a place where people grow, contribute, and find meaning in their work.

Visit xxx to see for more information on our organisation, as well as our corporate objectives.

Our context

Like all health and care systems, we continue to face significant, complex, and long-standing challenges deeply embedded in our systems, processes, and organisational culture. With changing demographics and evolving local and national contexts, health and social care integration requires our systems to work together in more connected and seamless ways than before.

Our People Strategy and supporting delivery frameworks for workforce planning, health, safety, wellbeing and culture development, are firmly aligned with the [National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care in Scotland](#) and the national [Health and Social Care Improving Wellbeing and Working Cultures framework \(2024\)](#). Locally, this plan is anchored by our Board Purpose, commitments, and values of caring, safe and respectful.

We place people, safety, and culture at the centre of our strategy. Our People Strategy – People, Safety and Culture Matters outlines our vision to 2030 and provides a framework for:

- delivering the Staff Governance Standards;
- strategic workforce planning;
- improving staff health, safety, and wellbeing (2025–28);
- developing organisational culture (2025–28); and
- implementing and monitoring iMatter.

Our workforce challenges

Looking ahead to 2030 and beyond, we continue to face several challenges:

- **Staffing shortages:** We continue to struggle with recruiting key staff and specialists. Brexit disrupted European supply chains, prompting us to explore global recruitment and alternative pathways to grow talent from within.
- **Ageing workforce:** Our workforce mirrors our ageing population, with an average age of 46. Retirement patterns remain unpredictable due to pension changes and personal responsibilities, including multi-generational caregiving.
- **Health and wellbeing:** Staff wellbeing remains below our aspirations. Sickness absence is high, and mental health concerns, including stress, anxiety, trauma, and burnout, have risen sharply since the pandemic.
- **Changing demands:** Staff face growing pressure to adapt to evolving service models and financial constraints. While change offers opportunities, maintaining services during transition strains both staff and leaders.
- **Digital transformation:** Rapid growth in digital technology and AI demands new skills and mindsets. Improving digital literacy and encouraging adoption of tech-enabled care models is vital for future productivity and accessibility.

People, safety and culture matters: Our aim

Our aim is to foster a workforce that is engaged, empowered, and enabled within a culture that is open, fair, compassionate, and inclusive. We want every staff member to feel respected, valued, and supported to reach their full potential and deliver excellence at individual, team, and organisational levels. Together, we aim to build a workplace where people feel appreciated, fulfilled, healthy, and resilient.

This strategy outlines four core objectives to strengthen how we plan, attract, employ, retain, develop, and support our workforce. Effective people management is built on strong foundations—clear roles, evidence-based practices, consistent delivery, and continuous improvement through collaboration and feedback.

Our core people objectives are to:

1. **Plan and attract:** Ensure the right people are in the right roles at the right time, aligned with our values and vision.
2. **Employ and retain:** Create a fair, inclusive environment where diversity is valued, roles are clear, and staff live our values.
3. **Train and develop:** Be recognised as an exemplar employer that invests in people, supports growth, and promotes lifelong learning and career development.
4. **Nurture and support:** Build a positive, compassionate culture that prioritises wellbeing, safety, and enables staff to thrive and perform at their best.

Our objectives

Objective 1: Plan and attract

We aim to have the right people, in the right roles, at the right time, and who share our organisational values and vision.

To achieve this, we must ensure that our workforce planning clearly articulates the staff we need and why we need them. Our Anti Racism, Employability and Recruitment Plans provide the mechanisms to support delivery. We are committed to being a diverse and inclusive employer, representative of our communities and recognised for promoting equality in employment.

As the largest employer in Ayrshire and Arran, we have a responsibility to address local unemployment and deprivation. Our Employability Plan will expand access to NHS careers, especially for those furthest from the workplace, through placements, apprenticeships, and partnerships.

We also aim to shift perceptions of NHS careers, highlighting non-clinical roles and flexible career paths, including “earn while you learn” opportunities.

In a competitive labour market, especially for clinical roles, our Recruitment Plan will strengthen our employer brand, improve candidate experience, and enhance retention, making Ayrshire & Arran an employer of choice.

Our current Workforce Plan (2022–25) is under review, with a refreshed version due in 2026.

Commitments working to 2030 and beyond

We will:

- Develop the Workforce Plan 2026–29 to identify future staffing needs and demographics.
- Refresh the Recruitment Plan to improve branding, effectiveness, and retention.
- Launch a new Employability Plan to expand entry routes and partnerships.

Impact measures

- Meet the 12-week NHSScotland recruitment standard.
- Maintain 75 per cent of employability participants gaining substantive roles.
- Increase apprenticeships beyond the five-year average of 25 each year.
- Reduce non-disclosure of protected characteristics in recruitment.
- Ensure 80 per cent of recruiting managers complete unconscious bias training.
- Lower turnover to pre-pandemic levels (6.4 per cent).

Objective 2: Employ and retain

We want all staff to feel fairly treated throughout their career, in a diverse, values-led environment with clear roles and responsibilities. By fostering a culture of care, learning, and consistency, we want our people to feel engaged, empowered, and proud of their work.

Our ambition is to be an exemplar employer – trusted, inclusive, and focussed on growth – where staff thrive and contribute to a shared purpose. We will work in partnership with our trade unions and professional organisations to ensure fairness in job evaluation, consistent application of terms and conditions, and effective workforce policies.

Commitments working to 2030 and beyond

We will:

- Redesign Employee Relations team into Business Partners for enhanced manager support.
- Improve staff engagement in change and reform.
- Strengthen feedback mechanisms on employment experience.
- Embed values and behaviours across all teams.
- Deliver responsive management development and training.
- Design roles that support longer, healthier working lives.
- Promote Whistleblowing standards and a just culture.
- Provide job evaluation and job description training.
- Enhance access to workforce policies and FAQs via intranet.
- Monitor and improve consistency in terms and conditions.
- Support managers in applying the promoting attendance policy.

Impact measures

- Reduced absence rates (target of 5.15 per cent).
- Fewer formal employee relations cases, with earlier resolutions.
- Improved performance against Staff Governance Standards.
- Increased uptake and application of people management training.
- Better policy and terms and condition compliance through audits.
- Fewer Stage 1 quality checks and job description returns.
- Easier access to workforce policies and guidance.

Objective 3: Train and develop

We want to be known as an exemplar anchor employer, recognised for the importance we place on developing our people, and encouraging them to be the best that they can be, maximising their learning, digital capability and career opportunities through ongoing professional and personal development.

Anchor employers, such as the NHS and local authorities, have a significant and lasting presence in their communities. They use their power through spending, employment, and assets, to build a fairer, healthier, and more resilient economy.

Succession planning is central to driving cultural change and long-term sustainability, supported by inclusive workforce development, leadership programmes, and platforms like Turas and LearnPro to enable career progression and system-wide growth. By embedding national frameworks, expanding vocational pathways, and evolving Performance Development Reviews into meaningful conversations, we will build NHS Ayrshire & Arran as a learning organisation where staff are empowered to grow, lead, and innovate.

Commitments working to 2030 and beyond

We will:

- Highlight local and national programmes in place, including coaching, mentoring, and 360° feedback to improve leadership confidence.
- Be an exemplar anchor employer, growing our people and working with partners to create shared opportunities for development and digital innovation.
- Demonstrate use of platforms like Turas and LearnPro for leadership development and succession tracking.
- Support new staff to complete MAST within two weeks of joining
- Share twice-yearly compliance reports and risk reviews with governance groups
- Establish a clear governance structure to oversee MAST implementation, aligned with national frameworks and local workforce priorities.
- Embed the MAST passport into existing learning systems such as Turas and LearnPro, ensuring seamless access and tracking for staff.
- Refresh corporate and local induction processes
- Track uptake in local, regional and national leadership programmes across all staff level.
- Grow vocational learning pathways in key areas, for instance, Healthcare Support Workers.
- Develop digital learning resources to support personal and professional development.

Impact measures

- Create a senior leader succession plan for the organisation.
- Improve access to development, digital tools and collaborative opportunities through anchor partnerships.
- Increase compliance with mandatory and statutory training requirements by three per cent year on year (2025 baseline of 79 per cent), subject to national guidance, and role specific MAST compliance in line with national guidance.
- Use the national MAST Passport to reduce duplication, improve efficiency, and strengthen training accountability through effective use of existing data systems.
- Increase Personal Development Review (PDR) completion of 60 per cent, with a stretch target of 80 per cent.
- Improve the quality of our induction experience for new starts by measured qualitative feedback.
- Increase levels of iMatter engagement and action planning to meet national targets.
- Percentage of teams demonstrating digital-first approach in workflows, service design or decision-making as shown by tool adoption, automation or staff feedback.

Objective 4 - Nurture and support

We aim to foster a compassionate, inclusive culture where staff feel supported, safe, and able to thrive. Recognising the complexity of their roles, we are committed to improving physical and mental wellbeing, safety, and overall work experience.

Guided by the Scottish Government's vision, our Culture Framework puts people at the heart of everything we do. You can find the link to our Culture framework [here](#). The framework sets out our commitments working to 2028 and beyond and describes the impact our actions will have for our staff and the wider organisation

To ensure our values, Caring, Safe, and Respectful, are embedded in daily practice, we will assess how they are experienced across the organisation through a system-wide questionnaire. Insights will inform leadership development, succession planning, and strengthen the link between values, behaviours, and performance.

We take a whole-system approach to creating psychologically safe, equitable, and learning-focused environments. This work is supported by two key frameworks - Culture, and Staff Health, Safety & Wellbeing (2025–28) - which outline the actions we'll take to improve workforce wellbeing and organisational culture over the next five years.

Our Culture framework focusses on five pillars, which are the cornerstones of our culture and the key drivers of transformation across NHS Ayrshire & Arran.



1. Supportive leadership: We will equip staff with the skills and confidence to lead with compassion through reflective practice, development programmes, and succession planning. We will measure this through training rates, iMatter data, PDR completion, and leadership feedback.



2. Equity and diversity: We will eliminate inequalities and foster inclusion through data analysis, bias training, mentoring, and inclusive recruitment. We will measure this through training uptake, survey feedback, workforce demographics, and RACE equity markers.



3. Just and open: We will promote trust and continuous improvement through respectful communication, Speak Up Advocates, and learning reviews. We will measure this through employee relations metrics, mediation use, iMatter feedback, and reporting of concerns.



4. Mental health and wellbeing: We will embed wellbeing into daily practice with trauma-informed training, psychological safety, and proactive learning. We will measure this through survey data, resource usage, absence trends, and flexible working uptake.



5. Using resources effectively: We will support managers to lead inclusively and manage resources sustainably through training, digital tools, and performance reviews. We will measure this through training evaluations, digital tool usage, PDR rates, survey indicators, and sickness absence trends.

Our Health, Safety and Wellbeing framework will cover five domains:



1. Financial and anchor: As the region's largest employer, we have a unique opportunity to influence financial wellbeing across our workforce and community. Through the three-year Anchor/Community Wealth Building Strategy and our staff financial wellbeing programmes, we will continue to provide education, training, and support.



2. Environmental and nature: We will promote health and wellbeing by supporting active travel, sustainable transport, and access to green spaces, in line with the NHS Ayrshire & Arran Climate Change and Sustainability Framework (2021–2032).



3. Emotional and spiritual wellbeing: Recognising the impact of workplace experiences on emotional and spiritual wellbeing, we will address stress, burnout, trauma, absenteeism, and presenteeism by fostering psychological safety and compassionate leadership.



4. Health and safety at work: Protecting staff health and safety is both a legal and moral duty. Our three-year Health and Safety Plan will drive continuous improvement through a balanced, practical approach.



5. Physical health and lifestyle: We will support physical health and lifestyle choices through targeted interventions that reflect workforce demographics and risks. By promoting healthy behaviours, our staff can also serve as role models for patients, families, and the wider community.

Throughout the 2025–28 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Framework, we will collect and analyse anonymised data from planned interventions to inform a comprehensive workforce health needs assessment. This evidence will guide the design of the 2028–31 framework, ensuring future interventions are targeted for maximum impact and support.

The framework will set out our commitments working to 2028 and beyond and will describe the impact our actions will have for our staff and the wider organisation.

Technological innovation and enhanced digital capability

To achieve our workforce ambitions, we must embrace technological innovation, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), to improve efficiency and sustainability. Success depends on a digitally ready culture, role redesign, and user-friendly systems.

We'll learn from NHSScotland examples, share best practices, and explore opportunities to enhance digital capability across workforce, systems, and processes, aligned with People objectives and future investment plans.

Conclusion

NHS Ayrshire & Arran has made strong progress on the People agenda. In response to the pandemic and financial pressures, we are now prioritising organisational culture, staff safety, and wellbeing over the next five years.

Our 2025–30 strategy focuses on creating a workplace where staff feel engaged, empowered, and supported to deliver their best. The four workforce ambitions provide a balanced framework for action, supporting digital transformation and enhancing every stage of the employee journey. Together, these objectives will shape the staff experience and strengthen our organisation.

Equality Impact Assessment

This Strategy has been subject to NHS Ayrshire & Arran's Equality Impact Assessment process, and the final document will be published on our public website.

Governance and accountability

Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board, through the Staff Governance Committee, is responsible for approving this strategy and overseeing its implementation and evaluation.

The Director for People, Safety and Culture is accountable to the Board for delivering the People Strategy. The People, Safety and culture Directorate will lead the delivery and provide guidance to leaders and managers to ensure safe, effective and compassionate people practices, in line with this strategy, directorate guidance and relevant policies and legislation.

Leaders and managers are responsible for ensuring safe, effective, and compassionate people practices, in line with this strategy, directorate guidance, and relevant policies and legislation.

All staff share responsibility for their own wellbeing, development, and behaviours at work, contributing to the culture and performance of NHS Ayrshire & Arran.

The Chief Executive, Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board, and the Executive Management Team will provide oversight and support. A successful People Strategy will create a clear framework for how NHS Ayrshire & Arran attracts, develops, supports, and retains its workforce while fostering a positive culture.

Progress on the implementation of this strategy will be reported annually.

