

# National Healthcare Uniform Allied Healthcare Professionals

Workforce Consultation – A Case for Change

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## Executive summary

The purpose of this briefing is to provide the background to the National Healthcare Uniforms project, and to launch a vote to establish the preferred base colour for Allied Healthcare Professionals (AHPs) working within the NHS in England.

We have set out a case for change to establish a national uniform for the NHS in England, with five key objectives:

- Improving patient safety
- Professional image
- Value for money
- Diversity
- and sustainability.

National engagement in May 2021 indicated that there was broad support for reducing the current scale and variation of uniforms worn by Nurses, Midwives, AHPs, Pharmacists and Healthcare Scientists (further detail can be found on page 2 of this document; A Case for Change). It is important to note that policies defining if and when a uniform should be worn, will not form part of this national approach, and these decisions will continue to be made locally.

There has been continued engagement with AHPs since the national consultation in May 2021, with a solution being developed through collaboration between NHS Supply Chain, NHS England, AHPs Professional Bodies, including AHP leaders, Provider trusts and Integrated Care Systems (ICS).

AHPs will be invited to express their preferences for the final decision on the base colour which will be complemented by individual colour trims, to identify the unique professions within the AHP community.

To avoid waste, it is intended that the new national uniform will be adopted through a phased approach, over a 2 – 3 year period commencing **Autumn 2023**. It is also intended that uniforms will be transferrable if staff move employer within the NHS, to further reduce waste.

We are aware that there are many clinical settings where it is not deemed appropriate to wear a uniform because of the effect this may have on a patient. It is not the intention of this proposal to change that or determine uniform policy at trust level.

## The case for change

The case for the introduction of a national uniform is strong, with positive impacts for healthcare professionals as well as cost savings. The importance of the uniform design, and the impact it will have cannot be underestimated. The challenges in capturing the thoughts, ideas, concerns, and feelings of all individuals impacted is considerable, however the benefits could be equally as significant.

### Benefits to patients

The benefits to patients of a strong visual uniform identity are clear but the knowledge and understanding of NHS uniforms by patients still has some way to go. Adoption of a clear and consistent national approach will support and accelerate this understanding. The principles of a simpler national uniform colour scheme were reviewed with patients and visitors and received a warm response and widespread support. The specific proposed designs and colours will be reviewed once again with patient groups in the coming months, to ensure they still meet their expectations.

### Benefits of a national approach

- Patients and service users have identified in an independent survey commissioned by NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services, that it is difficult to identify the roles of professionals from a distance and the inconsistency across England adds to the confusion. This standardised approach to uniforms will support an improvement in the identification of staff.
- Improved patient safety – supporting recommendations made in the 2013 Francis Inquiry.
- Development of a high performing, ethical and sustainable supply chain for uniforms, with a single NHS brand across care pathways. Providing consistency across the whole of the NHS in England.
- The ability to plan for, and react to, increased uniform demand such as those experienced during the pandemic.
- Greater recognition and respect for staff from the public and media.
- Enhanced professional appearance.
- Reduction in garment cost.

NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services has held numerous workshops with NHS representatives over the past 3 years and feedback has shown a broad consensus for a national strategy. A series of workstreams were developed from the workshops, supported by each of the national chief professions officers, to ensure that their members can carry out their role safely, effectively and do so with pride, when wearing their uniform.

A national approach will minimise the ability to create bespoke garments, embroidery, and local branding, all of which adds cost, complexity, and increased lead times on delivery of garments. This should be avoided. Uniforms must be well designed, use quality materials and be adaptable for the evolving demands of a modern health service. The detailed design and development of the uniform needs to be agreed, but the case for adopting a national standard healthcare uniform has never been more compelling.

## Establishing a solution for AHPs: consultation and engagement

Over 10,000 AHPs responded to the original consultation, with over 70% being in favour of the adoption of a standard design across the NHS in England.

The preferred design style is a smart scrub, with 93% of respondents agreeing that colour should be the primary method of distinguishing between the various professions in scope. Consultation feedback indicated that maintaining the professional identity of the AHP professions is of utmost importance.

### Continuing the dialogue

Whilst the project experienced some periods of pause due to the pandemic, NHS Supply Chain has maintained the dialogue with representatives from the AHPs to develop the design and colour scheme which best meet the five objectives of the project. As well as discussing the colourways for the smart scrub, AHPs told us that it was important to retain a range of uniform style options, and we have confirmed that polo shirts, shorts and dresses will continue to be available.

A critical objective of the project is to maintain and enhance the professional identity of each profession. This has been the subject of much discussion with the AHP representative bodies, and they have quite rightly and robustly articulated the views and concerns of their professional membership.

### Further engagement

During this process several options for AHPs have been considered, including all AHPs wearing the same uniform in a single colour, clustering some of the AHP professions together to produce a reduced number of colours, use of embroidery to identify the professions within AHPs, and adopting a unique colour per profession. The suitability of these approaches has been assessed through further engagement with AHP representatives, and assessment against the objectives of the consultation. Several of the AHP professional bodies have consulted their members to seek their opinions and feedback. None of the initial approaches were deemed suitable, and further engagement to identify an alternative scheme solution was undertaken.

## The proposal for AHPs

Through a series of meetings and a workshop held in September 2022, the current approach has been developed, where a **single base colour** would be adopted across all AHPs (both registered and support staff), with a **specific contrast trim colour being used to signify each of the individual AHP professions**. This approach has been developed jointly with representatives of AHPs, which has included those from professional bodies, provider trusts, integrated care systems, and regions. The colour contrast trims have yet to be finalised, they will be agreed with the professional bodies and representatives.

## Colour choices

The choice of the base colour has been narrowed down to three, please see images for visual representations of these colours:

- White (this being the existing colour currently worn by many AHPs)
- Light Grey (recognising consultation feedback that some wished to avoid white uniforms)
- Dark Magenta (from the national 'AHP brand' colour palette).

The vote will ask AHPs to rank these three colours in order of preference. It is proposed the colour with the majority preference will be selected as the base colour for AHP uniforms. The choice of contrast trims will be agreed with representatives of the AHPs, which will consider any existing associations of specific colours with AHP professions (e.g., physiotherapy blue, occupational therapy green). As part of the overall project, we will be sourcing both black and navy-blue trousers. Once a decision has been reached for the smart scrub base colour, we will explore the most suitable option for AHPs.

*Illustrations for visual purposes only. Colours may differ slightly.*



## Uniform options also available

Through discussions with representatives from all professions within scope of this project, it has been identified and agreed that there are a variety of roles which operate across multiple professions. To maintain and support the key objectives of reduced confusion and consistency it has been agreed that the following roles will have a shared colourway across all professions:

- Student, Apprentice or Learner
- Healthcare Assistant or Support Worker
- Matron or Modern Matron
- Advanced Practitioner or Consultant - Senior Leadership Roles.

It will be at the discretion of the trust as to which uniform colourway is adopted for these roles, this will allow the trust to choose a uniform that best suit their working practices. For example, a support worker could wear the AHP support colourway, or the shared colourway and it will continue to be a local trust decision as to whether they continue to make these choices available.

## Tell us your preferences: participate in the AHP uniform consultation vote

This briefing launches a vote to decide the preferred base colourway for AHPs in a National Healthcare Uniform across the NHS in England.

The closing date for the vote is **31 January 2023**.

To take part and have your say please visit:

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/AHPColourways/>

An anonymised summary of the responses to this consultation vote will be made available before or alongside any further action. It is the intention of NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services to commence preparatory tendering and contracting activity in parallel with this consultation. However, no commitments or final decisions regarding the preferred approach or design will be made until the results of this consultation are known.

### How we use your data

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