# 2024 NHS STAFF SURVEY
# **GUIDANCE FOR CONTRACTORS**

## NHS STAFF SURVEY COORDINATION CENTRE

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# 1 Introduction

The NHS Staff Survey provides an opportunity for organisations to survey their staff in a consistent and systematic way. This makes it possible to build up a picture of staff experience and, with care, to compare and monitor change over time and to identify variations between different staff groups. Obtaining feedback from NHS staff and taking account of their views and priorities is vital for improving staff experience which is a key contributing factor to driving real service improvements in the NHS.

The NHS Staff Survey aligns with the People Promise, which sets out what NHS staff can expect from their leaders and from each other. There are also two themes that some questions within the survey contribute to: Staff Engagement and Morale.

All NHS trusts in England (foundation trusts, acute and specialist hospital trusts, ambulance service trusts, mental health and learning disability trusts, and community trusts) are required to participate in this survey. Commissioning Support Units, Social Enterprises, Integrated Care Boards (ICB) and other NHS bodies may choose to undertake the NHS Staff Survey on a voluntary basis. This requirement to participate may be subject to change.

**NOTE:** Throughout this guidance document, we will be referring to the guidance for the survey of staff on substantive contracts as the ‘main survey’; while the guidance for the survey for bank only workers will be referred to as the ‘bank survey’. This distinction is only to highlight where there are differences between the approaches for each staff group. Text that is relevant only to bank workers will be highlighted in blue.

# 2 Key changes to the NHS Staff Survey for 2024

Important amendments to the guidance for the 2024 survey are covered below.

## 2.1 Increased limit on results breakdowns

For the breakdown reports, the maximum number of categories permitted in each breakdown has been increased from 24 in 2023 to 50 in 2024 (including any 'other' group).

## 2.2 ESR reporting tool

To assist with the drawing of staff lists, a new ESR reporting tool is being introduced in 2024. This will allow ESR users to draw lists of eligible staff (including bank only workers) via a single dashboard in ESR. For more information, please visit the ESR hub.

## 2.3 Permission to recontact question

To support recruitment for cognitive testing to develop future surveys, a new recontact question is being added to the 2024 survey (including the survey for bank only workers).

This question is only being included in the online version of the survey, not for staff completing via the paper questionnaire. This question is separated into two parts, with the first part asking if respondents would like to be recontacted and the second part allowing respondents to enter their name and email address where they wish to be contacted.

The specific question wording is outlined later in this document.

# 3 Summary of minimum survey requirements

All participating organisations must follow a standard methodology as described in these guidance notes and must fulfil the following minimum requirements.

**Note:** these requirements also apply to the bank version of the survey where used, unless otherwise specified.

- All participating organisations must appoint a survey contractor.
- All participating organisations are required to conduct a full census survey (main survey).
- If any organisation has at least 200 eligible bank only workers on their staff list as of 1 September 2024, they are required to conduct a census of eligible bank only workers (bank survey). The tailored bank questionnaire will be used to survey bank only workers and the survey will be online only.
- Online and paper questionnaires must contain the full set of mandatory questions (see section 9 for more details on the questionnaire).
- The survey must be distributed to eligible staff using a unique staff ID or login.
- Six reminders (if email invitation mode) or two reminders (if paper invitation mode) must be sent to non-responding staff (see section 7 for more details on the invitations).
- Organisations and contractors must ensure that their survey has a fieldwork period of at least eight weeks. All staff must therefore receive their questionnaire by **7 October 2024** at the latest.
- The closing date for the survey is **Friday, 29 November 2024.**

Please note that it is the responsibility of each participating organisation to comply with their responsibilities under the UK GDPR. The legal basis for processing personal data for the NHS Staff Survey is “for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller” (Article 6(1)(e)). The legal basis for processing sensitive personal data (e.g. ethnicity) is ‘covered in article 9(2)(h) under ‘the management of health or social care systems’.

# 4 Survey timetable

Please note, contractors may set earlier deadlines for organisations than those set out below. Contractors should liaise with the participating organisations regarding any such requirements.

| Date (2024) | Step of survey implementation | By whom? | Section in guidance |
|---|---|---|---|
| By 2 August | Appoint a survey contractor to administer the survey.<br><br>Confirm whether the organisation will be surveying eligible bank workers.<br><br>Choose at least two individuals within the organisation who will take responsibility for the survey.<br><br>**Complete the form sent by the Survey Coordination Centre to confirm your appointed contractor, bank survey participation and contact details.** | Organisation | N/A |
| By 9 August | Contractors must send their paper version of the questionnaire and a test link for the online survey to the Survey Coordination Centre for approval (including for the bank version if appropriate). | Contractor | 9.1 |
| By 16 August | Make sure your staff lists are comprehensive and up to date. If email invitations are being sent to staff, you must ensure staff email addresses are valid and up to date. | Organisation | N/A |
| By 23 August | Decide on the precise content of the questionnaire and communicate this to your contractor (all organisations must include the mandatory questions). | Organisation | 9 |
| By 23 August | Decide on what internal breakdowns (e.g. directorate, department or location) you will use, and make sure this information is included in the staff list. | Organisation | N/A |
| By 23 August | Organisations agree with their contractor which survey delivery mode (email, paper or mixed mode) is to be used, and whether SMS reminders will be used for bank only workers. | Organisation and contractor | 6 |
| By 30 August | Inform the post room(s) of the forthcoming questionnaire distribution and reminders, ensuring that they are aware of the importance of the survey and the likely volume of post. | Organisation | 10 |
| 1 September | Draw your staff list and provide required information to contractor. | Organisation | N/A |
| 2 September | Provide a final list of participating organisations to the Survey Coordination Centre, including which organisations will be surveying bank only workers. Note: the SCC will require regular updates on participating organisations prior to this final deadline. | Contractor | N/A |

| Date (2024) | Step of survey implementation | By whom? | Section in guidance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 19 September | Contractors submit first weekly monitoring data sheet. These should then be submitted every Thursday for the remainder of fieldwork. | Contractor | 10.4 |
| By 20 September | Contractors should aim to submit all samples to the Survey Coordination Centre by this date. | Contractor | N/A |
| By 30 September | Pre-approach letter/email. If you are using a pre-approach letter or email, send these to staff one to two weeks before the first mailing. | Contractor | 7 |
| | **Paper invitations/reminders**<br>The following dates are for the mandatory fieldwork period. **It is strongly recommended that fieldwork is started earlier.** | Contractor | 7 and 10 |
| By 7 October | Initial mailing (including questionnaire except for bank) | | |
| 3 days after initial mailing | Optional SMS notification (bank only) | | |
| 2-3 weeks after initial mailing | First reminder | | |
| 2-3 weeks after first reminder | Second reminder (including questionnaire except for bank) | | |
| 3 days after second reminder | Optional SMS notification (bank only) | | |
| | **Email invitations/reminders**<br>The following dates are for the mandatory fieldwork period. **It is strongly recommended that fieldwork is started earlier.** Time between mailings must always adhere to that specified in section 10. | Contractor | 7 and 10 |
| By 7 October | Initial email invitation | | |
| 1 day after initial email invitation | Optional SMS message (bank only) | | |
| By 21 October | First email reminder | | |
| By 28 October | Second email reminder | | |
| By 4 November | Third email reminder | | |
| By 11 November | Fourth email reminder | | |
| By 18 November | Fifth email reminder | | |
| By 25 November | Sixth (final) email reminder | | |
| 1 day after sixth email reminder | Optional SMS message (bank only) | | |

| Date (2024) | Step of survey implementation | By whom? | Section in guidance |
|---|---|---|---|
| By 11 October | Contractors to submit the list of organisations they require historical data for to the Survey Coordination Centre. | Contractor | 11 |
| By 18 October | Survey Coordination Centre to share calculations for People Promise element and theme scores and sub-scores with contractors. | Survey Coordination Centre | N/A |
| 18 October | Contractors to submit an interim data submission of all online and paper responses received to date. | Contractor | N/A |
| By 25 October | Contractors to submit permissions for receiving historical data to the Survey Coordination Centre. | Contractor | 11 |
| By 22 November | Deadline for submitting list of leavers/ineligible to contractor | Organisation | 15.3 |
| 29 November | **Close of fieldwork** | Contractor | N/A |
| 6 December | **Data submitted to Survey Coordination Centre** (excluding free text data) | Contractor | N/A |
| 10 January 2025 | Free text data submitted to Survey Coordination Centre | Contractor | N/A |

# 5 Mandatory minimum fieldwork period

To increase the quality of data provided to organisations, a minimum mandatory fieldwork period exists.

The minimum fieldwork period for the survey is **eight weeks. Fieldwork closes on 29 November 2024; therefore, initial mailings must be sent by 7 October 2024.**

Survey contractors should work with participating organisations to ensure they receive the staff lists early enough to meet this requirement, allowing time for the necessary sample checks by contractors and the Survey Coordination Centre.

Organisations must ensure that questionnaires are distributed to staff by the start of the mandatory minimum fieldwork period.

**Note: it is strongly recommended that organisations start their survey earlier in order to have a fieldwork period longer than eight weeks.**

# 6 Survey delivery and modes of distribution

Organisations participating in the survey are able to invite staff to take part by either email invitation or by paper invitation.

For staff who do not have an email address, they must be invited to participate via a paper invitation which also includes a paper version of the questionnaire. The bank survey does not include a paper questionnaire but bank only workers may still be invited to participate via a paper invitation.

Regardless of invitation mode (email or paper), staff must be provided with a personalised link or QR code for the online survey to enable their participation online.

**Bank only workers:**

- The questionnaire for bank only workers will be online only.
- Invitation/ reminder mode can be either a paper letter with a QR code and link/login to the online survey; or email invitations.
- Where mobile phone numbers are provided in the staff list for bank only workers, two SMS messages will be sent alongside the first and final contact attempt.
- Organisations should only provide mobile numbers for bank only workers if they want SMS notifications to be sent.

For eligible bank only workers who do not have a work email address…..

Personal email addresses, home postal addresses and personal mobile phone numbers can be used so long as they are up to date and have been provided by the bank only worker for work purposes. In these circumstances, specific consent for the use of personal contact details for the survey is not required.

## 6.1 Criteria for email distribution of an online survey

To meet the criteria to invite staff via email to complete the online survey, the organisation **must**:

- Have accurate, up-to-date and active organisation email addresses (for example an nhs.net or organisation specific email address) for all staff groups to whom they intend to administer the online survey (main survey).
- For the bank survey, it is permissible to use personal email addresses if they have been provided by the bank only worker for work purposes.
- Be confident that all staff access these email addresses on a regular basis and therefore it is feasible to expect to get responses to the survey from these email addresses.
- Allow staff time to complete the survey in work time on a work computer (for staff who wish to do this).
- Be able to implement a communications plan to ensure that staff are aware that they will be receiving a link to the survey by email. Organisations inviting bank only workers to participate by email should make particular efforts to publicise the survey

through a variety of routes, to ensure bank only workers are aware that they are eligible to take part and will be receiving an invitation by email.

- Where it will help encourage response amongst specific staff groups who do not regularly access work email addresses and who have provided personal email addresses which they use for work purposes, these personal addresses can be used to deliver survey invitations to staff, so long as they are known to be up-to-date.
- Commit to providing their contractor with updates to email addresses throughout fieldwork.
- Send written confirmation to their contractor, signed by their survey lead, that they meet all the above eligibility criteria for running an online survey.

Eligible staff who are on temporary leave (e.g. staff on maternity/parental leave, staff on long-term sickness leave, and suspended staff) must have a personal email in order to be sent an online survey (provided that they have provided this email address for work purposes).

- Work email addresses can only be used for staff on temporary leave where:
  - the staff member has agreed to NHS Staff Survey materials being sent to their work email in advance, and
  - the staff member is notified in advance that the NHS Staff Survey will be sent to their work email (including the time frames of when they should be expecting it).

## 6.2 Staff who have never received a survey email.

Contractors are required to provide the Survey Coordination Centre with data throughout the fieldwork period identifying the number of staff who have so far never received a survey email (staff coded as 'UN' – see section **10.4** for further details). The Survey Coordination Centre will monitor this data to identify organisations that have a high level of undelivered surveys. Data quality can be substantially impacted by an organisation having a high proportion of staff who never receive a survey email. Therefore, organisations must act to resolve this issue by providing their contractor with updated email addresses.

## 6.3 (Bank only) SMS text notifications

SMS text notifications can be sent to bank only workers, to supplement the email or paper delivery of the survey invitations and reminders. This has been found to improve response rates.

These text messages will be sent at two points:

1. immediately after the initial survey invitation;
2. and immediately after the final reminder.

The SMS element of the contact approach is optional. However, if a mobile phone number is included in the staff list provided to a contractor, it will be used for sending SMS text reminders. Organisations should not provide mobile phone numbers for bank only workers if they do not want them to receive the SMS text reminders.

*SMS text notification requirements:*

- If a mobile phone number is included in the staff list for bank only workers, SMS text notifications will be sent;
- Organisations are responsible for ensuring that mobile phone numbers are valid and up to date;
- Organisations are responsible for ensuring they have permission to use mobile phone numbers for work purposes;
- Must include a personalised link to the online survey;
- Must **not** be the sole mode of delivering the survey invitation;

## 6.4 Switching survey modes (main survey only)

For staff who do not have a valid email address (as provided in the staff list) contractors must ensure that staff receiving a paper invitation can opt to complete the survey online instead if they choose. In the paper invitation that accompanies the paper questionnaire, staff must be provided with a personalised link and QR code to the survey.

If a staff member takes part in the survey through both methods (i.e. paper and online), the first response should be used and their second response should be treated as a duplication.

Please note that organisations who wish to provide the option for staff members receiving an online survey to switch to paper completion have been advised to speak to their contractor to see if it might be possible.

## 6.5 ESR reporting tool

As described earlier in this guidance, a new ESR reporting tool is being introduced in 2024 to assist with the drawing of staff lists. This optional tool will allow ESR users to draw lists of eligible staff (including bank only workers) via a single dashboard in ESR.

The tool is available within the NHS National Returns Dashboard, which can be accessed through ESR Operational Reporting (commonly known as ESR Business Intelligence or ESR BI). The NHS National Returns Dashboard is only available to ESR BI Administration users and HR Administration and Management users. For more information, please visit the ESR hub.

# 7 Covering emails / letter and reminders

## 7.1 Covering and reminder emails/letters

Templates are provided for invitation and reminder emails and letters relating to the survey. Each member of staff should receive all communications by the same mode (email or paper). Please note that the NHS logo in the top left of the letters can be removed if it is repeated in the logo for the organisation.

**Bank only workers:** The bank version of the questionnaire is only available online and not in paper format. Bank only workers can be contacted either via email invitations/reminders or via paper letters/reminders including a QR code and link/ login linking to the survey. As above, each bank only worker should receive all communications by the same mode (email or paper). In addition to the invitations and reminders, two text/SMS notifications can be sent. This is to improve awareness and contact rates amongst bank only workers (see below).

There are eight email templates that have been created for the online survey:

- A pre-approach email (optional): this should be sent out one to two weeks before the first mailing to inform people that they will be taking part in the survey.
- An initial email, which will be sent out with a survey link.
- Six reminder emails to be sent with a survey link to non-respondents.
    - The first of these should be sent two weeks or more after the initial email. This gap allows time for the correction of email addresses found to be incorrect through bounce backs received following the initial email.
    - The following reminders should be spaced at least a week apart.
    - The final email reminder should be sent on 25 November at the latest.

There are four letter templates:

- An optional pre-approach letter
- A covering letter
- A first reminder letter
- A second reminder letter

Note: paper letters should have a minimum font size of 11.

For bank only workers only, there are two optional additional text/SMS notification messages:

- An initial notification message
- A final reminder message

The text for these covering and reminder emails/ letters (and texts) has been prepared by the Survey Coordination Centre and is downloadable from the survey documents page of the Survey Coordination Centre website https://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/survey-documents/.

Certain parts of these emails/letters require or allow editing by organisations and/or contractors. These are indicated on the template letters in blue text. A contractor helpline number and email address must be inserted in the correct location. In addition, it is possible to:

- Use personal salutations in covering emails/letters - i.e., addressing staff by name (‘Dear Dr Smith’). Please note that the decision to use personal salutations should only be made if the organisation is certain that ESR records are complete and allow for the use of staff names without error.

- Add a short paragraph to explain how the organisation will use the results to track progress towards the People Promise and how it has used results from previous surveys. It is very important the organisation publicises the action it will or has taken; otherwise staff cannot appreciate how the survey can improve working conditions. On the paper invitation, this should not be so long as to push the QR code onto page two and thus we recommend using around three lines.
- Add information about incentives, if applicable.

**Bank only workers:** Note that the text of emails/letters must be the same for all staff at an organisation, including bank only workers. The only difference is that the letters for bank only workers will not include reference to an enclosed paper questionnaire.

All letters should be printed on paper headed with the NHS and participating organisation logos and have a minimum font size of 11. The inclusion of the organisation logo assures staff that the organisation is supporting the survey and provides clarity for any staff working in multiple organisations about which organisation they should be answering questions about. Please note that the NHS logo in the top left of the letters can be removed if it is repeated in the logo for the organisation.

A first-class reply-paid envelope must be sent with every paper questionnaire. These envelopes should be printed with the address to which questionnaires are to be returned (i.e., that of the survey contractor).

It is a requirement that all paper used in the publication of the NHS Staff Surveys, including questionnaires and corresponding letters, must conform to government requirements for the use of 100% recycled paper with a minimum post-consumer waste content of 80%. It is further recommended that the paper used is uncoated and of standard A4 size (except for the questionnaires, which should be printed as A4 booklets on A3 paper).

Emails should be as concise as possible. Contractors may use links within the body of the email to provide further information for staff.

## 7.2 Email subject lines

Organisations and contractors are encouraged to carefully consider the subject lines used for emails which are sent to staff. It is important to make sure that these are easily understood by staff. Possible subject lines include: *2024 NHS Staff Survey*, or *[Organisation Name] Staff Survey*, or *NHS Staff Survey: Invitation*, or *NHS Staff Survey 2024.* Similarly, it is important to consider the email address from which the survey gets sent to staff, as if this does not look relevant, some staff may not open the email.

Consideration should be given to the possible impact of subject lines and email addresses on the likelihood of emails getting stopped by spam filters and firewalls. For example, if the inclusion of 'NHS' in the subject line or from address is likely to prevent delivery, contractors may use *2024 Staff Survey* instead. Contractors should take advice from NHS England when emails are checked prior to mailing. (see Section 8.5)

Organisations may also wish to notify staff of the subject line and sender email address through internal communications, so that staff know what to look out for.

## 7.3 Chief Exec emails/letters

In previous years, some organisations have opted to include an additional email/letter from their CEO or other high-level management. Such communications can be beneficial if they emphasise the importance of the staff survey to the organisation's management and discuss the impact the survey can have. If such a letter or email is to be used, the following guidance must be followed:

- If a chief executive email is sent along with survey mailings, this must be accessed via a link embedded in the official survey email. It is not acceptable for the chief executive letter to be added to the bottom of the official email, as this makes the email too long. It is also not acceptable for the letter to be included as an attachment to the official survey emails, as including attachments increases the file size of the email and risks reducing email deliverability.

If a chief executive letter is sent along with paper survey mailings, the envelope must be packed such that the official covering letter is seen first when the respondent opens the envelope.

# 8 Supporting staff to take part

It is essential that all eligible staff, of all types and in all roles, have a fair and equal opportunity to have their say. Providing this opportunity to all eligible staff will ensure that the results are representative of the workforce and are therefore reliable. Organisations must ensure that the delivery of the survey and all internal communications around the survey seek to support and encourage as many staff as possible to take part. Aiming for a high response rate from all staff groups is a good way to ensure that the results are of high quality and value.

Please note, however, that a high response rate is not in itself an indicator of good organisational performance, and organisations are strongly advised against reporting a high response rate as a “good result”. While organisations should do what they can to support engagement with the survey, given ongoing pressures in the NHS, there should be no pressure on HR or OD teams to commit resource which may be better used elsewhere, merely to drive higher response rates.

Some information about increasing response rates is provided below, and further resources are available on the NHS Staff Survey website at www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/survey-documents/.

## 8.1 Promoting the survey

The best way to improve response is to promote the survey to staff through an organisation’s own internal communications and engagement channels. Good communications can raise awareness and encourage participation, by explaining the value that the organisation and the NHS get from the data collected, how the data is used to improve staff experience and by reassuring staff about confidentiality and how their responses will be used. This will be particularly important for bank only workers.

To help support organisations to promote the survey, NHS England’s Staff Engagement team have produced a communications toolkit, which includes posters, social media cards, key messages and other assets. The 2024 toolkit will be available on the NHS Staff Survey website from around the end of July.

## 8.2 Confidentiality concerns

One of the key barriers to achieving good response rates is concern among staff members about the confidentiality of the survey and the need for the staff member to be identified via a personal login or a bar code on the paper questionnaire. It is therefore recommended that all organisations include information about the following in their communications to staff, and that managers are encouraged to discuss this with staff using the template responses below:

> **Q: If I complete the survey, will my response be kept confidential?**
>
> **A:** Yes. You will submit your response, or post your questionnaire, directly to the independent survey contractor appointed by <*insert name of your organisation*>. <*Insert name of your organisation*> does not have access to the responses/questionnaires or to any personal data (including names and addresses). The report that is sent back to <*insert name of your organisation*> presents the survey findings in summary form and does not reveal the identity of the staff surveyed.
>
> **Q: Why does the survey need a personalised login / identification number / bar code / QR code?**
>
> **A:** Survey contractors use the personalised logins / ID numbers to ensure that reminder emails or letters are only sent to staff who have not already completed the survey.

As staff send their responses directly to an external survey contractor, there is no way that anyone in an NHS trust/organisation will be able to link data with a particular individual. Organisations will only receive reports of the summary survey findings. Note that if a paper questionnaire is returned with the ID number obscured or removed, data cannot be included in the survey findings as, without the ID number, it is not possible to assign data to the correct NHS trust/organisation.

For further information, see the FAQs at https://www.nhsstaffsurveys.com/faqs/. You can also find further information on confidentiality in the documents on the NHS Staff Survey website.

## 8.3 Safeguarding

It is imperative that contractors are aware of, and adhere, to the safeguarding protocols of the organisations they work with.

## 8.4 Incentives

Some organisations use incentive schemes to encourage staff to complete the survey. The use of such schemes is at the discretion of the organisation. However, organisations must fully consider the possible risks of any incentive scheme prior to implementation.

Most importantly, if an organisation wishes to use an incentive scheme linked to survey completion by specific members of staff (e.g. a prize draw that rewards a specific member of staff for completing the survey), they should be aware this can undermine the perceived confidentiality and anonymity of the survey, as it can be taken to suggest that the organisation has access to the survey data. Organisations that are providing an incentive scheme must ensure that any communication around such schemes reassure staff that their responses are confidential and anonymous i.e., that organisations use an external contractor to administer the survey, all surveys are returned directly to the external contractor and therefore that the survey responses would be considered anonymous in relation to the organisation.

Please note, prize draws **MUST** be handled by the contractor, and it is recommended that communications to staff note that this is the case. Given that they can be resource intensive for contractors to administer, we have advised participating organisations that contractors may opt to impose restrictions on the prize draws to focus on survey delivery. Note that we have not been specific about the restrictions that could be imposed, as that is for a contractor to decide. However, we have noted that restrictions may include, but are not limited to, a maximum number of prizes or a limit on the number of draws.

A more inclusive alternative to incentive schemes that identify specific respondents is to use a scheme that rewards groups, rather than individuals. For example, incentives could be given to departments, or a ‘thank you’ could be given to all staff, such as a free drink or snack, based on completing the staff survey.

Contractors may add a question at the end of the online survey asking whether staff consent to taking part in any prize draw offered as part of an incentive scheme. This question should only be asked:

- For staff whose organisation is offering a prize draw, details of which are included in the optional paragraph on the covering letter/email, so staff are aware.
- After the completion and submission of the main survey and any local questions. Staff must not be able to backtrack and change answers or ‘unsubmit’ their response on sight of this question.

For staff completing the survey online, this will allow contractors to select prize draw winners from those providing consent, rather than having to make separate contact with winners subsequently and pass their details to the organisation for the distribution of prizes. However, no equivalent consent question will be included on paper questionnaires. If prize winners are to be selected from staff completing the survey on paper, then the contractor will need to contact the individual separately to seek consent to pass their details to the organisation for distribution of prizes.

The prize draw question should not mandate a response (i.e. it can be skipped) and the wording for this question should be as follows:

Thank you for completing the NHS Staff Survey.

As you may be aware, [organisation name] is running an incentive scheme as part of this year's staff survey as a thank you to staff who took part in the survey. The prizes are provided by your organisation directly.

The selection of the winners is made randomly by [contractor], independently of your organisation. Those who win a prize will have their contact details provided to their organisation in order for the prize to be distributed.

**All survey responses are strictly confidential and at no point will anyone within your organisation have access to them, or be able to identify you from your responses.**

If you wish to be entered into the draw to have a chance at winning one of the prizes available, please consent below.

1. No, I do not consent to be included in the prize draw.
2. Yes, I consent to be included in the prize draw.

## 8.5 Online surveys: email deliverability

One of the key factors in supporting all eligible people to take part if running an online or mixed mode survey is ensuring that the survey emails are received by staff.

**Email accuracy**

It is vital that organisations ensure the accuracy of email addresses they provide to their contractor for use in the survey mailings, and make sure that only active email addresses are provided. This checking process should be started in good time before the survey commences and should be repeated each year, even if an online survey was run the previous year.

Following the initial survey mailing, there will be a two-week gap before the first reminder is sent out. Organisations must use this time to provide correct email addresses to their contractor for any staff members whose email addresses did not work in the initial mailing (i.e., a bounce back was received).

Please note, when survey email addresses are updated, it is strongly recommended that the organisation also updates this in their ESR (Electronic Staff Record) system. This can save a substantial amount of time in future surveys and help with other organisation activity such as the National Quarterly Pulse Survey.

**Mailbox space**

Staff should be encouraged through internal communications to ensure they have sufficient space in their mailboxes to receive the email. This is likely to be particularly an issue for groups of staff who do not use their email accounts as part of their day-to-day work.

**Firewalls and spam filters**

To avoid survey mailings being stopped by firewalls and spam filters, organisations should liaise with their IT departments about these prior to the survey and make all possible efforts to ensure the survey emails are allowed through. To help with this process, it is recommended that contractors confirm relevant details including the email subject lines and sender email address that will be used with all organisations prior to the start of the survey.

Contractors must liaise with NHS England directly, prior to their first mailing, to ensure that survey mailings will be accepted by NHS servers. Details of how to do this will be provided to contractors in August by the Survey Coordination Centre.

# 9 The questionnaire

For 2024 there are two versions of the survey questionnaire:

1. Main questionnaire (online/paper) - for staff on substantive or fixed term contracts
2. Bank questionnaire (online only) – for bank only workers

Each questionnaire has a set of mandatory questions, which all participating organisations must include, in full, in their questionnaire. There are also two optional free text questions on the bank questionnaire. Organisations may also include additional local questions in either questionnaire (optional). These should be discussed and agreed with their contractor.

Introducing too many questions may have an adverse impact on response rates, therefore organisations should limit the number of additional questions so as not to make the questionnaire too long.

## 9.1 Online questionnaire specifications

All organisations must have an online version of their questionnaire. The bank version is online only. If the organisation is sending paper invitations to staff, covering letters must provide a personalised link and QR code that allows the staff member to complete online if they prefer.

All staff within an organisation should complete an identical online survey (main or bank). However, the survey should employ adaptive technology to provide optimum user experience depending on screen size.

Online surveys must remain open to staff throughout the fieldwork period if the staff member is eligible and has not responded, even in cases where a response is very unlikely (i.e. someone has left an organisation and further mailings have been stopped).

All contractors must provide the Survey Coordination Centre with a test link to their online survey by **9 August 2024**. This applies to both versions of the survey (main and bank). Contractors must receive approval of their online questionnaire(s) from the Survey Coordination Centre before survey mail-out including approval of any adaptive versions.

Note that while the Survey Coordination Centre will check and approve the online questionnaire prior to fieldwork, survey contractors are responsible for putting checks in place which will identify any issues which occur with the online data collection during fieldwork. These checks should start as early as possible in the fieldwork period, and any concerns must be flagged to the Survey Coordination Centre immediately. Checks should be designed to flag unusual patterns of response during fieldwork that might indicate issues with how the survey questions are presented to respondents. This might include checks on the level of missing data (by question/response options) or unusual patterns of response.

Online questionnaires should generally follow the paper questionnaire formatting, allowing for ease of completion on screen. The bank version should have a similar look and feel to the main questionnaire and include all the information in the questionnaire specification produced by the Survey Coordination Centre.

For both the versions of the questionnaire, contractors must adhere to the following requirements:

- The appearance of the questionnaire is very important. It should appear neat and professional. Colours should match those used in the paper questionnaire.
    - The main colour used in the online questionnaire is Pantone Process Blue C, or R:0 G:145 B:201. The light blue used for the bands at the top of each question is a 25% tint of the same colour (Pantone 290 C, R:196 G:216 B:226).

- The front page should contain all the information featured on the paper questionnaire /bank survey specification (except for the information on returning the questionnaire), including the NHS logo.
    - Contractors need to include their email and phone helpline contact details.
    - Any technical support information should direct queries to the contractor, as the Survey Coordination Centre cannot assist with technical queries (e.g. passwords, new links). The contractor's support email and phone number should appear on the front page, and at least one of these should appear at the bottom of every other page of the online questionnaire.
- It is not permitted for contractors to include their own organisation's logo anywhere on the survey.
- Fonts should be easy to read and consistently sized, with no special formatting other than that featured in the paper questionnaire. Use of underline, bold and italics must match that in the paper questionnaire (main) or the bank survey template provided.
- Written translations of the survey should not be provided by survey contractors. Please see the note on questionnaire translations on the NHS Staff Survey website for more information.
- The buttons allowing respondents to move between pages should be sufficiently obvious.
- All response options and headings must be included online.
- Response options should appear in the same order as presented in the paper questionnaire / bank survey specification and the same layout, unless adapting for a smaller screen size.
- Response options should be evenly spaced, with no category given more space than others.
- Response radio buttons/tick boxes should be sized with the font – i.e., if a large-print font is selected, the response buttons/boxes should also be large-print.
- If possible, the area around the radio buttons/tick boxes should be "clickable", so that the response option is selected if the respondent clicks slightly outside the button/box.
- Once the questionnaire is published, the Survey Coordination Centre will provide further instructions on where to insert page breaks so that there is consistency amongst all contractors.
- For questions that feature the "Other" response with a response text box, ensure that the text box is logically placed with the "Other" response selection, so respondents understand the two items go together. The Survey Coordination Centre will provide guidance after the questionnaire is published regarding the uniform execution of "Other" response options.
- Any notes featured in the paper questionnaire (e.g. "*Please include paid overtime, bank shifts, and additional paid hours on-call"* on question 10b) should be similarly placed in the online version. This applies to any notes included in the bank survey template - they too must be included in the bank online survey.
- Online questionnaires should utilise automatic routing, so that respondents are automatically directed to the next relevant question where the paper questionnaire includes instructions to do so. If automatic routing is not used, then the text and placement of routing instructions must match that featured in the paper questionnaire. **Contractors must indicate on submission of test surveys where automatic routing has been used.**

- Respondents must be able to leave questions blank.
- Respondents must be able to go back to previous pages while in the process of completing the questionnaire.
- The online survey functionality must enable users to pause/exit the survey and then return/continue to complete it later (up until the point of submission, when they can no longer change their response).
- Online questionnaires need to be hosted on HTTPS-enabled websites.
- The permission to recontact question and prize draw opt-in question must appear after a respondent has submitted their survey responses. The respondent must not be able to go back and amend survey responses on presentation of the recontact question and prize draw opt-in question.

All efforts should be made to meet the above requirements. If any of these are not possible within the limitations of contractors' survey software it is essential that contractors discuss this with the Survey Coordination Centre and agree on a suitable approach in good time before the beginning of fieldwork.

## 9.2 Paper questionnaire requirements

- The core questionnaire published on the NHS Staff Surveys website must be used without alteration for all organisations.
- It must be printed in colour:
  - The main colour used in the questionnaire is Pantone Process Blue C, or R:0 G:145 B:201. The light blue used for the bands at the top of each question is a 25% tint of the same colour (Pantone 290 C, R:196 G:216 B:226).
- Length should be limited to a maximum of 16 A4 sides (recommended is 12).
- Any local questions should be designed on separate pages and added to the end of the pages of the PDF document before printing to form a single document.
- Questionnaires should be printed as A4 booklets.
- It is a requirement that all paper used in the publication of the NHS Staff Surveys, including questionnaires and corresponding letters, must conform to government requirements for the use of 100% recycled paper with a minimum post-consumer waste content of 80%.
- It is further recommended that the paper used is uncoated and of standard A4 size (except for the questionnaires, which should be printed as A4 booklets on A3 paper).
- All selected staff within an organisation should receive an identical questionnaire, in terms of content and format. The only difference between questionnaires distributed to different individuals should be in the ID number assigned during the sampling procedure.

**It is crucial that contractors receive signoff from the Survey Coordination Centre before fieldwork begins, as the questionnaire cannot be used without approval.**

## 9.3 Envelopes

Contractors must use either C4 or C5 envelopes to post paper questionnaires.

A concise printed message on the envelope is permitted to identify that it contains a staff survey.

## 9.4 Permission to recontact question

As outlined earlier in this document, to support recruitment for cognitive testing to develop future surveys, a recontact question is being added to the 2024 survey (including the survey for bank only workers).

This question is only being included in the online version of the survey, not for staff completing via the paper questionnaire. This question is separated into two parts, with the first part asking if respondents would like to be recontacted and the second part allowing respondents to enter their name and email address where they wish to be contacted.

The recontact question should not mandate a response (i.e. it can be skipped). This question should be included after the completion and submission of the core survey and any local questions but before the prize draw consent question (if the organisation has opted to run an incentive scheme). As with the prize draw consent question, staff must not be able to backtrack and change answers or 'unsubmit' their response on sight of this question.

The wording for the recontact question can be seen below:

<u>Part A:</u>

The [Survey name] is coordinated on behalf of NHS England by the NHS Staff Survey Coordination Centre, based at Picker, an independent health and social care charity. As part of the ongoing development of the survey, the NHS Staff Survey Coordination Centre may wish to conduct research to test and develop new survey questions.

Would you like to hear about any opportunities to get involved in testing and developing the questions used in the NHS Staff Survey?

*If you select yes, you will be asked to provide your name and email address. By providing your name and email address, you agree to these details being shared with the NHS Staff Survey Coordination Centre at Picker only. Your contact details will not be shared with your organisation, NHS England, or any other third party, and will not be linked to any of the responses you have given in this survey. The NHS Staff Survey Coordination Centre will retain your contact details for a maximum of 12 months and will not use them for any purpose other than to let you know about opportunities to help with the development of the survey questions.*

1. Yes
2. No

<u>Part B [Shown if respondents answer Yes for Part A]:</u>

Please provide your name and email address below.

- Name:
- Email address:

# 10 Distribution and receipt of questionnaires, and prompting non-respondents

Organisations sending both email and paper invitations to staff should distribute the first email and paper mailings as close to each other as possible, and they must be distributed to staff by the first day of the mandatory fieldwork period.

Bank only workers: personal email addresses, home postal addresses and personal mobile phone numbers can be used for the survey so long as they are up to date and have been provided by the bank only worker for work purposes. In these circumstances, specific consent for the use of personal contact details is not required.

**Emails**

Survey emails should be sent to staff members' organisational email addresses where possible, but it is acceptable for non-work email addresses to be used, if necessary, for example for staff on parental leave or long-term sickness leave, provided that staff have provided this email address for work purposes.

**Paper**

Survey documents should be distributed to employees with permanent work addresses using the internal post (or other internal distribution mechanisms). Where staff members do not have permanent work addresses, or where there is no primary address (e.g. staff that work across multiple sites), survey documents may be distributed to home addresses. When sending staff survey documents to home addresses, only the name and home address of staff should be displayed. It is the participating organisation's responsibility to ensure that no reference to employees' job title or work location is included in such address fields, i.e., to ensure that such information is not displayed on envelopes posted to home addresses.

Please note that a copy of the questionnaire and reply-paid envelope must be sent with the initial covering letter and the second reminder letter. Each questionnaire must be marked with a unique identification number, in order to monitor response and target reminders.

It is recognised that many organisations are based in multiple locations, each with its own post room, and in these cases, it is preferable that survey packs be arranged into separate batches for the separate locations. It is the responsibility of organisations to ensure the contractor has sufficient information (provided with the staff list) to enable them to do this.

Post room(s) play a crucial part in the internal distribution of paper questionnaires and reminders. Therefore, it is important that organisations inform their post room(s) that their workload will increase over the survey period and give them good notice of the dates they will receive each survey mailing.

In previous years, the organisations with the best response rates had survey leads within the organisations who took ownership of the distribution process themselves and kept in close contact with the post room staff, to ensure that distribution went smoothly and according to timetable.

## 10.1 Contractor helplines

All contractors running the NHS Staff Survey are required to provide an email and phone helpline, for staff queries during the fieldwork period. The telephone helpline will, at a minimum, need to be available to staff between 9am – 5pm, Monday-Friday. During hours when the phone line is not available, a voice message should be set in place, to advise staff about the hours when the helpline is contactable.

The contact details for both contractor helplines (i.e. email address and phone number) need to be provided with all types of questionnaires (for paper and online).

## 10.2 Distribution timing

Please see the timetable in section **4** for the latest dates by which staff must **receive** email and paper surveys and reminders (and text messages for bank only workers). All surveys **must** be distributed to staff by the first day of the mandatory fieldwork period.

Please note, for staff members who explicitly opt out of the survey, were included in error as they were ineligible for the survey on 1 September, or who leave the organisation or become otherwise uncontactable during fieldwork, no more reminders should be sent. This applies to both paper and email mailings

All organisations are required to have a minimum fieldwork period of eight weeks, but it is strongly recommended that a longer fieldwork period is used, to increase response rates, representativeness and comparability. Please see section **5** for more details. Any organisations that believe they may struggle to meet the mandatory minimum fieldwork period should contact the Survey Coordination Centre as soon as possible.

## 10.3 Taking receipt of completed questionnaires

**Online responses**

Data from online responses should be automatically logged, including the date of response.

**Paper questionnaires**

Each paper questionnaire should be marked with a return address to which staff should send their completed questionnaires. This must be the address of the survey contractor.

The contractor should log the return of each paper questionnaire and online response received according to its unique ID number and the date when it was received.

If the ID number on a paper questionnaire has been removed or made illegible, this questionnaire should not be included in the data transferred to the Survey Coordination Centre.

## 10.4 Recording responses: outcome codes

Outcome codes must be used to record the different types of response and non-response outcomes, some of which will need to be completed at the close of the survey. When data is submitted to the Survey Coordination Centre at the end of the survey, all staff members in the original staff list must have an outcome code assigned.

The table below details the outcome codes to be used in recording responses and non-responses.

**Note:**

- **For the purposes of eligibility and outcome codes, long-term sick leave is defined as 365 days or more off work.**
- Staff who leave an organisation (including TUPE staff) on or after 1 September but on or before the date of the first mailing should be coded as ‘LE’. Staff who move on to long term sick leave (365 days), die or take an unpaid career break after 1 September but on or before the date of the first mailing should be coded as ‘EXCL’. Both ‘LE’ and ‘EXCL’ should only be overwritten by a completion code or an ‘INEL’ code.
- The ‘LE’ outcome code will only apply to substantive staff (main survey). Eligible bank only workers are defined as those who have been paid for a shift in the six months prior to 1 September. If they meet the criteria, they remain eligible even if they are removed from the bank or choose to stop working on the bank between 1 September and the date of the first mailing. Bank workers cannot therefore be assigned an ‘LE’ outcome code.

- Staff who leave an organisation (including TUPE staff), or who move on to long term sick leave (365 days), die or take an unpaid career break, after the first mailing has been sent out should have further mailings stopped and be coded as ‘NFM’. This code should only be overwritten by a completion code, a ‘B’ code, a ‘REF’ code or an ‘INEL’ code.
- Staff who were ineligible for the survey on 1 September and were included in an organisation’s sample in error should be coded as ‘INEL’. This code should not be overwritten by any other code and should overwrite any other code.
- Organisations **must** submit lists to their contractor of staff who were included in error as they did not meet the eligibility criteria on 1 September (‘INEL’); left the organisation (‘LE’) on or after 1 September but on or before the date of the first mailing (not applicable for bank only workers); moved on to long term sick leave (365 days), died or went on an unpaid career break after 1 September but on or before the date of the first mailing (‘EXCL’).

  Organisations may also submit lists of staff who left the organisation, moved on to long term sick leave (365 days), died or went on an unpaid career break after the first mailing (‘NFM’).

  These lists should include the staff ID number, the reason the staff member is on the list (left the organisation, long term sick leave, etc.) and the date this reason took effect (e.g. the date they left the organisation, or the date on which they moved on to long term sick leave). Contractors should then code these staff accordingly.

  Lists can be submitted at any point during fieldwork but the deadline for submission is **22 November 2024**. This is to guarantee outcome codes can be updated accurately in time for the final data submission.
- Separate outcome codes are provided for completed online and paper questionnaires (‘CO’ and ‘CP’, respectively). This is because the mailing dates for the first and second reminders will differ between paper and online for organisations running mixed mode surveys. Note that CO codes should be applied only where the survey was delivered by email and CP codes where the survey was delivered on paper (even if completion was online).
- As a general rule, assume that completed **paper** questionnaires received by the contractor up to and including a day *after* reminder letters have been sent out were returned **before** the recipient received the reminder (noted below in the response codes).
- Contractors that can identify staff members who were sent email invitations/reminders and **never** received the survey as all emails were undelivered (i.e., a bounce back notification was received following every survey email sent to the staff member) should code these staff as ‘UN’.

  Information on bounce backs per survey mailing will also be collected separately, in the weekly monitoring data submitted by contractors. This data must be included as it will be used to help monitor the accuracy of the email addresses organisations are providing to contractors.

The outcome codes on the following page should be used to record the different types of staff response and non-response against the appropriate ID numbers. Where more than one outcome code may be appropriate, these should be assigned according to the following priority order:

| Priority | Code |
|---|---|
| 1 | INEL |
| 2 | CO1, CO2… CP1, CP2 etc. |
| 3 | LE |
| 4 | EXCL |
| 5 | REF |
| 6 | B |
| 7 | UN |
| 8 | NFM |
| 9 | N |

| Outcome code | Type of response |
|---|---|
| CP1 | **Paper or online (paper delivery mode):** Response received **before** the respondent received the first paper reminder |
| CP2 | **Paper or online (paper delivery mode):** Response received **after** the respondent received the first paper reminder, but **before** the second paper reminder |
| CP3 | **Paper or online (paper delivery mode):** Response received **after** the respondent received the second paper reminder |
| CO1 | **Online:** Response received **before** the respondent received a reminder email |
| CO2 | **Online:** Response received **after** the respondent received the first reminder email, but **before** the second reminder email |
| CO3 | **Online:** Response received **after** the respondent received the second reminder email but **before** the third reminder email |
| CO4 | **Online:** Response received **after** the respondent received the third reminder email but **before** the fourth reminder email |
| CO5 | **Online:** Response received **after** the respondent received the fourth reminder email but **before** the fifth reminder email |
| CO6 | **Online:** Response received **after** the respondent received the fifth reminder email but **before** the sixth reminder email |
| CO7 | **Online:** Response received **after** the respondent received the sixth reminder email |
| B | Blank questionnaire returned (paper only) |
| REF | Staff member explicitly opted out / refused to take part |
| INEL | Staff member was ineligible for survey on 1 September<br>**Note:** should always overwrite other codes, should never be overwritten |
| LE | Staff member left the organisation on or after 1 September, but on or before the date of first mailing (not applicable for bank workers)<br>**Note:** should only be overwritten by a completion code or INEL |
| EXCL | Staff member moved on to long term sick leave (365 days), died or went on an unpaid career break after 1 September, but on or before the date of the first mailing<br>**Note:** should only be overwritten by a completion code or INEL |
| UN | **Online only:** Respondent never received the questionnaire as all survey emails undeliverable (this code should be used if the contractor has the necessary data) |
| NFM | Questionnaire not returned (no further mailings)<br>Staff member left the organisation, moved on to long term sick leave (365 days), died or went on an unpaid career break after the first mailing was sent. Further mailings were stopped during fieldwork and the staff member did not respond<br>**Note:** should only be overwritten by a completion code, B, REF or INEL |
| N | Questionnaire not returned (reason not known) |

## 10.5 Calculating the response rate

The response rate will be calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{\text{Number of respondents}}{\text{Issued sample}}$$

The issued sample refers to the number of staff who were sent a survey. This is equal to the total sample size minus staff who were never sent, or should never have been sent, a survey (those with an outcome code of ‘INEL’, ‘EXCL’ or ‘LE’).

Staff with an outcome code of ‘NFM’ or ‘UN’ are not removed from the response rate calculation. Staff with a ‘NFM’ code had the opportunity to respond, as they received at least one mailing, but chose not to do so. Staff with a ‘UN’ code were not given the opportunity to respond, but this was because the email address supplied by their organisation was not accurate. Organisations running an online survey commit to supplying accurate email addresses to their contractor for all staff that are to receive the survey via e-mail (see section **6.1**).

The number of respondents is the sum of staff who had the following outcome codes: ‘CP1’, ‘CP2’, ‘CP3’, ‘CO1’, ‘CO2’, ‘CO3’, ‘CO4’, ‘CO5’, ‘CO6’, ‘CO7’.

## 10.6 Providing a summary of partial responses

Contractors will be required to provide a summary of partial responses to the survey. This will include the number/percentage of staff who dropout the survey and an indication of the last page visited/question answered. Further information on the content/format of the information required and when it needs to be submitted will be provided by the Survey Coordination Centre.

## 10.7 Weekly monitoring

The Survey Coordination Centre requires weekly submissions of outcome data and advice line calls for each organisation taking part in the 2024 Staff Survey. These are called weekly monitoring sheets, and they must be submitted by 5pm every Thursday of fieldwork, beginning with the first submission of data on the **19 September 2024.** An Excel spreadsheet which **must** be used to return this information to the Survey Coordination Centre will be provided to contractors with instructions on how to complete it. The excel workbook will require data for the main and bank surveys separately.

Please note, it is important that weekly monitoring files submitted to the Survey Coordination Centre conform to the file name structure: **ST24_XXX_N** - where XXX is the contractor code and N is the week of submission (e.g. 19 September is week 1). Contractor codes are three letters and begin with ‘A’. If you do not know your contractor code, please contact the Survey Coordination Centre.

# 11 Reporting

## 11.1 Suppression

NHS Staff Survey results published by the Survey Coordination Centre are subject to suppression. This means that results based on small numbers are removed from reports. This is done for two reasons: to prevent the risk that individuals could be identified, and to prevent reporting of unreliable results.

In publishing survey results, the Survey Coordination Centre adheres to guidance from NHS England regarding data suppression. This suppression guidance outlines that results for groups of less than 10 should be suppressed for publication. This is in line with other NHS England surveys.

**To align with the national reporting, contractors should apply a suppression threshold of less than 10 to their reporting.**

Small differences may occur between contractor reporting and Survey Coordination Centre published data, due to differences in suppression rules applied for published data. Where this happens, no attempt should be made to reidentify individuals.

If contractor reporting is to be published (i.e. made publicly available with open access), we recommend adherence to the guidance for suppression in published data, details of which will be provided on the NHS Staff Survey website.

## 11.2 Breakdown of results by directorate / department / site etc.

**Bank survey only:** please note that the results for bank only workers will be reported separately and cannot be included in the organisation’s breakdown report.

The ‘breakdown report’ (formerly known as the ‘directorate’ report) produced by the Survey Coordination Centre can include up to two breakdowns by directorate, department, location or any other staff categorisation or grouping the organisation wishes to include. The breakdown reports provide People Promise element and theme scores for each group, comparing them to the organisation mean.

For the Survey Coordination Centre to produce a breakdown report for an organisation, sufficient and accurate information needs to be included on the staff lists supplied to the contractor and the Survey Coordination Centre. It is the responsibility of the participating organisation to ensure that the information provided is accurate and that they provide the correct information to their contractor.

In general, we recommend a limit of 12 groups to a breakdown (e.g. 12 directorates in the first breakdown; 12 locations in the other breakdown). If there are substantially more than this, we suggest combining some of the smaller categories. This will ensure that less data is suppressed due to low numbers, and an organisation still receives useful breakdowns. The maximum number of categories permitted in each breakdown is 50 (up from 24 in 2023), including any ‘other’ group, but this number would only be suitable for very large organisations and organisations should bear in mind that large base sizes give more robust results.

To preserve confidentiality neither contractors nor the Survey Coordination Centre report results from any group if there are 9 or fewer responses in that group. Therefore, it is important that enough staff are included in each group to ensure that there are enough number of responses for results to be displayed. Organisations should consider their response rate when making these decisions.

Breakdowns groups submitted to the Survey Coordination Centre must have a minimum of 10 staff.

Care must be taken by the organisation and contractor to provide the Survey Coordination Centre with only those breakdowns the organisation wishes to be included in the breakdown report, which will be publicly available.

As part of the data submission, contractors must provide the Survey Coordination Centre with the name of each group. The length of these should be sufficiently short to fit into the report format as it is. Due to the format of the reports, breakdown category names should be 36 characters or fewer (including spaces). Longer names may be cut off.

It is the responsibility of a participating organisation to confirm with their contractor precisely which breakdowns/groups will be included in the Survey Coordination Centre breakdown reports.

**Organisations may not request changes to these breakdowns/groups once fieldwork has closed and contractors have submitted the data to the Survey Coordination Centre**. Amendments can only be accommodated if the report does not contain the groupings previously agreed between the organisation and the survey contractor.

## 11.3 Early release of results under embargo

**IMPORTANT**: The results of the NHS Staff Survey are an official statistic and are produced and reported under the UK Statistics Authority code of practice. As such, the survey results **must not be made public prior to the national publication date**, which is determined by NHS England.

To allow organisations that participate in the survey to make the best use of their survey results for action planning, these organisations are granted early (pre-release) access to their own results so they can receive and start to use their results ahead of the official publication date. However, it should be noted that any survey data released to participating organisations before the official publication date, either by the Survey Coordination Centre or by their own survey contractor, is provided under embargo and must not be shared with any person or organisation external to the participating organisation. The following link contains useful information regarding embargo guidance: NHS Staff Survey Embargo Guidance

## 11.4 Reporting free text comments

Redacted free text comments must be submitted to the Survey Coordination Centre by 10 January 2025.

If a contractor is providing free text comments to a participating organisation the contractor must review all comments and remove any identifying information. At a minimum, contractors must remove the following data from all comments that are to be passed to a participating organisation.

- Names
- Dates of birth
- ID numbers (e.g., a payroll number)
- Addresses
- Email addresses
- Phone numbers

If an organisation requests a more detailed breakdown of free text comments, for example split by site or department, contractors may provide such breakdowns only where there are 9 or more free text comments (not respondents) in the requested sub-group. Note that if multiple breakdowns are provided, within or across reports, to prevent the risk of the staff member who provided a comment being identified, it is the contractor's responsibility to ensure that an individual comment cannot be traced back to a sub-group of less than 10 staff.

## 11.5 Data transfer for organisations who change contractors

As part of the contractor reporting process, organisations generally desire year-on-year comparison data. If an organisation has recently changed contractors, their new survey contractor may require previous years' data to do appropriate analyses.

To receive previous years' data, the new contractor must contact the survey lead at the organisation and explicitly request permission, which must be sent to the old contractor along with any other required details (for instance, if multiple years are required). It is also possible to request such permission as part of the contractor's sign-up process. The organisation contacts should be fully informed and aware of which data they are releasing (e.g., if it is two years instead of just one). Upon receiving the organisation's permission, the contractors can then arrange for the data to be transferred between themselves. If any issues are encountered in this process, please contact the Survey Coordination Centre for assistance.

Alternatively, if contractors only require the previous year's data from the questionnaire, this can be arranged through the Survey Coordination Centre. There are two deadlines which need to be met to receive organisation data in such a way, these are outlined below:

- By **11 October 2024**: Contractor to confirm to the Survey Coordination Centre the list of organisations they are requesting data for.
- By **25 October 2024**: All permissions to be received by the Survey Coordination Centre. These can be sent by the contractor or directly by the organisations.
    - Data for outstanding permissions on this date might not be processed until after reporting is complete.

Data for organisations whose permission is received in such a way will be shared with the appropriate contractor during **w/c 28 October 2024**.

**Note: NHS Staff Survey datasets at respondent level must never be provided to participating organisations. Datasets must remain only with contractors and the Survey Coordination Centre, to preserve respondent confidentiality.**

## 11.6 Data transfer for organisations working with multiple contractors

If, in addition to their main survey contractor, an organisation wishes to work with a secondary contractor for delivery of survey reporting, they should notify their primary survey contractor as soon as possible. Any data sharing between the primary contractor and the secondary (reporting) contractor must be agreed locally, between the two contractors and the contracting organisation. With the explicit consent of the contracting organisation, the primary contractor may share case-level data with the secondary contractor, in the same format as that submitted to the Survey Coordination Centre. The primary contractor may charge for any additional processing or cleaning of the data, or other support that may be required by the secondary contractor. It is the responsibility of the contractors and the participating organisation to ensure that IG and data protection requirements are met.

Note that secondary contractors receiving NHS Staff Survey data to provide reporting to a participating organisation must adhere to the reporting requirements detailed earlier in the section regarding suppression, embargo and free text comments.

**Note: NHS Staff Survey datasets at respondent level must never be provided to participating organisations. Datasets must remain only with contractors and the Survey Coordination Centre, to preserve respondent confidentiality.**