

# National Quarterly Pulse Survey

Guidance for implementing and  
submitting results for the National  
Quarterly Pulse Survey

# Contents

Key principles.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Implementation.....	6
Data submission .....	9
Data publication .....	11
Implementation support.....	12
Appendix 1 – Channels for listening to staff .....	13

# Key principles

1. The National Quarterly Pulse Survey (NQPS) began implementation in April 2021 for organisations that use the national pulse survey, the [People Pulse](#). All provider organisations will be required to implement from July 2021<sup>1</sup>.
2. The primary purpose of the NQPS is to provide an additional and more frequent opportunity to hear from staff to help understand employee experience, and to support decision making and actions for improvement with the ambition of making the NHS the best place to work.
3. The NQPS will provide a consistent and standardised approach, nationally and locally, to listening to staff at more regular intervals.
4. A flexible approach has been adopted for how organisations implement the NQPS. Data collection can happen either via the People Pulse, existing Staff FFT arrangements or any other internal surveys. However, the simplest way to run the quarterly survey is through the People Pulse, which includes an online analytical platform and is free for Trusts to use.
5. NQPS data is to be collected in the first month of Q1, Q2 and Q4. The data is to be submitted in the second month of Q1, Q2 and Q4. For Q3 (when the annual NHS staff survey is undertaken) there is no requirement to undertake NQPS and submit data, although organisations may wish to do so. If organisations decide to collect NQPS data during this period, there is no requirement to submit the data centrally.
6. The survey consists of the nine questions which make up the existing Engagement theme of the NHS Staff Survey, measuring motivation, advocacy, and involvement. The results of these questions will be submitted / collected centrally. Organisations may choose to add additional questions when using own survey providers, however there is no requirement for results from any additional questions to be submitted centrally.

<sup>1</sup> Organisations are expected to implement the National Quarterly Pulse Survey in July 2021. Organisations which are unable to implement for quarter two 2021/22 can start data collection from the first month of quarter four (January 2022). The National Staff Survey will take place in quarter three 2021/22.

7. During each quarter (excluding Q3), all staff in an organisation must be given an opportunity to respond. Organisations are asked to achieve participation levels no lower than those from previous Staff Friends and Family Test.
8. Organisations are encouraged to collect demographic information as part of the NQPS internally to provide local insight into all staff experiences on a regular basis, however there is no requirement for these to be submitted centrally. For Trusts who use People Pulse, this will be collected routinely.
9. Organisations should ensure that local staff side union representatives and staff networks are aware of the introduction of the NQPS, and the value of it. We would encourage collaboration on the introduction of the survey and presentation and analysis of local results.
10. Organisations need to ensure compliance with Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
11. Organisations choosing to collect data through alternative methods than via the People Pulse (e.g. existing Staff Friends and Family test provider or a local survey provider) need to ensure data is submitted via the [Strategic Data Collection Service](#) by the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the second month of Q1 (May), Q2 (August) and Q4 (February). Organisations' data submissions will need to include the breakdown of responses per each of the nine engagement theme questions. For those using the People Pulse, this will all be done centrally so there is no need to complete the data submission.
12. Organisations are required to publish their own results locally, for instance through communications channels within the organisation.

# Introduction

1. Staff engagement has been researched in detail over the last few decades and has been proven to have strong links with positive organisational and individual outcomes. Employee engagement components, in particular involvement, have been shown to have positive correlation with lower patient mortality, lower sickness levels and lower patient complaints. This follows on from a suite of studies over recent years by academics and the [Kings Fund](#), specific to the health care setting.
2. The [People Plan 2020/21- action for us all](#) is committed to ensuring staff have a voice. The experience of COVID-19 has thrown into even sharper relief the need to engage with and listen to staff. This is an element of the [People Promise](#): We each have a voice that counts.
3. The People Plan recommends a launch of a new National Quarterly Pulse Survey to track employee engagement in the first quarter of 2021/22. In recognition of the pressures on trusts during the response to COVID-19 and the recovery phase, in April 2021 organisations already utilising the national pulse survey participated through the addition of the nine staff engagement questions to the People Pulse. From July 2021, the NQPS requirement will apply to all NHS trusts in England. This includes trusts providing acute, community, ambulance, specialist, and mental health services.
4. The National Quarterly Pulse Survey will provide a consistent and standardised approach, nationally and locally, to listening to staff at more regular intervals with a robust data set. It has been supported by an ongoing desire for more regular reporting and understanding of NHS staff's working experience.
5. The introduction of the National Quarterly Pulse Survey complements the annual National Staff Survey and monthly People Pulse (see appendix 1). The responses and data are primarily for action at a local level. This will build on the yearly, granular level data available from the National Staff Survey (NSS). It is important to mention that results from NSS and NQPS will not be directly comparable, due to factors including the response rate and possible seasonal effects. The purpose of the NSS is to provide official statistical data of staff experience across all provider organisations allowing organisations

track progress over time and compare their results against national and local benchmark to a granular level of detail. The NQPS will provide a representative view of staff engagement in provider organisations on a quarterly basis. There are also fundamental differences in sample strategy between NSS and NQPS – the NSS has a robust sampling strategy aligned to ESR data. Furthermore, NSS results are weighted whilst NQPS results are not.

6. The primary purpose of the National Quarterly Pulse Survey is to understand the working experience of staff more regularly and in a consistent approach, to support actions for improvement. Organisations should take ownership of their NQPS data and act on the results. The results of the NQPS should be used by providers and commissioners to celebrate success or make improvements where required. To aid further analysis, organisations may wish to collect additional information via the NQPS to make the data more useful at a local level. These results should be used alongside the patient FFT results, and other local intelligence, to drive improvement, working in partnership with local staff side representatives and staff networks.

# Implementation

1. NHS England and NHS Improvement has adopted a flexible approach to how organisations may collect data for the National Quarterly Pulse Survey. This decision has been taken as a result of feedback received and because it is important that the NQPS is an improvement tool which works at a local level. The NQPS will be implemented initially via the [People Pulse](#) in April 2021. From July 2021, all NHS provider organisations will be required to implement and report the first set of results in August 2021. After the first year of implementation of the tool, NHS England and NHS Improvement will evaluate the implementation of the survey to review what approaches have worked most effectively.
2. The survey will include the nine staff engagement questions from the annual NHS Staff Survey. These questions cover the three elements of employee engagement: motivation, involvement, and advocacy and will be measured on a five point scale of strongly agree-strongly disagree:
  - I look forward to going to work (Motivation)
  - I am enthusiastic about my job (Motivation)
  - Time passes quickly when I am working (Motivation)
  - There are frequent opportunities for me to show initiative in my role (Involvement)
  - I am able to make suggestions to improve the work of my team/department (Involvement)
  - I am able to make improvements happen in my area of work (Involvement)
  - Care of patients/service users is my organisation's top priority (Advocacy)
  - I would recommend my organisation as a place to work (Advocacy)
  - If a friend or relative needed treatment I would be happy with the standard of care provided by this organisation (Advocacy)
3. Organisations should carefully consider which data collection method best suits the needs and preferences of their staff, across the range of services provided, or functions carried out, by the organisation. To collect data, trusts can choose between the following methods:

- People Pulse
- An existing internal survey tool
- A current Staff FFT provider. In order to manage trust burden staff FFT data submission will be replaced by the National Quarterly Pulse Survey, but trusts could use the same provider.

Although organisations are encouraged to collect data electronically, it is possible to offer some members of staff an option to respond via a paper form (not applicable when using the People Pulse to collect the data). However, it is a responsibility of an organisation to ensure data from a paper questionnaire is transcribed electronically.

Gathering staff feedback via the NQPS requires dedicated resources and staff time. Due consideration therefore needs to be made to the costs, resources, staff time and expertise required for this activity.

Where organisations deliver the NQPS in-house, they must comply with the confidentiality and data protection requirements. It is essential that the NQPS is conducted in such a way that confidentiality is respected and given high priority. When carrying out the NQPS, organisations will need to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)), and the NHS Code of Practice on Confidentiality (2003). The NQPS responses must not be presented or published in a way that allows individual members of staff to be identified.

Where trusts are utilising data from the Electronic Staff Record (ESR) to obtain equality and diversity data, staff should be informed that their response will be linked in this way. Prior to NQPS being implemented for the first time, organisations should seek the advice of their Information Governance Manager at an early stage and ensure they have a secure legal basis to process the personal data of staff for this purpose.

Organisations may choose to implement NQPS in a way that best suits staff and the needs of the organisation, but they are obliged by law to honour any statements they make about anonymity or confidentiality. It will also be necessary to establish appropriate contractual arrangements with any external suppliers, if that is the preferred method of data collection.

4. The National Quarterly Pulse Survey is designed to be a tool for local service improvement. Organisations may therefore choose to use the NQPS as an opportunity to gather further information beyond that required by this guidance. Organisations should consider which additional information would be most useful to them and liaise with local staff side representatives in discussing and agreeing additional topics.
5. Organisations should collect additional information via the National Quarterly Pulse Survey to enable further breakdown of the results, i.e. by staff occupational grouping, ethnicity, etc. to evaluate representativeness of data. However, any additional questions or demographic information should not be included in the data submission. For Trusts using People Pulse to administer NQPS, the analysis will be split according to demographic information through the online analytics platform.
6. All staff working within the organisation must have the opportunity to respond on a quarterly basis (excluding quarter 3). The National Quarterly Pulse Survey is an inclusive tool and should not be restricted to those who have a contract of employment with the organisation, for example, temporary staff can also participate in the survey.
7. There is no requirement to collect National Quarterly Pulse Survey data during quarter 3 (October), when the annual staff survey is undertaken, although organisations may choose to do so. If organisations decide to collect NQPS data during this period, there is no requirement to submit the data centrally.

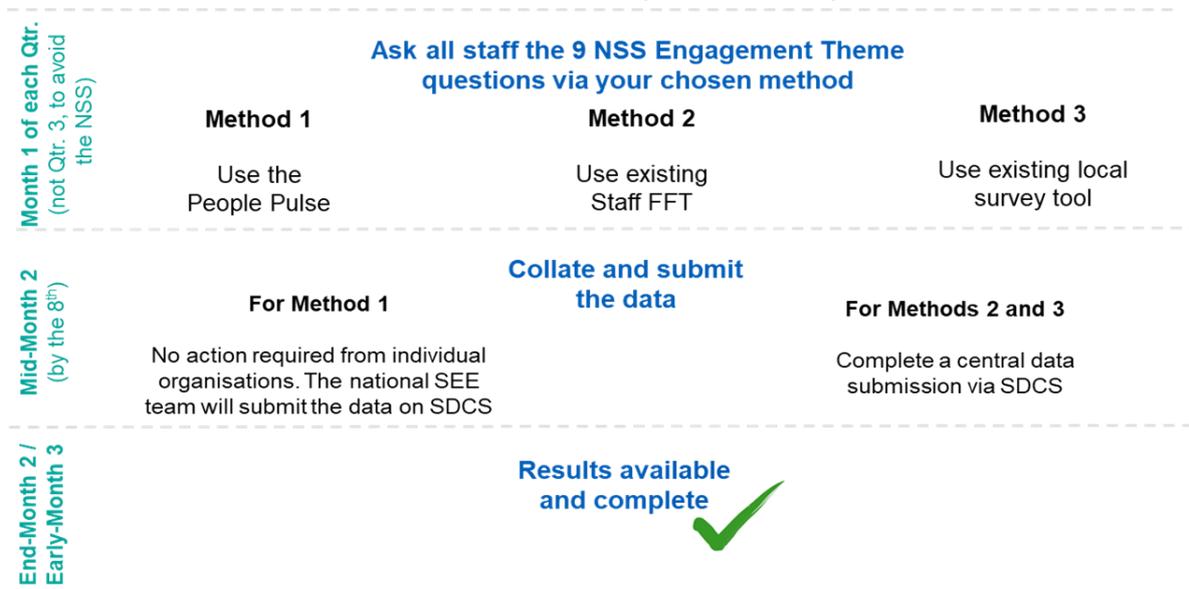
# Data submission

1. Regardless of the data collection method, organisations are asked to collect data in the first month of the quarter. Trusts using other methods than the People Pulse are asked to submit data by the 8<sup>th</sup> calendar day of the second month of the quarter. This applies only to Q1, Q2 and Q4. Q3 is excluded from this requirement due to the period of fieldwork for the National Staff Survey. The table below shows exact dates for the data collection and submission:

	Data collection period	Data submission due date
Quarter 1 (April-June)	1-31 April	8 May
Quarter 2 (July-September)	1-31 July	8 August
Quarter 4 (January-March)	1-31 January	8 February

2. If using the People Pulse, there is no requirement for data to be submitted by trusts via the [Strategic Data Collection Service](#) (SDCS) as this will be done centrally. If using an existing internal survey tool or existing Staff FFT provider, data will need to be submitted via SDCS by trusts. The diagram below presents the process for the National Quarterly Pulse Survey.

*“How do I go about meeting the requirement for National Quarterly Pulse Survey?”*



**The section below applies to Trusts utilising methods other than the People Pulse.**

3. After the National Quarterly Pulse Survey data has been collected (via paper forms, or electronically, for example) the response data must be entered into an Excel workbook provided for the submission of data to NHS England and NHS Improvement via [SDCS](#). The table below provides an example of the data specification requirements. The number of responses in each of the five response categories needs to be submitted for all nine staff engagement questions. This information should be displayed in a matrix to allow accurate data processing prior to publication.

	Strongly disagree	Dissagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
"I look forward to going to work."	42	6	8	59	33	148
"I am enthusiastic about my job."						0
"Time passes quickly when I am working."						0
"There are frequent opportunities for me to show initiative in my role."						0
"I am able to make suggestions to improve the work of my team / department."						0
"I am able to make improvements happen in my area of work."						0
"Care of patients / service users is my organisation's top priority."						0
"I would recommend my organisation as a place to work."						0
"If a friend or relative needed treatment I would be happy with the standard of care provided by this organisation."						0

4. Guidance on submission via SDCS can be found [here](#). The SDCS team is also creating a NQPS submission specific guidance which will be available in July 2021 and will explain aspects of submission such as correct data format, error messages, etc.
5. Late submissions will not be allowed due to strict turnaround time for data processing and publication. In addition, as the NQPS data collection is aligned to specific time periods in each quarter, it is important to keep to these to ensure confidence in the reliability of the data being relevant to this time period and its' context.

# Data publication

1. Publishing the results of the National Quarterly Pulse Survey in a consistent and transparent way is important so that improvement areas are clear to everyone and that subsequent actions can be explored collaboratively to support employee experience.
2. Organisations must publish their NQPS data locally, for instance through internal communications channels within a trust, to promote transparency. When publishing this data, it must be at least the same level of data that is submitted via SDCS. However, if organisations collate (e.g. departmental level or demographic data) they may also choose to publish this locally. Local publications should be made available in accessible formats as required.
3. It is recommended that organisations develop a plan to publish the results of the NQPS at a local level, working in partnership with local staff side representatives. Organisations will need to consider how frequently they will communicate the NQPS results and what methods will be used to communicate these results. Organisations will need to consider both the external and internal audiences who will be interested in the NQPS results, including: clinical and non-clinical staff; the local negotiating forum; senior managers and board members; patients and members of the public; commissioners; other local organisations and the local press.

# Implementation support

1. National Quarterly Pulse Survey is being implemented with support from the Staff Experience and Engagement Team within the People Directorate at NHS England and NHS Improvement.
2. For general and technical queries, please email [nhsi.quarterlyss@nhs.net](mailto:nhsi.quarterlyss@nhs.net)

# Appendix 1 – Channels for listening to staff

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
<b>Type of survey</b>	Quarterly Survey / People Pulse	People Pulse	People Pulse	Quarterly Survey / People Pulse	People Pulse	People Pulse	National Staff Survey (NSS)	National Staff Survey (NSS)	People Pulse	Quarterly Survey / People Pulse	People Pulse	People Pulse
							Pulse for non-provider orgs	Pulse for non-provider orgs				
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Annual NSS: Mandated.</b> To provide yearly official statistical data of staff experience across all provider organisations allowing organisations track progress over time and compare their results against national and local benchmark.											
	<b>Quarterly Survey:</b> Engagement theme questions (appendix 1), mandated through People Pulse or existing platform quarterly as part of the People Plan.											
	<b>Monthly People Pulse:</b> Voluntary, monthly or other cycles. To provide a regular national and regional overview of staff experience to understand progress against the People Promise and gather input against specific concerns or topics											
<b>Content</b>	<b>People Pulse:</b> Staff sentiment questions - feeling informed, supported, anxious, motivated; types of support required and free text feedback to leaders; Additional topical questions such as psychological safety, team belonging, HWB support evaluation and other topics relevant at a specific time											
	Include staff engagement questions			Include staff engagement questions							Include staff engagement questions	

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This publication can be made available in a number of other formats on request.