

# NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services National Uniform Project

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Allied Health Professions (AHPs)



Ref	Item
1	The Project Recap <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work to date</li><li>• Key objectives</li></ul>
2	The Colourway Choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Options</li><li>• Options Appraisal</li></ul>
3	Conclusion and Recommendation
4	A Final Word

## Work to Date

- NHS Supply Chain: Hotel Services currently offers a uniform contract which expires April 2023:
  - The current contract enables local trusts dictate the design, style, and colours which has led to significant variations of uniform
  - Proposal to adopt a strategy which implements a National Healthcare Uniform across the NHS in England
- Annual spend on uniforms is approximately £23 million:
  - Core garments such as scrubs, tunics, and trousers account for around 70% of the spend
  - Accessories such as fleeces, cardigans, and shoes account for the remaining 30%
- The new uniform scope will include Nurses, Midwives, Allied Health Professions, Pharmacists and Healthcare Scientists, working in NHS acute, community and mental health settings
- The current supply chain is complex. There are many styles, colours, embroidery, and rank identifiers in use with over **30,000** product lines in England. This compares with NHS Wales (154 lines) and NHS Scotland (64 lines) both of whom have already implemented a National Healthcare Uniform
- The adoption of the National Uniform for England will be mandatory in NHS Provider Trusts, implemented in a phased manner between 2023-2025, for staff who wear a uniform (whether staff wear a uniform, or not, will remain a local decision)

# Key Objectives

**Patient and  
Visitor Safety**

**Professional  
Image and  
Suitability**

**Equality,  
Diversity and  
Inclusion**

**Value for  
Money**

**Sustainability**

## Where are we now, and where next?

AHPs have engaged in significant numbers in the national consultation and several AHP professional bodies have also undertaken surveys of their membership. This engagement has identified two key areas of concern:

### Concern 1:

Ongoing availability of polo shirts as a uniform option. It is confirmed that polo shirts, fleeces, and shorts will continue to be an option, as per current local arrangements for sourcing uniforms. This concern is now resolved.

### Concern 2:

How a national uniform will enable the unique professional identity of each of the AHP professions in scope, and concern about losing the established colour branding of physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

- An option for 'clustering' the professions was proposed which offered a compromise but was widely unpopular and has now been eliminated as an option.
- The professional body surveys asked their members about the preferred mechanism to ensure each unique profession were identifiable, if there were a single colourway for the AHP uniform. Most of respondents said that the inclusion of an embroidered professional title would be their preferred solution.
- NHS Supply Chain and the Chief Allied Health Professions Officer for England acknowledge this outstanding concern and the options appraisal that follows leads to a conclusion and recommendation.

# The question of identity

Engagement with AHPs via consultation and surveys indicate there are two viable options to further explore:

**Option 1:** Single colour for all AHPs with two shades to distinguish between the registered and support workforce; with the addition of an embroidered professional title to identify each unique profession Approximately 50 SKU's



**Option 2:** A separate colour for each individual allied health profession, with paler shades of each colour to distinguish between registered and support workforce. Approximately 700 SKU's



Objective/Rationale	Option 1 Single Colourway for all AHPs; paler shade to identify support workforce; all embroidered to denote unique professional identity	Option 2 Individual colourway to identify each unique profession within AHP; each with a paler shade for support workforce
<p><b>Patient and Visitor Safety</b></p> <p>Patients and Visitors have stated that the current variety of uniform colours is confusing; they want simpler clearer way to identify the clinical staff.</p> <p>The Francis report cited the fact that patient and visitors could not identify appropriate carers quickly and easily as a contributing factor in inadequate care provision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ One colour for AHPs adopted across England would achieve this.</li> <li>✓ 'Brand AHP' would be strengthened, and patients, visitors and other staff would be less likely to confuse AHPs with nursing and other clinical colleagues</li> <li>✓ Patients and visitors would become familiar with the adopted colour and what it means</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Multiple colours which identify specific professions would distinguish those professions</li> <li>✗ Individual colours are an indication of difference, but don't overtly identify the unique profession associated with each colour; this may be a particular issue for the smaller professions</li> <li>✗ This level of colour differentiation may be too complex as patients would struggle to know which colour was which due the level of variation. This approach is not so different from the current situation which we know causes confusion</li> </ul>
<p><b>Professional Image/Suitability</b></p> <p>Uniforms provided should be fit for purpose and afford the practitioner comfort, dignity, modesty, and be easy to maintain to a professional standard</p> <p>Healthcare Professions should feel proud about the uniform they wear. It should enhance their identity and reflect their role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Suitability will be achieved through stringent user testing</li> <li>✓ It would promote the identity of the AHPs as a significant community</li> <li>✓ It aligns with work to strengthen AHP leadership and influence at trust, ICS and Regional levels.</li> <li>✓ It would strengthen their voice and ability to influence, particularly for the smaller professions.</li> <li>✓ They would become more visible as a collective in healthcare settings</li> <li>✓ It aligns with the principles for other healthcare professions e.g. Nursing and Midwifery who will each adopt a primary colour with shading for their support workforce</li> <li>✓ Significant variation in colours worn by the same profession in different trusts would be standardised</li> <li>✗ Individual professional identity may be reduced</li> <li>✗ Some professions already have an established colour brand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Suitability will be achieved through stringent user testing</li> <li>✓ A colour per profession would maintain that individual's professional identity.</li> <li>✗ A colour per profession will not contribute to the identification as AHPs</li> <li>✗ It will not help to strengthen their collective voice</li> <li>✗ Visibility would not be enhanced, due to the variety and small numbers in some professions</li> <li>✗ There are practical issues of implementing distinctive colours/shadings. It is likely that some practitioners may be unhappy with the colour choice for their profession</li> </ul>

Objective/rationale	Option 1 Single Colourway for all AHPs; paler shade to identify support workforce; all embroidered to denote unique professional identity	Option 2 Individual colourway to identify each unique profession within AHP; each with a paler shade for support workforce
<p><b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</b></p> <p>Uniform must be suitable and appropriate for the whole of the diverse NHS workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Will be achieved through the design and materials used in the garment which will be irrespective of colour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Will be achieved through the design and materials used in the garment which will be irrespective of colour</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <p>The project must support and contribute to the 'Greener NHS' targets and</p> <p>It must combat climate change and be based on an ethical and sustainable supply chain</p> <p>The project offers AHPs an opportunity to engage with the #GreenerAHP strategic priority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Minimises the product range to 56 products. This will reduce the stock holding required and warehouse space both for raw materials and finished goods</li> <li>✓ Reduction in variation will reduce product wastage.</li> <li>✓ Returns are less likely as uniforms can be passed on more easily.</li> <li>✓ This will have a positive impact on the carbon footprint.</li> <li>✓ Development of an ethical supply chain can be achieved</li> <li>✓ Reducing variation will support the purchased of sustainable materials – such as recycled polyester.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Adopting a colour/shaded option per profession will increase the range substantially – each number colours required an additional 28 products to be stocked to meet all sizes – hence over 600 products.</li> <li>✗ Wastage will increase as products will not be as easy to pass on</li> <li>✗ Supply Chains will remain very complex minimising opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint</li> <li>✗ Increased variation reduces the opportunity to purchase sustainable materials such as recycled polyester economically</li> <li>✓ Development of an ethical supply chain can be achieved</li> </ul>
<p><b>Value for Money</b></p> <p>Source a cost effective uniform. Usage the NHS purchasing leverage to deliver savings.</p> <p>Use the savings available to invest in quality materials and design</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Improved value for money through bulk purchasing.</li> <li>✓ Maximising the length of production runs, increased material purchase and reduced stock holding will lower the cost of the uniform enabling investment to be made into the garment design and material itself</li> <li>✗ Addition of embroidered professional title adds approximately 20% cost to each uniform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Increased variation of colours will increase cost and reduce value for money.</li> <li>✗ Production run volumes will be lower, some very small. This will increase material and manufacturing costs</li> <li>✗ Storage requirements will be at least 10 times larger</li> <li>✗ Some low volume colours and more specialist products such as maternity wear, very large or very small sizes will be made to order rather than kept in stock effecting lead-times and service levels</li> </ul>



## Conclusion and Recommendation

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All of the choices are possible but the options appraisal leads to a clear conclusion about the option which best meets the five objectives.

The adoption of a single colour across the AHP community with shading to denote the support workforce, and inclusion of an embroidered professional title is the option which most effectively allows us to meet all the project objectives. This option is in the best interest of the NHS for:

- The Patient
- The Profession
- The Planet
- The People
- The Pound

This option will enable the allied health community to have a strengthened visibility as a whole, whilst also maintaining the unique professions' identity. It supports the recommendations of the Francis Report, will contribute to meeting the sustainability goals of the NHS and enables the NHS to leverage its purchasing scale.

With respect to colour choice, AHPs have an established brand identity as denoted by the AHP badge and used by the AHP leaders in their 'house' style. It is therefore proposed that these colours are adopted for the national AHP uniform for England.

# Recommended Colourway with Shading and Professional Badge



## A Final Word

I am proud to represent allied health professionals in England. We continue to work tirelessly to promote the opportunities for increased impact of AHPs in the delivery of excellence in health and care, aligned to the ambitions of the NHS Long Term Plan and AHPs into Action.

As AHP leadership strengthens in Trusts, Integrated Care Systems, and Regions, so the profile and contribution of AHPs increases. The opportunity to establish a national AHP uniform will further enhance the visibility of our community as the third largest clinical workforce in the NHS.

I have already stated my commitment to AHPs supporting environmental sustainability and we have many opportunities to become #GreenerAHPs. Reducing the carbon footprint of our current uniforms supply change affords us an opportunity to make a contribution to reducing climate change.

I endorse the findings of the options appraisal and subsequent recommendations made by NHS Supply Chain, and look forward to wearing my new uniform with great pride.

*Suzanne Rastrick*  
*Chief Allied Health Professions Officer for England*