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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health Board

Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board

Strengthening Social Partnership Report

2024/25

Introduction

The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill became law in August 2022. The Act focusses on how organisations can work together in Wales to deliver public services in a fair and responsible way. The law came into force in 2024. The Act sets up a Social Partnership Council for Welsh Ministers to talk with partners to meet social well-being goals. The council provides advice to the Welsh Ministers about the best ways social partnership can work. The council is made up of government, employers and workers including trade unions. Under the regulation public bodies, are required to talk to their workers with the aim of agreeing their well-being goals and how they will achieve them. Social partnership means workers and employees working together to solve problems. In March 2025 the Welsh Government published a User Handbook outlining the duties of public bodies in relation to the Act introducing the Self- Assessment Tool as a simple way of assessing the effectiveness of Partnership working. A base line assessment has been undertaken using the Self-Assessment Tool to inform this report.

The Self-Assessment Tool and Baseline Assessment

The self-assessment tool was sent out to the 73 members of the Workforce Partnership Group for completion and discussion at the meeting. The full results are contained in appendix a. The response rate was 15% and the results were tested and discussed at the Workforce Partnership Group on the 18th July 2025. The results clearly demonstrated a cohesion between the results of management and trade union colleagues. All parties agreed or strongly agreed with the statements in relation to partnership working in BCU. As the parties present covered all areas pan the organisation it was determined that on the whole the outcomes reflected the strength of partnership working within the Health Board. All parties were in agreement that the partnership is reasonably healthy across all areas. A dialogue will continue to ensure that the base line levels are maintained and improved when the audit is next undertaken.

The results of the Self Assessment Tool will be shared with the Local Partnership Forum to further test whether the results are agreed with at the most senior levels in the organisation.

Welsh Government Conference

Welsh Government held a conference to raise awareness of the duties and responsibilities for all North Wales public bodies on Friday 15th March 2024. Jan Tomlinson, Staff Side Chair and Kay Hannigan, Associate People Services Director were invited to speak at the event to share how social partnership operates within

BCU. Other key note speakers included Hannah Blythin, a local MS and the then Deputy Minister for Social Partnership. This was an excellent forum to spotlight BCU achievements in relation to working in partnership.

Social Partnership Working in Action

Within BCU Trade Unions work closely with managers to embed the principles of social partnership through partnership working. The Health Board's Trade Union Independent Member sits on the Board, which ensures that the partnership voice is heard at the most senior levels. As a Board Member the trade union independent member is expected to contribute fully to Board deliberations.

The BCUHB Local Partnership Forum is the formal mechanism through which management and trade unions and professional bodies (hereafter referred to as staff organisations) work together to improve health services for the people of Wales. It is the forum where key stakeholders engage with each other to inform, debate and seek to agree local priorities on workforce and health service issues. The forum has established a regular and formal dialogue between the Board's Executive and the staff organisations on matters relating to workforce and health service issues. The group meets quarterly and is jointly chaired by the Chair of Staff Side and the CEO.

The Workforce Partnership Group meets monthly to promote and deliver a regular dialogue between the People Services Directorate, senior managers and trade union partners on matters relating to the BCU workforce. The group enables managers and trade unions partners to put forward issues affecting the workforce for discussion and decision-making. All organisational changes and service reviews impacting upon the workforce are overseen by and consulted upon within the group before being released to the wider organisation for full consultation.

Formal consultation between the organisation and the British Medical Association takes place through the Local Negotiating Committee. This is the opportunity for BMA representatives to meet with senior Health Board leaders to discuss in partnership matters specifically relevant to the medical workforce.

Each of the health communities have people and culture groups with local trade union representatives invited to be core group members. The purpose of the group is to advise and assure the local Senior Leadership Team on the development, implementation and effectiveness of strategies in relation to the workforce, organisational development and culture of the health community. The group also provides advice and assurance in relation to the alignment of strategies to Living Healthier Staying Well and relevant national strategies. The group is also responsible for providing the central IHC Senior Leadership team with evidence of impact of the improvement when implementing strategies.

Facilities Arrangements

BCU is committed to ensuring trade union representatives are afforded reasonable paid time off to undertake trade union duties as outlined in WP15 Partnership and Recognition Agreement. The agreement identifies the framework for time off and facilities for accredited representatives of Trade Unions recognised by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), in accordance with Agenda for Change Wales terms and conditions.

As part of the Health Board's commitment to the partnership working agenda, it recognises that investment in a Time off and Facilities Agreement is a key aspect of the management of the people who deliver health services to the population of North Wales and visitors to the area. The agreement takes cognisance of the relevant statutory framework.

BCUHB recognises that provision of time off and facilities to carry out trade union duties and activities will be of mutual benefit to the Health Board and the trade union organisations. BCUHB recognises the significant increase in demands made upon Trade Union organisations as the partnership agenda has and continues to develop. It is committed to supporting representatives to undertake their roles and responsibilities.

Conclusion

BCU is committed to working in partnership with its staff organisations and trade unions to ensure the delivery of services to the population of North Wales. The self assessment tool has demonstrated a cohesion across the organisation with all parties confirming that the partnership is reasonably healthy and should continue to be maintained and improved.

Social partnership is the mechanism by which key stakeholders engage with each other to inform, debate and seek to agree local priorities on workforce and health service issues. This enables regular formal and informal dialogue to occur between Executives, managers and the staff organisations on matters relating to workforce and health service issues.

It is recognised that moving forwards there will be hard decisions to be made requiring robust discussions. However, continued dialogue does enable all parties to work together to find an acceptable solution. Better outcomes are achieved by listening to other opinions, exploring other points of view, and seeking alternative solutions. Social partnership involves colleagues at the early stages of project initiation not just consultation once the plan has been developed.

Forward Plan

Although acknowledging that social partnership is embedded within BCU the audit did demonstrate that there are areas for improvement and the challenge is to maintain the standards we are achieving and strive for improvement.

Social partnership will run as a core through all leadership development programmes. A review of the programmes will be undertaken to ensure that social partnership is embedded.

The organisation will support trade unions representatives to obtain release to undertake their social partnership responsibilities. BCU will support trade union members to gain accreditation to take on representative roles to work alongside current accredited representatives. Opportunities to become accredited representatives will be promoted.

Reports on social partnership activities will continue to be shared through the LPF and People and Culture Committee.