

# NHS chief considering regulation of managers

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/1f4da9d2-42a8-11ee-8b31-3c9c533abb75?shareToken=19fb03f7246577bd13ff9c3c6f0e3a43>

## Lucy Letby case: NHS chief considering regulation of managers

[Chris Smyth](#), Whitehall Editor Thursday August 24 2023, 8.40pm, The Times

The head of the NHS is actively considering regulating health service managers in the aftermath of the Lucy Letby case.

Amanda Pritchard, chief executive of NHS England, says the case of the nurse convicted of murdering seven babies means it is “the right time to look again” at a system which could investigate and strike off managers responsible for serious failings.

She has told health chiefs she wants an urgent meeting next week to consider whether formal regulation is the right response to the Letby case and look at whether systems for overseeing teachers and bankers could be models to follow.

- **Letby had ability to mentally switch off, says detective**

Pritchard stresses she is not yet committed to full regulation and wants also to consider alternatives that might improve safety with less bureaucracy.

However, she says that clear accountability of managers is “a key driver of public confidence” in the NHS, in an intervention which will pile pressure on ministers to revive plans for a body to [investigate claims against senior hospital bosses](#).

Ministers rejected the recommendation from a 2019 review for a full register of managers, judging it too complex, instead opting for reforms that make it easier for NHS hospitals to share records of bosses responsible for misconduct.

However, in a letter to senior colleagues seen by The Times, Pritchard said that in light of Letby’s conviction “we feel that now is the right time to look again at what benefits could be delivered through regulation”.

Bosses at the Countess of Chester Hospital, where Letby worked on the neonatal unit, have been accused of ignoring the concerns of whistleblowers, in the latest of a series of cases in which hospital managers were considered to be prioritising reputation over safety.

- **Who ran Lucy Letby’s hospital? The NHS chiefs who called the shots**

“It is vital for the effective running of the NHS that directors are accountable for decisions they take. It is also a key driver of public confidence in local services that this is seen to be the case,” Pritchard told colleagues.

She asked them to consider “the feasibility of NHS England being given the powers and resources to regulate, who this could apply to and how it could operate in practice; learning from other sectors such as financial services, education and law”.

## NHS chief considering regulation of managers

A decision on introducing regulation lies with the government rather than the NHS, but Pritchard said that “the NHS should contribute proactively and fully, and with an open mind, to this decision-making process”.

Ministers changed the law to allow them to introduce regulation of managers more easily, but have said that they do not believe it is necessary. Steve Barclay, the health secretary, has previously pushed for tighter checks on managers and is thought to want the [Letby](#) inquiry to consider whether further changes are needed.

He will be under pressure to speed up that timescale as Pritchard pushes the health service to come to a firm view sooner.

Sir Julian Hartley, head of NHS Providers, which represents hospital bosses, said: “We absolutely need full accountability of managers. We need to keep an open mind about how that should happen. Regulation of managers is one of the options on the table. First, though, we need the inquiry so that we can fully understand what happened and what actions need to be taken to prevent this in future.”

Senior doctors have long pushed for managers to be regulated in the same way as they and other healthcare professionals are, and momentum for the changes have been building this week. Whistleblowers in the Letby case and the head of the public inquiry into the Mid Staffordshire scandal have backed the idea.

Sir Robert Francis KC said that “the time has now come” for regulation, including a blacklisting system to stop bosses responsible for mismanagement and cover-ups [moving to new jobs elsewhere in the NHS](#).

- [\*\*Medical director fobbed us off, say parents\*\*](#)

Stephen Brearey, a consultant who tried to raise concerns about Letby, said: “Often we’ll see senior managers who have no apparent accountability for what they do in our trust move to other trusts and you worry about their future actions.”

Ravi Jayaram, another paediatrician who studied the link between Letby’s actions and baby deaths, argued that “accountability hinges on a statutory framework that enforces responsible behaviour”.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said that “there are a number of systems and processes in place to ensure accountability of NHS directors. NHS England has recently strengthened these.” She added: “We keep this policy under active review.”