

Timesheet fraud

NHS fraud prevention quick guide

January 2026

V0.4



Timesheet fraud

Timesheet fraud occurs when an employee falsifies a record (timesheet) of hours worked for the purpose of payment. A timesheet may be falsified by inflating hours worked, misreporting breaks taken, overtime worked, on-call hours, unsociable hours, using a falsified approval signature or submitting fraudulent higher-grade claims.

The risk of an organisation processing a falsified timesheet increases when appropriate controls are lacking or when policies and procedures are not followed.

Who is this quick guide for?

This guidance is intended for staff working in NHS finance, payroll, human resources, and agency functions, as well as staff authorised to approve timesheets, including the bank office team.

How to spot fraud

Staff must remain vigilant for indicators of timesheet fraud, including, but not limited to:

- unrecognisable or missing signatures on timesheets
- physical timesheets that appear to have been altered where changes have not been initialled by the authorised signatory
- timesheets completed by someone other than the worker, for example by the employing agency rather than the agency staff member
- unusual working patterns including discrepancies between timesheet claims and attendance records, frequent overtime, shifts outside normal working hours, or duplicate or overlapping shifts
- missing or incomplete supporting documentation
- system anomalies, including retrospective changes, multiple user accounts, or a lack of an audit trail
- circumvention of organisational policies for the submission and approval of timesheets.

Prevention advice

Implementing the actions outlined in this quick guide will assist NHS organisations and their staff in ensuring that timesheet arrangements provide a clear and transparent audit trail, while minimising opportunities for fraud.

The following procedures and controls should be in place prior to the authorisation of all staff timesheets (including substantive, agency, and bank staff).

Governance

Strong governance over timesheet processes helps ensure accuracy, transparency, and compliance with organisational policy. Key measures to support this include:

Policies and procedures

- clear policies and procedures should be in place for the completion, submission and authorisation of timesheets and/or overtime claim forms for agency and bank staff; they should also cover special circumstances such as maternity leave, on-call duties, or unsociable hours to prevent overpayments.
- the policy should define a clear segregation of duties between those who submit and those who authorise timesheets, specifying who can authorise another employee's timesheet and who can approve and sign off claims.
- all timesheets should be submitted in accordance with organisational policy, subjected to regular monthly audits against rotas and payroll records, and scrutinised for compliance, with any non-compliant or suspicious timesheets rejected.

Communication and training

- timesheet policies and procedures should be regularly communicated to all staff, including the potential disciplinary and criminal action of fraudulent claims.
- staff should be encouraged to complete fraud related e-learning modules and understand how and to whom to report any suspicious activity.
- Local Counter Fraud Specialists (LCFSs) should deliver targeted presentations on timesheets fraud.

Oversight and system controls

- conduct regular audits of organisational systems to identify any discrepancies, such as overlapping or excessive hours, and raise these with the relevant budget holder, department head or LCFS; this helps identify patterns or collusion between staff and managers.
- maintain an understanding of rejected claims to highlight recurrent issues and use this data to inform targeted awareness and policy reinforcement.
- ensure access to timesheet systems is secure and auditable. Applying Multi-Factor Authentication (which requires users to provide two or more verification factors to access an account) where possible.
- maintain an up-to-date authorised signatory list cross-referenced against those authorising timesheets.

Process

Timesheet processes should be clearly defined and carefully managed to ensure that all hours claimed are accurate, verifiable and properly authorised. Key measures to support this include:

- timesheets must be completed and submitted only by the contractor, agency worker or employee; agencies should not complete timesheets on behalf of agency workers and NHS organisations should reject any timesheets suspected of being completed by someone other than the individual undertaking the work.
- timesheets should include full details of the actual hours and locations worked and clearly identify the authorising manager.
- verification checks should be carried out by the authoriser to ensure timesheets are submitted by the correct individual, that hours and locations are accurate, that all required information is included and that the declaration is signed by both the staff member and the authoriser. Verification may include reconciliation against allocation sheets, calendars and shift records and incomplete or ineligible timesheets should be returned to the employee.
- extra caution should be taken with paper timesheets, as they carry a higher risk of fraud; completed forms should be clear and not overwritten, the authoriser should block out any uncompleted fields to prevent amendments and any necessary changes should be initialled by the authorising signatory, with details recorded in the organisation's systems once approved to prevent manipulation.

- timesheets for agency staff should include the hours and locations worked, deduction of mandatory breaks, shift type (e.g., shifts that attracts higher payment such as resident or non-resident on call) and specify the approving manager within both the NHS organisation and the agency.
- timesheets should be reconciled against invoices received from agencies to ensure accuracy and prevent overpayments.

Electronic timesheet systems

NHS organisations should consider implementing electronic timesheet systems, as they provide secure auditable records and reduce opportunities for fraud. Electronic submissions ensure that timesheets originate from the correct individual, include the necessary details such as hours and location worked, and follow controlled approval routes supported by system-based verification.

In contrast, paper-based timesheets are more vulnerable to manipulation. They can be overwritten, may lack full information, and require manual reconciliation.

To ensure that an electronic timesheet system is effective, we recommend that it has the following features:

- Secure, unique user accounts (no shared logins), with Multi-Factor Authentication where possible and a requirement for users to change their passwords on a regular basis.
- Supporting SOPs and procedures that cover the regular review of system access rights and limitations to users.
- Audit trails and verification for electronic authorisation.
- Capture of key supporting details (actual hours, location/site/ward, break deductions, and shift type that may attract enhanced rates).
- Authorised signatory management (maintained list of approvers; approvals only valid if approver is on the current list).
- Controlled approval workflow (named approver, escalation/delegation rules, and prevention of self-approval).
- Ability to apply policy parameters automatically, such as validation rules to prevent common fraud/error (overlapping shifts, excessive hours, missing breaks, duplicate entries, incorrect grade/rate/shift type).
- System access blocked after a specified number of failed login attempts.

- Controls on retrospective changes (lock periods after submission/payroll cut-off; allow changes only via authorised amendment request with reason codes).
- Automated exception reporting / anomaly detection (e.g., unusual patterns, frequent overrides, repeated rejected claims, repeated late submissions).

Counter-fraud declarations

NHSCFA recommends timesheets for both substantive and agency workers should include a counter fraud declaration signed by both the employee and the authoriser. Both the employee and authoriser should sign the declaration.

Suggested example declarations are as follows:

Example declarations

Employee declaration:

I declare that the information I have given on this form is correct and complete and that I have not claimed elsewhere for the hours/shifts detailed on this timesheet. I understand that knowingly providing false information may result in disciplinary action and I may be liable for prosecution and civil recovery proceedings. I consent to the disclosure of information from this form to and by the NHS organisation and NHSCFA for verification and the investigation, prevention, detection and prosecution of fraud.

Authoriser declaration:

I am an authorised signatory for my ward/department. I am signing below to confirm that both the grade and the shift that I am authorising are accurate, and I approve payment. I understand that knowingly authorising false information may result in disciplinary action, and I may be liable for prosecution and civil recovery proceedings. I consent to the disclosure of information from this form to and by the NHS organisation and NHSCFA for verification and the investigation, prevention, detection and prosecution of fraud.

If you suspect fraud

If fraud is suspected the organisation's counter fraud policy and escalation process should be followed immediately and the LCFS contacted for advice (see below).

How to report fraud

Report any suspicions of fraud to the [NHS Counter Fraud Authority](#) online or through the NHS Fraud and Corruption Reporting Line on **0800 028 4060** (powered by Crimestoppers). All reports are treated in confidence, and you have the option to report anonymously. You can also report fraud to your nominated LCFS.

Details of your LCFS [ADD DETAILS]

- Organisation name:
- Name:
- Job Title:
- Email:
- Telephone:
- Mobile:
- Address:



Counter Fraud Authority

10 South Colonnade

Canary Wharf

London

E14 5EA

Tel: 0207 895 4500

www.cfa.nhs.uk

