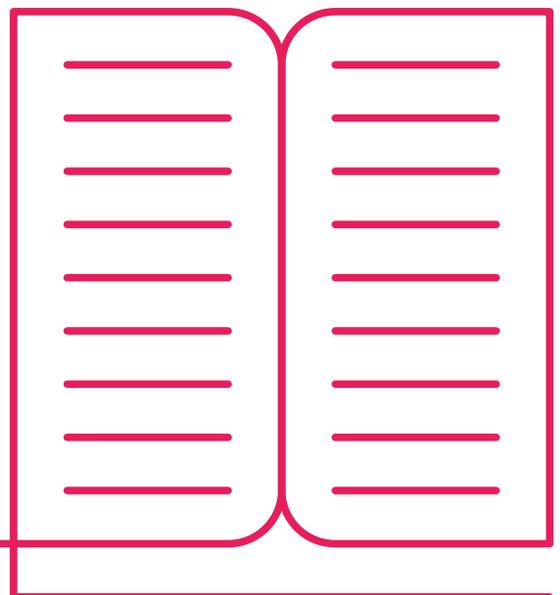


# Workforce

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## What's the problem?

It is now recognised that workforce issues are the key challenge facing the NHS across the whole of the UK. This was recognised in the publication of the draft Workforce Strategy by HEE in 2018 and its importance in the NHS England Long Term Plan. The Academy and other commentators have stated that the ambitions of the Long Term Plan will not be realised unless the workforce issues are resolved.

There are significant workforce shortages across the health and social care systems in the UK, which Colleges have been concerned about for a number of years. Most specialities in medicine face staff shortages, the exact number of which changes from year to year. This problem is exacerbated by two factors. First, a general lack of 'boots on the ground', such as nurses and other allied healthcare professionals and second, the impact Brexit may have on the EU workforce.

Listed below are examples of some of the shortages facing the medical profession:

- The Royal College of Physicians of London Census 2017/18 found that 45% of advertised consultant posts went unfilled due to a lack of suitable applicants. 53% of consultants and 68% of trainees said rota gaps occurred frequently or often, with significant patient safety issues in 20% of cases
- The Royal College of General Practitioners found in December 2018 that 31% of GPs said they are unlikely to be working in general practice in the next five years. In February 2017, 38% of surveyed GPs said that they had at least one vacancy for more than three months
- In October 2017, 29% of advertised consultant posts in emergency medicine remain unfilled
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists is seeking inclusion on the National Shortage Occupations list as only 69% of training posts in psychiatry were filled in August 2017
- The Royal College of Radiologists' latest clinical Oncology Workforce Census from 2017 showed that 1 in 3 consultant clinical oncology posts have remained unfilled for a year or more.

## What can be done to resolve these issues?

The NHS Long Term Plan committed to producing a Workforce Implementation Plan. Any workforce strategy or implementation plan must have three strands which have to be addressed together:

- Workforce supply
- Job roles and new ways of working
- Valuing the workforce to support staff retention.

In line with this the workforce crisis can be addressed by:

- Increasing supply
- Improving multi-disciplinary working
- Increasing efforts to retain the current staff.

These solutions apply equally across the UK but may need to be implemented in different ways according to local need.

### a) Supply

While the Academy welcomes the increase in places at medical school, there is a significant time-lag before these doctors are fully qualified. More interim measures should be put in place such as including more medical specialities in the national shortage occupation list and increasing the number of visas available to the Medical Training Initiative, a scheme which allows doctors from across the world, particularly Department for International Development priority countries, to work and train in the UK for up to two years. In addition, consultants, high grade trainees and SAS doctors choose where they work. This often leaves rural and remote health services significantly understaffed. Future allocation must be based on geographical service needs.

### b) Multi-professional work and changing roles

As well as increasing the number of doctors, there needs to be more imaginative use of other clinical staff working with doctors. Trained doctors, which are an expensive resource, should do the work that only they can do. Better and increased use of regulated Medical Associate Professionals, advanced care practitioners or similar roles is required. Better team working is not simply about addressing workforce shortages but will also deliver better care for patients.

### c) Retention – Supporting the workforce

It is essential that greater efforts are made to retain the current workforce alongside moves to increase overall workforce numbers. Current workload pressure caused by staff shortages and increased demand and general low morale amongst the workforce are leading to increased numbers of staff leaving or considering leaving the NHS. In terms of the medical workforce this is about both making improvements for doctors in training so they remain committed to the NHS and also making it easier for doctors at the later stages of their career to stay on at work. Both these require a greater flexibility in the approach to working patterns and practice. We must create a supportive and enabling environment for NHS employees. This need not cost a large amount of money, but rather is more dependent upon good leadership and a change in culture and behaviour, not strategy, which can be encouraged by education and training.

## What can the Academy and Colleges do?

Colleges and the Academy are not in a position themselves directly solve workforce problems. The Academy has, however, identified those areas where it can make a positive contribution and this will be the focus of our work in 2019. These include:

- Providing evidence and data (routinely collected by many Colleges) to inform accurate workforce planning
- Proposing practical solutions for local or national implementation of new working practices, service developments or other workforce matters
- Engaging with and support national and local organisations in their activities to tackle workforce problems
- Ensuring that all our own activities (such as guidance, curricula, standards) make work easier rather than harder for doctors
- Promoting the MTI via College sponsorship and academy administration
- Supporting career development and training of non-medical professionals.