



## Workforce planning

### Academy of Medical Royal Colleges statement

March / 2021

In July 2020, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges in conjunction with the BMA, NHS Confederation, NHS Providers, RCN and UNISON produced a [joint statement](#) on the NHS workforce.

The statement concluded that addressing the NHS and social care workforce issues is the best possible recognition of the hard work and dedication of staff during the pandemic. It will also be essential if the NHS and social care are to deliver for the public in the months and years ahead.

The NHS led Covid vaccination programme has given the nation hope and we are now able to look ahead and think about life beyond the pandemic. It is now the time to take practical steps to provide long term and sustainable workforce solutions for the NHS and care system.

This Academy statement focuses on the need for a clear process for workforce planning which aims for consensus over requirements.

There is genuine enthusiasm for looking differently at how we do things throughout the NHS and care system post-pandemic and we must not let this opportunity to embed changes that improve the quality of care for patients, the health of the public and the experience for staff pass by.

Our joint statement last year identified the issues that needed addressing as:

- Ensuring the wellbeing of the workforce
- Flexible working arrangements and at work facilities
- New ways of working and delivering care including the value of multidisciplinary team working
- Leadership
- Increasing the supply of workforce.

The NHS People Plan for England, published in 2020, provides a helpful framework for addressing a number of these fundamental workforce issues and the other nations have similar initiatives. It has not been possible actively to progress these issues during the pandemic, but now is the time to swiftly move this agenda forward at local and national level.

These measures to improve staff experience and therefore aid retention, which is crucial at this time, are vital and welcome. However, the People Plan that was published only considered workforce supply and future planning superficially.

Detailed workforce planning is a notoriously complex and sophisticated task if it is to be done well. It is not simply a mechanistic process around numbers: it involves understanding population demographics, future health care demand, training needs and requirements, the productivity impact of technology and new ways of working, workforce skill mix and participation rates, retention rates and policy priorities. There is rarely a single “correct” answer and confidence limits are often large. However, as a system, we have not been good at seeking to secure consensus on what are reasonable predictions and their associated solutions.



We are seeking:

- An inclusive and open debate about future workforce requirements across the four nations involving Governments, Statutory Education Bodies, employers, commissioners, regulators, professional bodies and trades unions and the public
- Transparency and agreement on existing workforce data with sharing of appropriate data
- A process through which, as far as is possible, agreement and consensus is reached on workforce requirements both in terms of specific staff groups and, importantly, across the workforce
- An understanding of the ongoing roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders at different levels of the system i.e., employers, commissioners, ICS, professional organisations, regulators and Government statutory bodies
- A regular published assessment of workforce projections and requirements in each of the four nations from a designated responsible body
- A further clear process by which Governments are required, on an ongoing basis, to consider and act on jointly agreed recommendations on workforce numbers from the designated body or provide a clear rationale for why they are not supported.

The proposed NHS legislation for England makes provision for a workforce plan to be presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State. This provides the opportunity to develop and enshrine these principles in amendments to the Bill.

The sustainability of our health and care system in all four nations is reliant on attracting and retaining the highest calibre of appropriately trained professionals.

A paradigm shift is urgently required to ensure that relevant organisations collaborate effectively and honestly to ensure workforce planning is undertaken in a comprehensive and transparent way. This endeavour must be backed up by national commitment to resourcing such a workforce, both now and in the future.