

NHS Long Term Workforce Plan unveiled

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The much anticipated [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan 2023](#) was finally published last week. It sets out the strategic direction for the long term as well as actions that can be taken locally and regionally and nationally in the short to medium terms to address the staffing crisis in the NHS and place it on a sustainable footing going forwards whilst also improving patient care.

The plan sets out three key priority areas of focus:

- **Train** – significantly increasing training capacity and new and alternative routes into professional roles including medical degree apprenticeships.
- **Retain** – supporting people throughout their careers and increasing the flexibility on offer to staff to assist retention levels in the service.
- **Reform** – reforming ways of working and training to improve productivity by building broader teams with flexible skills and ensuring that new technology can be utilised effectively to free up clinician time and improve care to patients.

The plan recognises that for decades there has been a lack of co-ordinated workforce planning in the NHS, which has limited the ability to best utilise staff skills and to forecast future needs. These challenges were further exacerbated by the pandemic as the service dealt with unprecedented demands never before experienced in its 75-year history. However, it is hoped that these shortcoming will be addressed under the new plan, which will be reviewed every two years going forwards.

The plan aims to address staffing issues over the next 15 years and decrease reliance on both agency and overseas labour, which increase costs.

The targets for 2031 include:

- Doubling the number of medical school training places, with more places in areas of the country with the greatest shortages
- Increasing the number of GP training places by 50%
- Almost doubling the number of adult nurse training places, with 24,000 more nurse and midwife training places a year
- Expanding dental training places by 40%

In addition to increased training, the plan also recognises the role of retention and highlights the importance of flexible working options, career development as well as cultivating an inclusive and compassionate culture. In addition, reforms to NHS pension scheme aim to facilitate more flexible retirement options as well as making it easier and more attractive for retired staff to return.

To deliver the objectives set out in the plan the government have promised £2.4bn in funding over the next five years.

Although the plan is undoubtedly welcome and hopefully will provide the platform for sustained change going forwards, it is also acknowledged that it is not a quick fix, and it will take many years to see the improvements that are so desperately needed. Given that last year more than 40,000 nurses left the NHS and as of March 2023 the current vacancy rate stood at 110,000, with one out of every 10 posts unfilled, retention will be the key in the short to medium term. Therefore, healthcare employers should be looking at what they can do now to cultivate inclusive and compassionate cultures, enhance staff wellbeing and provide opportunities for flexible working and career development to encourage staff to stay and those who may have previously left to return.

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