

Staff Shortages in the NHS

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In January 2019, the NHS Long Term Plan was published, and this included workforce plans which highlighted the need for extra staff. As part of this strategy, specific mention was made of the potential to expand the Medical Training Initiative (which allows trainee doctors from outside the EU to work in the UK for a maximum of two years) so that more medical trainees from both developed and developing countries could learn and work in the NHS. Reports suggest that the NHS is still waiting to see any increase on the cap under the Medical Training Initiative from the Home Office. The Interim NHS People Plan issued in June 2019 also highlighted the staffing issues faced by the NHS, and in particular, the shortages in nurses.

With both Brexit and the NHS heading up the list of key issues for voters, it is to be expected that focus will remain heavily on the NHS during the general election campaigns. Health bosses have already advised that the NHS should not be used as a “political weapon” but we are likely to see further promises and assertions being made in respect of funding and costs.

We’ve already seen proposals for an “NHS visa” under a points-based immigration system – with extra points awarded for working in the NHS. It remains to be seen what further specific proposals will be made for tackling the key issue of current and anticipated future workforce shortages and the impact that this is having (and will continue to have) on staff morale and frontline care, including whether there will be the previously discussed expansion of the Medical Training Initiative. We also await the publication of the NHS Full People Plan which is due later this year.

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