

19 April 2021

Dear Prime Minister

As the NHS reviews its priorities after the impact of the pandemic on our work, our members across all parts of the NHS workforce are clear that action to address the chronic undersupply of NHS staff, particularly in our degree level professions, is urgently required.

Your government has helpfully focused on recruiting more registered nurses and providing support for the cost of living to undergraduates studying for healthcare careers. This followed previous steps including the expansion of medical schools and improved access for international healthcare professionals to roles in health and social care. The recent white paper provides an opportunity to clarify the accountability arrangements for workforce and to strengthen the role of local leaders.

We welcome the opportunity these steps provide. However, last autumn's spending review did not recognise that there is a compelling case for investment which starts to deliver sustained and impactful increases to workforce numbers by the end of this parliament. Investment in the forthcoming spending review means we can capitalise on the increased interest in undergraduate healthcare courses as well as other vital roles.

The various iterations of the NHS People Plan have rightly reminded employers of the role they must play in improving workplaces and thereby retaining the teams and individuals who make up the NHS. Our members are committed to working together to improve the experience of the NHS workforce, particularly in the areas of greatest variation.

At the same time, we are very aware of the strain and stress placed on NHS services and teams by the vacancies we see across services and roles. This position was the case before the pandemic but is thrown into stark relief by the experience of the last 12 months. There is a very real risk that these vacancies are the greatest threat to the retention of our people. The iterations of the NHS People Plan over the last two years have not been able to properly address the following key questions:

- What the workforce requirements for delivering the NHS Long Term Plan are in each geography within the NHS.
- The areas of greatest risk and greatest need across the NHS workforce both in terms of service delivery and roles.
- The educational, training and infrastructure costs of increasing supply.
- The timescales for increasing supply, and the respective roles of international and domestic markets.

It appears that no such plan can be developed because the government has not been able to commit to funding the implications of these important questions. Billions in additional investment will be required by the end of this parliament to address these long-standing issues of supply and education.

As the people of the NHS emerge from the pandemic proud of their contribution to the safety of the nation but exhausted after the most testing year they will ever have experienced, we ask you to give them hope. Hope that there is a plan (matched by investment) which will address shortages of NHS staff in the medium and long term, and hope that such planning finally becomes a routine way of how the government and the NHS work together to improve the health and wealth of the nation.

Yours sincerely



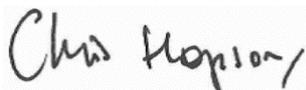
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