

Dear Chancellor,

Date

10.03.2023

NHS Workforce Plan

Our members – health leaders across England – were hugely supportive of your Autumn Statement last November in which you confirmed that the government will deliver an independent assessment of workforce needs across the NHS over the next five, ten and 15 years.

For the attention of Chancellor of the Exchequer Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

CEU.Enquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk

As you know, the NHS Confederation had been making the case for this important strategy for several years considering the recruitment and retention crisis facing health and social care, alongside rising demand for treatment and support.

CC Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP

NHS England Chief Executive, Amanda Pritchard

We recognise you have been a strong advocate of this too, both as the country's longest-serving health secretary and in your time as chair of the Commons health and social care committee. The expert panel of your own former committee rated the government's progress on key workforce commitments as 'inadequate'; therefore, your acknowledgement as Chancellor that the NHS would finally receive this comprehensive assessment was hugely welcomed as it gave hope to those working across the service that help was on its way.

NHS England Chief Workforce Officer, Navina Evans

If we are to believe recent reports that suggest that your department is holding up the publication of this plan and that it may not commit to funding the independent assessment that has been presented in full, then we do not see how this damning rating of the government's commitment can ever improve. This would leave patient care and the future viability of the workforce at risk.

You will be very aware that the biggest challenge facing the NHS is its workforce, with over 124,000 reported vacancies. This, alongside concerns around pay and working conditions, mean many staff feel exhausted and demoralised at a time when they are needed more than ever to clear the care backlogs that have built up following the pandemic.

We are seeing this play out in the waves of industrial action that have disrupted patient services over the last few months and we remain hopeful that a resolution between the government and trade unions can be reached swiftly and that if a new pay deal is agreed that it must be funded in full by the government. Otherwise, health leaders will face impossible choices about which aspects of their services they must cut at a time when demand is through the roof.

A more long-term commitment to address the staffing deficit, as intended in the workforce plan, will add further hope that the government is committed to the future of the NHS and to supporting improved economic productivity. We have been pleased with the process NHS England (including Health Education England) has led in the development of this plan, including how our members and partners have been engaged.

We expect the plan both to describe the supply requirements that the NHS needs including through education and apprenticeship routes, and to challenge NHS organisations to improve the retention of their staff.

As far as we can tell, this desperately needed plan should be ready to publish soon. However, there is mounting concern that having asked the NHS to set out the doctors, nurses and other staff it needs to meet the growing needs of the population into the future, the government and the Treasury, in particular, does not appear to like the answers that have been reached and that this is delaying its publication.

It may well be that your department's position and your personal commitment have been misrepresented and so, on behalf of our members we would be grateful if you could reaffirm the government's intention, allow the totality of the independent workforce projections to publish in without delay, and commit to funding them in full in your imminent Spring Budget.

Failure to do this will see the NHS continue to be under-staffed, with all of the implications that brings for patient care, waiting times, the

efficiency of services and for staff morale. In short, the NHS will be stuck in perpetual crisis management, which for the sake of everyone who works in and relies on its services, must not happen.

We would be grateful for your consideration of these matters and would be happy to provide more detail if that would be helpful. Your team can contact us via externalaffairs@nhsconfed.org to arrange this.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Taylor
Chief executive
NHS Confederation



Lord Victor Adebawale
Chair
NHS Confederation