

NHS Workforce Plan missing core elements to address the immediate crisis

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Responding to latest reports on the details expected in the NHS Workforce Plan, the Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) has warned that short-term solutions are needed to supplement the long-term strategy if the healthcare crisis is to be alleviated.

Commenting on the plan, Tania Bowers, Global Public Policy Director at APSCo said:

“We welcome the focus on training many more doctors, nurses and affiliated skills but as the Prime Minister has already alluded to, it could take 15 years to have a real impact. The NHS is in crisis and needs immediate action to alleviate this.

“Increasing training and diversifying routes into healthcare employment will only be effective if people choose to practice their profession in the NHS and build a career within it. The NHS is struggling with extreme worker dissatisfaction, as evidenced by strike action and demotivation, not helped by recent OECD data evidencing that the UK has the lowest ratio of practising doctors per 1,000 people.

“The UK needs to show it has a globally competitive healthcare sector that people want to work in. Reducing the reliance on globally trained healthcare professionals during a staffing shortage isn't viable.

“Clear leadership and ownership is needed by government and NHS employers to cut the red tape, which would deliver immediate results. An example is the lack of conformity around pre-hiring compliance and safety checks of permanent and agency staff which is contributing to the increased costs and delays of getting nurses and doctors in front of patients. A specialist, compliant to work for a Trust hospital under one CCG, may not necessarily be so at another hospital or primary care centre that operates under the same group, meaning there is minimal agility or responsiveness in workforce management.

“One aim of the reform is to reduce NHS providers' reliance on agency workers, currently critical to fill resourcing gaps. Members report these gaps are partly created by staff choosing to leave the service and work as locums or to reduce their permanent hours to supplement pay through better paid agency work, a necessity for them due to the surging cost of living. Rather than the agencies driving the demand, it is candidates choosing to work this way, reducing the access the NHS providers have to staff directly. In any workforce as complex as the NHS there will always be a need for agency workers and government must recognise the sector as part of a well-managed solution.

“The workforce plan is long overdue but will take years to have impact. There are shorter term steps that government must consider: standardised compliance checks and onboarding processes across the trusts, primary care and social care, to facilitate efficient, free movement between care settings; reform of the apprenticeship levy to allow reskilling and upskilling of existing staff through flexible, modular training; and a focus on working conditions as well as pay and benefits to remotivate the current workforce.”

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About APSCo

The Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) is the trade association for the professional recruitment market. APSCo Global comprises APSCo Asia, APSCo Australia, APSCo Deutschland and APSCo United Kingdom as well as APSCo OutSource, the trade body for the RPO and MSP sectors.

Find out more: www.apscouk.org