

Workforce Planning and Retention

Future Leaders Programme



Background

The NHS's greatest strength is its people, who come from all backgrounds and have varying skill sets. The NHS employs about 1.3 million people across the health service and is the biggest employer in Europe.

Over the past decade, workforce growth has not kept up with the substantial changes in population demographics and healthcare needs. There are now unsustainable vacancies in the NHS, with the most significant shortfall in nursing¹ with a shortfall of 260,000 to 360,000 staff forecasted by 2036/37².

With a shift in the expectations from the workforce, change in demographics, evolving global demand for current staff and the long time required to train healthcare professionals, the NHS interim and long-term plan is a welcomed development. These plans support effective workforce planning and ensure the appropriate staff level is available to deliver world-class services. It is essential in solving the workforce crisis.

Having an effective workforce requires a robust understanding of the nature of the workforce and financial pressures alongside evidence-based workforce planning, ensuring alignment with wider service planning.

The NHS long term plan

The NHS Long Term Plan sets out a plan to keep pace with the evolving landscape of service needs of a growing, ageing population. It focuses on several key areas: the overall service model, prevention, reduction of health inequalities, improvements in quality and a move towards digitally enabled care and taxpayer return.

Regarding the NHS workforce, there are different unique long-term plans for the different professionals³. Across the professional categories, the long-term plan commits to "take sustained and concerted action to:

1. **Make the NHS a great place to work** by prioritising staff support and wellbeing.
2. **Strengthen and support good, compassionate, and diverse leadership** at all managerial and clinical levels.
3. Ensure there are enough **people with the right skills to help care** for patients well now and in the future.
4. **Enhance retention drives for professionals** to continue their NHS careers.
5. Empower the workforce to use **new technology**.

The NHS long term workforce plan

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan was published in 2023, mandated by the NHS Long Term Plan. It is a comprehensive NHS workforce plan focusing on retention, the use of cutting-edge technology and a massive recruitment drive.

It encourages a cultural transformation aimed at improving the experience of NHS staff and ensuring retention. The NHS Long-Term Workforce Plan has three key areas of focus:

1. **Train** or Grow the workforce by increasing apprenticeship and alternative routes into professional roles. Long term aim is to ensure that the NHS is not heavily reliant on international recruitment and temporary staffing to keep the NHS adequately staffed.
2. **Retain** by embedding the right culture such as compassionate leadership and improving opportunities available to staff.
3. **Reform** by working and training differently



Workforce and Diversity

Approximately 19% of NHS staff in England are from an ethnic minority background, but ethnic minority staff are significantly underrepresented in senior leadership posts. Teams must be trained on equality, diversity and inclusion and be aware of unconscious bias. Staff should feel empowered to challenge discriminatory behaviours, and effective whistle-blowing policies should be in place. Representation and inclusivity are essential components of staff retention, good teamworking and safe, effective patient care.

What we can do

1. Be aware of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues and advocate for this. Free courses on EDI are available on e-lfh and maxcourse.
2. Complete a leadership course and incorporate compassionate leadership practices in the workplace, e.g., Edward Jenner or other leadership courses .
3. Volunteer and Train to be a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian
4. Prioritize our health using NHS self-help tips. This ensures we are in an optimal state to take care of others.
5. Request for annual leave and study leave well ahead of time. This ensures there is an adequate plan to cover staffing gaps.
6. Challenge discriminatory behaviours.

References

1. NHS Improvement. Quarterly performance of the NHS provider sector: quarter 1 2018/19. Available at <https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/quarterly-performance-nhs-provider-sector-quarter-1-201819/> Accessed 11 August 2023
2. NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, 2023. Available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-v1.2.pdf>. Accessed 11 August 2023
3. <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/areas-of-work/workforce/> accessed 15 August 2023

Further reading
[Operational Workforce Planning: a self-assessment tool](#)
[The NHS Retention Improvement Guide](#)
 Understanding Workforce Planning
 The [national retention support programmes](#)⁴



HEE's Values

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