



# Towards sustainability: ensuring the future healthcare workforce

**Nurses, midwives and AHPs make up around 75% of the NHS clinical workforce; investment in the existing and future workforce is vital to meet future demands and sustain core services.**

The education of nurses, midwives and allied health professionals (AHPs) faces a period of unprecedented change. We need strong, sustainable growth in higher education and government must invest in the graduate health and social care workforce supported by a thriving research environment.

We call on the next UK government and devolved administrations to:

Invest in the  
graduate  
healthcare  
workforce

Build on the  
expertise and  
experience of  
existing staff

Protect and  
increase  
innovation  
and research  
capacity

# Invest in the graduate healthcare workforce



The need to grow the nursing, midwifery and allied health profession workforce has never been greater, particularly post-Brexit. As an average across the UK EU nursing, midwifery and allied health registered professionals amount to 5% of our workforce while the EU university staff that educate them are estimated at 4.5%. The next government should rapidly guarantee the rights of EU citizens working in the UK to secure stability both for healthcare and higher education staff retention.

Nursing has been acknowledged as being a priority workforce area, appearing on the Shortage Occupation List with current vacancy rates in England of 7.2% and up to 15% in some parts of the country.

Universities across the UK need absolute assurance that the education of our future health professionals will receive adequate investment over the coming years, including funding to enable the expansion of places. Nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions have been recognised as being high cost subjects by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). In England, these courses would require c. £100 million for 75,000 students in the system in addition to funding generated from tuition fees. Although one third of that investment of £32 million has

been secured for 2017/2018, there is no certainty for universities in England on funding levels beyond that. A decline in applications to these programmes should focus future governments on addressing funding sustainability if we are to grow student numbers.

Universities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland require certainty about appropriate levels of higher education funding and commissioning arrangements.

Future governments must commit to investing in additional clinical placement capacity to enable growth, providing adequate funding for pre-registration education in universities and helping to promote careers in these professions. £15 million over the lifetime of the next parliament would support an extra 10,000 places for clinical practice.

New routes into the professions, such as nursing associates and apprenticeships can create new opportunities but draw on the same resources in terms of educators and placement capacity. In the interest of patient safety, governments must scale up tried and tested university routes as the means of educating the future workforce as well as trying new roles and routes into the professions.

## Our asks

- Recognise the full cost of teaching nursing, midwifery and allied health profession courses and the additional numbers of students needed including investment in additional clinical placement capacity.
- Increase student numbers and promote careers in healthcare professions through campaigning activity in targeted vulnerable subject areas.

**To address workforce shortages and reduce the reliance on overseas staff the government must commit additional funding to meet the real cost of providing healthcare courses and increase student numbers.**

## Build on the expertise and experience of existing staff

The sustainability of health and social care is dependent on the transformation and support of existing services and staff. Investment in the existing workforce is essential for patient safety and staff retention. Staff need to adapt to new roles and learn new skills to help integrate services, deliver primary care, move care into the community and operate in the digital era.

The next government must address the disconnect between strategic priorities and actual levels of investment. Existing staff must respond effectively to progress in the management of health and illness including technological advancement. Commissioners in England and employers across the UK have traditionally commissioned a wide range of courses from universities in, for example, advanced practice, specialist clinical areas, prescribing and chronic disease management. There were cuts to local continuing professional development (CPD) budgets in 2016 of up to 45% as the result of a decision taken at national level to reduce workforce development funding by 49%. Moreover, specialised roles such as health visiting, district, practice, school and occupational health nurse higher education face uncertainty in terms of their future funding. This does not reflect the urgent need to provide patient care closer to home.



### Our asks

- Government must address the disconnect between national strategic priorities and levels of investment in the continuing education of existing staff and the funding of specialist roles.
- Commissioners and employers must prioritise continuing professional development alongside levy-funded apprenticeship programmes.

**Continuing professional development is essential for patient safety and staff retention. Investment in specialist training is also required for staff to deliver the care that patients require closer to home.**

## Protect and increase innovation and research capacity

Research led by nurses, midwives and AHPs already makes an important contribution to the UK's overall research excellence. This is research that results in older people falling less, fewer infections in hospital, better rehabilitation for stroke survivors, improved rates of return to work after illness, improved maternity services and better mental health care. Applied health research is highly reliant on UK government and EU funding. Universities in the UK reported a total of £3.4 million in EU research grant funding in 2015/2016 for nursing and allied health professions, 12 universities were in receipt of EU grant funding of more than £100,000 for these subjects.

Capacity for research in our professions should be increased to ensure that the healthcare professions are properly grounded in research for the future. Government should support initiatives to significantly increase the number of clinical academic nurses, midwives and AHPs to 1% of the registered workforce in these professions.

### Our asks

- Commit to protecting current levels of investment in R&D funding, health research and development and the Global Challenges Fund and maintain full UK access to and influence over EU research and innovation programmes, including Horizon 2020.
- Invest in initiatives to significantly increase the number of clinical academic nurses, midwives and AHPs to 1% of the registered workforce in these professions.

## Who we are

The Council of Deans of Health represents 82 UK university faculties engaged in education and research for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. It celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. Our members are experts in educating future and current health professionals, both in the UK and overseas and carry out internationally-recognised research that benefits patients.



**Almost anyone who studies in the UK to become a nurse, midwife or allied health professional will study with one of our 82 members.**

**At any one time our members will be educating more than 100,000 future registered health professionals, both in the UK and internationally, leading to the education of 75% of the total future health professional workforce.**

**We estimate that the domestic education activity delivered by our members is worth more than £1.2bn annually.**



**Council of  
Deans of Health**

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