



Interim NHS People Plan

Briefing Paper – June 2019

The NHS published its [Interim NHS People Plan](#) on 3 June 2019. This follows the Long Term Plan, published in January 2019, and precedes publication of a full People Plan following the Government's 2019 Spending Review. The interim plan proposes a set of immediate actions on NHS workforce, particularly for nursing.

The Council of Deans of Health has engaged heavily with NHS England, NHS Improvement and Health Education England (HEE) during the development of the Interim People Plan. It sat on the sub-groups for both nurses and midwives and allied health professionals under the future clinical workforce workstream which reported into the national workforce steering group.

This briefing provides analysis of the Interim NHS People Plan, focusing on those aspects that most affect Council members. The Council has also published a [press release](#) in response to the plan.

Overall themes

The Plan is divided into 6 chapters, two of which relate to improving NHS culture. The Plan outlines actions that need to be taken to deliver 21st century care. It also sets out a new operating model for workforce planning and next steps for developing the full People Plan. It is however explicit that addressing the current shortage of nurses is *'the most urgent challenge'* and this topic is given its own chapter.

Tackling the nursing challenge

The Council is pleased to see that the interim plan reiterates the Long Term Plan's assertion that 'undergraduate' (read 'university based') nursing degree courses are the largest and most effective supply route for the profession. In a departure from the tone of the original Long Term Plan in January, we are pleased to see that the interim plan acknowledges the importance of academic attainment and values-based recruitment in university admissions and states *that 'it is critical that we retain the current standards to ensure applicants' expectations are managed and that patient safety is not affected'*. It seeks to encourage and support potential applicants and identify and address potential barriers to increasing acceptance rates.

Clinical placement expansion

Over the past year the Council has been working with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England to highlight the importance of clinical placement capacity to increasing student numbers, recognising that this is a growth constraint for some but not all universities and courses. As a result of these discussions, the interim plan announces the intention to expand clinical placement capacity in providers by 25% in 2019 (5,000 placements) through targeted support and resources. In our public

response we have welcomed this intervention but also called attention to the fact that extra placement capacity does not necessarily translate into corresponding additional student numbers. We know many Council members are already engaged in local conversations and that some have committed to trying to increase student numbers this year. We also continue to stress to policy makers the timing, capacity and applicant constraints faced by HEIs.

The NHS wants to review university acceptance rates in light of this increase in placement capacity and also to undertake a more comprehensive review of placement capacity.

In the longer term there is an intention to increase clinical placement capacity in primary and social care settings and explore innovative approaches to clinical placements such as the Collaborative Learning in Practice approach.

Stimulating demand

The Council has welcomed the commitment to strengthening the image and perception of nursing and consolidating current recruitment campaigns to develop *'a single campaign that reflects the realities of a career in modern nursing at the cutting edge of clinical practice. This will focus on those branches of nursing with the greatest vacancies, address demographic issues, and support local health systems with the biggest challenges by linking national and local initiatives.'* The NHS aims to expand its ambassador network and increasing opportunities for work experience and volunteering.

Reducing attrition

There is still an emphasis on reducing course attrition through implementation of the RePAIR programme recommendations. The NHS wants to work with the OfS to agree a standard definition of attrition, work with HEIs to ensure learners are well prepared for practice placements and develop a toolkit for supervisors and assessors to enable them to support the full range of learners.

Return to practice

The NHS wants to support and encourage more nurses to return to practice, which may have implications for members providing return to practice programmes.

International recruitment

International recruitment will be used to increase supply rapidly. NHS England/NHS Improvement regional teams will become responsible for the coordination of local health systems' recruitment efforts. The NHS intends to work with the DHSC and regulators to support improvements to regulatory processes for international recruitment.

Routes into the profession

The 'digital degree' mentioned in January's Long Term Plan has been rebranded as a 'blended learning nursing degree programme'. The NHS will be calling for expressions of interest from HEIs before the summer and will then work with the NMC to develop proposals in the autumn.

The Plan reiterates the existing commitment to developing the nursing associate role.

Student offer

Disappointingly, the People Plan does not mention additional maintenance support, tuition fee or loan concessions for healthcare students. The Long Term Plan's references to 'earn and learn' degrees for mental health and learning disability nursing and mature students have also disappeared. There is a commitment to working with HEIs to consider how to identify and address shortage areas. The Plan talks about promoting mental health and learning disability nursing and widening access through apprenticeship programmes. The Plan also seeks to support growth in the primary and community workforce.

The NHS has committed to working with the DHSC to improve the financial support available to students through the Learning Support Fund (LSF), considering how to streamline the process between applications and rewards and promote awareness of the scheme.

References to job guarantees for nurses have been toned down in comparison to January's Long Term Plan. The People Plan does state that several NHS organisations already offer job guarantees and that there is an opportunity to build on this nationally.

CPD spending

The People Plan acknowledges the dramatic decrease in national funding for CPD and notes that employers have also been investing less. It commits to *'review how to increase both national and local investment in CPD and workforce development with the aim of achieving a phased restoration, over the next five years, of previous funding levels for CPD.'* This commitment has already been made but remains a statement of intent rather than a strong commitment to change. This will also depend on the Spending Review and we may see a firmer decision published in the full People Plan.

The Plan aims *'to support nurses to develop in their careers, ensuring a diverse range of options for career progression, for example as advanced practitioners within multiprofessional teams or as academics and educators of the next generation.'* It is encouraging to see this acknowledgement of our sector.

Allied health professionals

The People Plan says much less about AHPs than nurses. It projects a need for an additional 5,000 physiotherapists and 2,500 paramedics by 2023, together with additional dieticians and occupational therapists among others. This is linked to new investment in expanded community teams and the new GP contract.

During 2019/20 the NHS will focus on increasing applications to undergraduate AHP education, particularly in the shortage professions, look at expanding clinical placement activity and expanding the SIHED programme 'to bridge the gap between education and employment'. The Plan reiterates the general commitment to developing advanced practice roles.

Mental wellbeing

The Council, through executive team member Professor Nigel Harrison, was involved in HEE's [NHS staff and learners' mental wellbeing commission](#). The recommendations made in February by this commission, chaired by Sir Keith Pearson, were expected to be implemented through the People Plan. There is little detail in the interim plan on this subject, only a short statement that key recommendations from the commission will be introduced during 2019/20 in parallel with the development of the new people offer.

New operating model for workforce

The Council has welcomed the Plan's commitment to developing a new operating model for workforce. Integrated care systems (ICSs) will be expected to take on greater responsibility for people planning and transformation activities, especially where strong local partnerships are required.

The Plan commits to full alignment of HEE's mandate with NHS England/NHS Improvement's service plans and stronger working arrangements between these bodies. A new Chief People Officer will chair a National NHS People Board to develop the full People Plan and assure progress against the interim and full Plans.

Next steps

The full People Plan is intended to translate the national agenda into detailed, costed actions, alongside a detailed implementation plan for the NHS Long Term Plan. This will follow the Government's next Spending Review as it depends on the investment available for education and training and for digital and capital transformation. It is also intended to follow the development of 5-year STP/ICS plans.

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