

Forward to 2020: Workforce

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Following the publication of 'Next Steps on the NHS Five Year Forward View', one of the focus areas highlighted was "Strengthening Our Workforce."

Unsurprisingly, retention of existing staff and encouraging staff to return to the NHS is at the core of this plan, as is growing the workforce in areas such as nursing, mental health and other frontline staff. And, alongside growth and retention, there will be a drive to ensure that existing staff are in the right place at the right time; through better job planning and use of e-rostering. Also brought together in the plan are recently announced initiatives around staffing and education opportunities.

Within the plan, action suggested to address staff shortages does not refer to the possibility of seeking to hire staff from abroad in the EU or further afield. Although we are aware of a number of trusts still actively sourcing staff from abroad to meet the need for trained frontline staff, as well as seeking to retain those that have already been appointed. However, the plan does state the contributions of international staff will be actively safeguarded and secured during Brexit negotiations.

One particular area that is focused upon is equal opportunities and being a "more inclusive employer." The plan highlights the following initiatives:

- For NHS employers to show improvements in closing the gap between the number of white and BME staff being appointed within the next 2 years
- The reduction of bullying of BME staff
- An improvement in employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities
- For health bodies to outline their baseline measurements for the new workforce disability standard and set out their first year action plan
- Establishing ways to encourage flexible working to be discussed with staff and their trade union representatives - reviewing matters such as term time only contracts, seasonal hours and annualised hours
- "De-risking" of service change will also be a matter for discussion. This may include initiatives such as staff holding "employment passports" within a local STP footprint

The recently released report on the progress made by NHS Trusts on the Workforce Race Equality Standards (April 2017) provides a useful initial indicator for employers in terms of where the work in the area of equal opportunities for BME staff will need to be focused.

It is anticipated that local STP Workforce Action Boards will be at the forefront of developing and supporting their STP's in the deliverance of their workforce plan. This will place HR professionals at the forefront of working towards the employee initiatives.

The 'Next Steps on the NHS Five Year Forward View' was published in March this year, before the General Election was announced. It will remain to be seen what the impact of the election will have on the proposals however, it seems unlikely that the overall direction of travel will change much regardless of the Election outcome.

For more information on the issues discussed here, please contact [Hilary Larter](#) and [Zoe Thomas](#).

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