

The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State of Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

7 November 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your recent appointment as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. On behalf of everyone at the Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) and our members, I wish you every success in your new role, at a particularly critical time for the UK's economy, as well as our health and care systems.

The REC speaks for over 3,000 recruitment and staffing businesses, who place a million workers into permanent roles every year, and a million workers into workplaces as temps every day. Over 500 of these members are staffing partners of the NHS or the social care sector. This includes the ten biggest staff suppliers to the NHS along with hundreds of SMEs who provide clinical and non-clinical professionals to NHS Trusts and local authorities, as well as to the private sector. They supply valuable permanent and flexible workers across all bands and services. What unites them is their commitment to robust compliance standards (as required as part of REC membership), and their dedication to providing 24/7 high quality staffing solutions to the NHS and the wider social care sector in the most efficient way possible for taxpayers.

Our members have a key role to play in addressing NHS backlogs and supporting staff development in both social care and health. We would like to work with you on this – elevating staff planning from a procurement function to a strategic one. This is essential to retaining and attracting substantive staff and building temporary staff models that are sustainable and of high quality. Too often, the taxpayer ends up paying more, because frameworks and approaches designed to control costs are inoperable in our tight labour market. This leads to high-cost emergency options, when more sustainable approaches might have been taken at an earlier stage. We would like to work with you to put these better value, higher quality solutions in place.

We also want to help the NHS with flexible employment for staff. Temporary workers often make a conscious career choice to work via an agency full-time. The number one factor is the flexibility this pattern of employment offers, enabling people to choose their own shifts and fulfil other commitment, according to data from NHS Digital.

The REC's healthcare membership is spread across the UK, covers all disciplines and includes agencies of all size. This provides a national and regional understanding of the workforce, and we are keen to share this with you. Together, we would like to help you look at long-term, sustainable solutions on issues like staff shortages in the NHS and workforce planning. I enclose a further briefing document which provides more data on the state of the health and social care labour market and our suggestions for collaborating with you on long-term workforce planning to help deliver your priorities.

A few important starting points might be:

- Reinststate a National Agency and Temporary Staffing Strategic Forum which provided a platform for a joint approach towards agency management between the REC, NHS Employers, NHS Professionals and DHSC in previous years.
- Deliver a fundamental review into frameworks and price caps with a view to develop a modernised strategy - one that allows for much-needed flexibility within NHS Trusts and proper but realistic pricing controls for the whole market, including the banks. This would save Government money over the medium-term.
- Produce a long-term workforce plan, in collaboration with the recruitment industry - we are here to support the DHSC achieve its goals to improve patient care and provide better value for taxpayer money. We have been communicating this to NHSE/I but had little engagement back from them on this.

The REC has also published our ['Manifesto for Growth'](#), which sets out policy measures to enhance business investment, boost productivity, and promote economic growth. To create a sustainable labour market and stoke economic growth we all need to put the “people stuff” first. That's why our manifesto focuses on four key areas: skills, immigration, levelling up, and employment rights.

We look forward to working with you and your team to continue all this vital work. It would be great to have the opportunity to meet with you, to discuss how we can further support you and the department at this critical time. Ellie (ellie.goddard@rec.uk.com) in my office would be happy to arrange a meeting at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Neil Carberry
Chief Executive