

Wes Streeting MP
Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

4 January 2023

Dear Shadow Secretary,

I am writing to you to request a meeting to discuss how to create a sustainable workforce in the NHS and care sector. As you have pointed out, this workforce is at breaking point and the current staffing frameworks are failing.

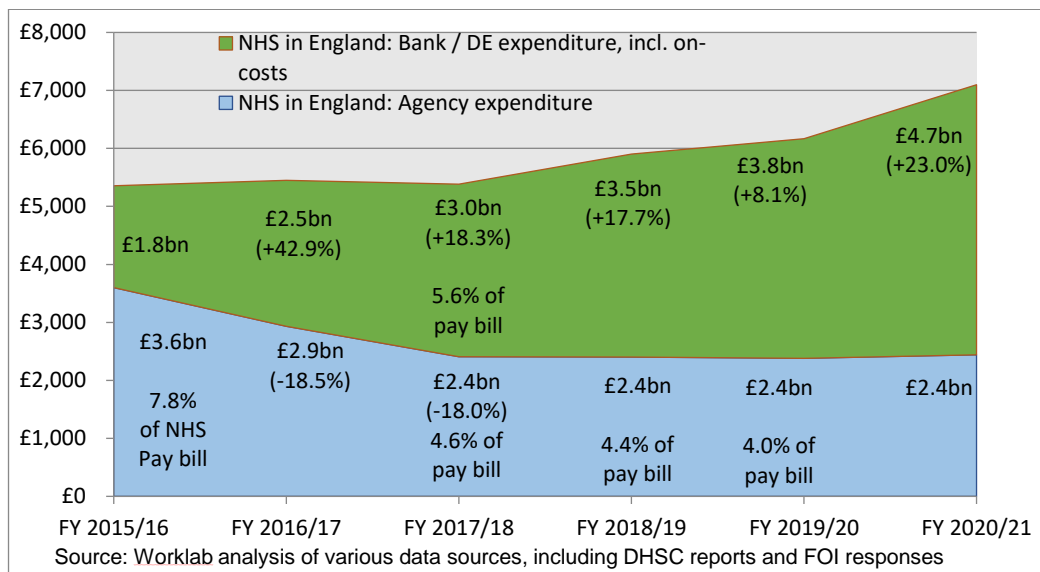
At the [Recruitment and Employment Confederation](#) (REC), we speak for over 3,000 recruitment and staffing businesses in the UK. About 500 of our members are staffing partners of the NHS and social care sector.

Every one of our members wants to see a system that delivers better patient care, improves patient safety and delivers value for money for taxpayers.

Recruiters' engagement with NHS Trusts up and down the country means we have direct experience of what is working and should be shared more widely. But we also see what is categorically failing in terms of the recruitment and retention of staff in the NHS and needs to be brought to an end immediately. We would like to share these experiences with you and your team to inform future policy proposals.

We believe that the Government needs to prioritise three things, urgently:

1. Staffing frameworks are not fit for purpose because they are undermined by other models of staffing, including "off-framework" / "break glass" activity and NHS staff bank rates. If you look at actual agency spend on staffing in the NHS, the Government are correct that it has held steady for many years. But it fails to take account of the increase in spend for other staffing models, as the graph below illustrates:



The whole system needs an overhaul that should be informed first and foremost by NHS staff and managers, but also by the NHS suppliers and third-party framework operators who can see

the unintended consequences of the current system when they are recruiting staff for both permanent and temporary contracts.

2. There needs to be a better, more comprehensive understanding of why so many NHS and care workers feel they have no choice but to find temporary or locum contracts. When we collate evidence from health and care workers via our members, they tell us that this is the only way they can:
 - a) get flexibility in their work and shifts that suit them, their families and their other responsibilities, and
 - b) top up their pay after years of below inflation pay rises for substantive staff.

We have established an excellent working relationship with the RCN who appreciate that their member agency nurses are vital caregivers in the current system, and their motives for choosing to work this way need to be addressed if we are ever to hope of creating a sustainable workforce plan for nursing. The 24/7 nature of the sector means it just isn't realistic to talk about NHS staffing without temporary provision being in the mix.

3. There has been acknowledgement, finally, from the Chancellor that what is required is a long-term workforce plan for the NHS – we need the same approach to be taken in care and social work. We have been one of several voices calling for this for many years. But a proper workforce plan isn't just about the attraction of staff. Yes, we need more people to be participating in medical and nursing degrees, as well as other professional pathways. But when our members provide services for their clients, they don't just talk about recruitment – they talk about retention of staff. In many cases, it is our member recruiters who go the extra mile to tailor arrangements for each worker and provide the support that they don't often receive elsewhere. We have already mentioned the importance of pay and flexibility but in addition, our members provide mental health support, mentoring and training opportunities. I cannot tell you how many times I encounter an agency worker who tells me that the agency is their first employer who has actually just listened to them. A workforce plan must be more than recruitment targets for substantive staff.

We understand and appreciate your ambition to expand the NHS, train and retain more staff and create an independent workforce body. The REC has also been calling for many of these points for a number of years, and we stand ready to discuss your plans and share our insights.

I have enclosed a briefing on the REC and our members. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss our recommendations further with you and your team. Jamie (Jamie.Keen@rec.uk.com) in my office would be happy to help us arrange a meeting at a mutually convenient time.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Shoemith
Deputy Chief Executive