

Amanda Pritchard
Chief Executive
NHS England
Wellington Place
Leeds LS1 4AP

12 November 2024

Dear Amanda,

We are extremely concerned over reports that the government is planning to announce a ban on agency workers performing entry level roles in the NHS and think you should urgently reconsider this proposal. A conversation with us as soon as possible about these plans makes sense.

[The Recruitment and Employment Confederation \(REC\)](#) is the professional body for the UK recruitment and staffing industry. Over 400 of our members are involved in some way with supporting the NHS or social care providers, from NHS Trusts to local authorities and private sector partners. REC members 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.

We had been pleased to see that the government opened a consultation to take ideas on the future of the NHS, but announcing a change of this scale whilst the consultation remains open, and without considering input from stakeholders, betrays repeated claims that they want to work collaboratively with others.

Plans to ban agency workers represent a fundamental misunderstanding of where the flaws in the NHS staffing procurement system lie. We understand the need to find cost saving measures across all departments, but targeting agency staff in the NHS is a short-sighted and ill-informed move that will cause further problems in the long-term. The rates for temporary and agency workers were set in 2016 and have not been revised since, leaving it increasingly difficult to supply workers at these rates and driving more provision to much more expensive models, including staff banks and emergency off-framework rates.

Over the last few months, we have collated several examples of a “false economy” in staffing to the NHS. A SME recruitment agency based in the South of England reports that their Band 5 nurses regularly cancel shifts with 2-6 hours of notice - because since accepting the agency shift, the nurse has been offered an increased rate of hourly pay via

the bank - for the same shift in the same hospital. This Trust has been advised by NHS England that it needs to cut its agency spend by 20% - but it is only able to meet this target by increasing its overall budget spend on bank staffing solutions. This is just one example, we have many more.

We would like to approach a conversation with NHSE from a place of absolute respect for the challenges the NHS is facing, and that collaborative efforts from all stakeholders is the best path ahead. As taxpayers, as patients, as individuals asking the NHS to care for our loved ones, we want to work with you on the solutions.

We don't seek to hark back to a system of the past - but to move forward. The talent, recruitment and staffing sector can offer detailed insight into workforce challenges being faced by all employers, how they are overcoming them, and the frontline experiences of staff supplied by our members. We want to be solutions focused.

Consistent refusal to engage in a meaningful conversation, leads us to the situation we face today. Spend on banks has almost tripled since 2016. Some of our members have raised the differential in costs with Trusts and have received responses like this:

- *"The points raised by yourselves are valid, but we need to reduce our agency spend..."*
- *"The trust do sometimes offer higher rates for bank doctors and we... advise that they will actually sometimes pay more via bank than via agency. The trust have targets to achieve to reduce agency spend and aren't monitored as much when it comes to bank costs."*
- *"Sites are under considerable pressure to reduce their agency spend... this is what has been and will be offered to anyone joining the bank. In some cases this may be higher than what a doctor has been earning as a core pay rate with their agency."*

These responses were all received by email in 2024. Banning agency workers will only exacerbate these issues.

The rumoured policy uses agency staff as a convenient scapegoat for inefficient procurement process, rather than tackling the core issue. Reforming and reviewing how we recruit and procure staff to the NHS would be a more practical long-term solution to strike the balance between sustainable and safe staffing and value for money.

The REC as ever wants to discuss the importance of the agency market with you in more detail. Jordan (jordan.price@rec.uk.com) in my office is able to arrange this.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Shoemith
Deputy CEO