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Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Workforce Planning in NHS Wales

1. Introduction

The NHS in Wales has been undertaking workforce planning on an annual basis since 1988. Each year Trusts and Local Health boards are required to complete plans showing staff in post, joiners, leavers and vacancies for the current year and the forecast for several future years. The forecast data is based on future service developments, new policies being implemented and any other changes envisaged in NHS service demand. The information is collected by profession and includes non professional staff working with each profession.

The NHS has been facing a shortage in the supply of staff for the last few years. From 1988 to 2000 NHS Trusts were required to workforce plan on the basis of future affordability of staff. Since 2001 Jane Hutt the Minister for Health and Social Services has required the workforce plans to be based on future forecast need for staff rather than affordability. This methodology should avoid under forecasting of future need and therefore help to overcome the shortage of staff over the next few years.

In recent years, with the publication of National Service Frameworks (NSFs) and many service reviews, there has been a policy drive to undertake workforce planning on a 'care group' basis. For example, to be able to answer a question such as 'how many clinical psychologists work with children', as opposed to 'how many clinical psychologists work in the NHS in Wales'. Currently NHS workforce information systems are not able to provide this data. The NHS in England and Wales are in the process of implementing a new 'electronic staff record' (ESR) which will enable the 'care group' data to be collected.

2. Workforce Planning Outcomes

The workforce plans are used for two different outcomes.

- Setting and monitoring staffing targets for NHS Wales.
- Education and commissioning numbers for NHS professional staff.

Workforce planning has a long lead time. For example; it takes four years to train a speech and language therapist. Those completing their training in June 2004 will have been planned for in the 1999 workforce plans.

3. Education and Training

The Assembly NHS HR Department commissions all NHS professional education and training, by contracting with Higher Education Institutions in Wales. The identified demand in the Workforce Plans is translated into education and training numbers for each profession. Since the workforce plans have been based on need, the demand for training places has increased considerably. The education and training budget has increased considerably since 1997 and this has been invested in greatly increased numbers of NHS professional students in training.

Increasing education and training places depends on the capacity of the Higher Education Institution and/or investment in a new course elsewhere in Wales. Currently in Wales there is only one course for Dietetics, Podiatry and Speech and Language Therapy. NHS professional courses require students to undertake clinical placements and clinical placement capacity is also an issue for the NHS.

The education and training budget was originally established in the early 1990s for the pre-registration education and training of specific NHS professions.

4. Recruitment and Retention

Education and Training investment alone will not overcome the problems with the supply of NHS professional staff. A Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been published which includes return to practice initiatives, overseas recruitment and careers advice and many other initiatives to encourage staff to stay in the NHS.

Work is also underway on introducing new job roles into the NHS. These new roles will support the NHS professional staff and enable them to undertake the tasks that they are educated and trained for.

5. Workforce planning issues specific to staff working with children and young people with Special Education Needs.

Speech and Language Therapists

A Speech and Language Therapy Action Group (SALTAG), a joint Education and Health group reported on its work in late 2003. The report includes a set of recommendations which have been out to consultation. The results of the consultation have been analysed and are currently with Ministers.

This work will result in guidance being issued to the NHS on provision of Speech and Language Therapy. There are difficulties for Health and Education services in jointly planning and commissioning speech and language therapy services, these issues are covered in the 'SALTAG' report.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Staff

A joint Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services workforce group has been investigating the position of education and training provision for professional staff working with this group of children and young people. Funding has been provided for the development of a course curriculum. It is planned that the course will begin in September 2004.