

Audit Committee
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The National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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AC-06-02(p2)

PS/L/03/02

27 June 2002

AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT ON EDUCATING AND TRAINING THE FUTURE HEALTH PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE FOR WALES

Thank you for your letter of 8 April about the response from the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales to the Audit Committee's report, *Educating and training the future health professional workforce for Wales*. You asked for the Auditor General's advice on the contents of the response and on any follow up action which the Committee might take.

In its report the Committee made eight recommendations intended to address the areas of weakness or concern that Members had identified. The Cabinet has responded positively to each of these recommendations and has given clear commitments on when the specific actions outlined in the reply will be taken. This is very welcome. Annex A, provides an analysis of the Cabinet's response to the Committee's recommendations.

The National Audit Office Wales will monitor the progress made in responding to the Committee's recommendations and the Auditor General will report as appropriate to the Committee on what has been achieved.

Yours sincerely

Helen Kirkby
Private Secretary to the Auditor General for Wales

Educating and Training the Future Health Professional Workforce for Wales. Report 02-02 – 24 January 2002

Analysis of the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales response

The Audit Committee hearing addressed the key issues raised in the Auditor General for Wales report on Educating and training the health professional workforce for Wales. Specific attention was directed at: the measures used to overcome staff shortages and improve the workforce planning process; arrangements to deliver new staff of the required quality; and how the NHS and education sector are obtaining value for money from the training arrangements.

The Committee recommended that Trusts should reduce their reliance on the use of overseas and agency staff to fill the gap caused by staff shortages. The NHS Wales Department has addressed this by setting up working groups to produce guidelines and procedures to control and reduce reliance on these overseas and agency staff. An action plan to reduce Trusts' reliance on agency staff was distributed in May 2002. The policy on good practice for the use of overseas staff is on target to be delivered in September 2002. (*Recommendation i*)

A comprehensive training programme to give Trust workforce planning staff and managers the necessary skills was established in November 2001 and all Trust workforce planning staff have attended this course. Additional courses have been held between December 2001 and March 2002 for other interested staff. The Workforce Planning Team from the Assembly has visited each NHS Trust and Health Authority to meet all workforce planning personnel. (*Recommendation ii*)

The NHS Wales Department and higher education institutions have been working in partnership to determine the capacity available to accommodate the increase numbers of health students. An interim report has been produced and some projects to increase capacity, funded by the Assembly, have commenced. The final report on capacity is expected to be published in September 2002. (*Recommendation iii*)

The Committee was concerned that a lack of suitable quality practice placements was a constraint to the system. The Assembly Government's decision to fund some practice placements as one solution to the problem is being monitored as are a number of other initiatives aimed at increasing the number of placements. The Assembly plan to disseminate the outcomes of these initiatives during contract reviews and other regular meetings with NHS service providers and will inform the Committee of the value for money of the options in due course. (*Recommendation iv*)

Higher education institutions are working with the NHS Wales Department to develop specialised training programmes to meet the changing needs of the service. This includes part time accelerated programmes. Student support systems and mentorship skills for clinical teachers and supervisors are being developed through Fitness for Practice initiatives. The NHS Wales Department has also become

more involved in the recruitment and selection processes and has representatives involved in the student welcoming process. (*Recommendation v*)

The Committee advocated more open and transparent contract negotiations and monitoring. NHS Wales Department has implemented a new, merged contract review and negotiation process that has been approved by the Welsh Assembly internal audit service. (*Recommendation vi*)

The Assembly's revised contract review and negotiation process is expected to produce consistent input and output targets that will aid benchmarking and performance management. The Financial Planning and Contracting Unit of the Welsh Assembly Government opened strategic discussions in April 2002 with ELWa. The next stage is for officials from the health and education sectors to meet and evaluate contracting models and incorporate good practice into the new system. (*Recommendation vii*)

Medical and non-medical human resource issues have been consolidated into one Education, Training and Development Group. At the time of the AGW review, however, the Professional and Managerial Education and Training Group was experiencing problems with staff shortages. Following a review nearly all vacant posts have been filled. However one post, the Head of Section, is expected to be filled shortly, following a recruitment and interview process. (*Recommendation viii*)