



Royal College of Podiatry statement on the NHS England Long Term Workforce Plan

The Royal College of Podiatry (RCPod) is happy to see the publication of the [Long Term Workforce Plan](#) for the NHS in England. Those who work in the NHS or uses its services will be acutely aware that years of cuts and increased pressures on staff and services has meant that this long overdue plan needs to be the answer to a system that has over 110,000 vacancies.

Following comments in the press by the Prime Minister that ‘NHS staff must be fast-tracked out of the classroom,’ we believe that the Government wishes to reduce the numbers of healthcare professionals undergoing full time undergraduate degrees and to increase the number of those undertaking apprenticeships. From a podiatry perspective growth in apprenticeships is a positive step, particularly for areas of the UK where there are no undergraduate podiatry programmes. However, this should not be done at the cost of undergraduate and pre-registration masters programmes. We would urge the Government to fully fund those programmes that may not be as popular as some other healthcare programmes but are none the less vital to the health of the nation.

The plan rightly highlights shortfalls for many allied health professions, the worst of which is podiatry. The reason given is that this is due to the education and training pipeline not keeping pace with expected demand. The true rational is that the Government had a large part to play, firstly through a year-on-year reduction in commissioned training places, as patient need increased. And secondly, through the removal of the NHS bursary, thereby leaving the recruitment to podiatry programmes to the marketplace.

This marketplace saw a rise in the number of more popular and ‘well-known’ courses, with an increase in the number of places offered and with new courses developed. This is of benefit to most, but at the detriment to podiatry; a small and vital profession which should have been supported by an effective targeted marketing campaign via NHS England.

The rhetoric of who works in the NHS remains firmly planted as ‘doctors and nurses’. This is a disappointment and has a lasting impact on all the other staff who work in the NHS, including podiatrists.

The plan states that podiatry, even with targeted interventions, will likely see medium term shortfalls. There are not the temporary staff available to fill the gap. We would love to hear more about the targeted interventions they have in mind. What they don’t say is that this medium-term shortfall will have a real terms effect upon patient care, patient safety and a reduction in preventative care.

To ensure patient safety and keep the population healthy and mobile, direct government intervention is required to incentivise people to study podiatry, at both apprenticeship and undergraduate degree level, and work to ensure an increase in mobility and prevention of

complications. Employers also need significant assistance to support an apprentice. Financial incentives have been useful for other professions - this should be explored for podiatry to create the capacity required to grow the workforce.

RCPod welcomes the drive to increase diversity within the NHS workforce, and we will be interested to see how NHS England will work with HEIs and Trusts to ensure that their staff reflect their communities.

The plan posits that professions such as podiatry, therapeutic radiography and ODPs will recruit 80% through apprenticeship routes; and this becomes the main route into the profession. Our HEIs are clear about the challenges of delivering an apprenticeship route for podiatry, which includes OfSted regulations, IfATE compliance and employer readiness. These issues are not unique to podiatry and many would welcome a review and reform of the regulations to map against training adult learners for a healthcare profession.

Whilst we welcome the increase in projected apprenticeship numbers for podiatry- 408 in 2025 to 668 in 2031 - with the increase in rates of diabetes, peripheral arterial disease, musculoskeletal conditions, and the impact these conditions have on foot and lower limb complications, the cost of managing them, to say nothing of the impact it has upon people's lives, these numbers fall so far short of what is needed it is of enormous concern.

We would urge the government to go further to address the high vacancy rates within NHS podiatry services. The pressure on NHS staff and issues with retention aren't addressed within the plan. We need our staff to be paid at a level that is commensurate with their level of responsibility, and in podiatry that level is extremely high.

With the cost of living affecting all UK households, there doesn't appear to be a plan as to how to make a career within the NHS an attractive option. Pay and retention need to be seriously addressed. The notion that a career in the NHS is a vocation, therefore salaries don't need to meet those of the other sectors, is a ludicrous and outmoded concept. People want a career that is rewarding, where they are able to develop, and they are remunerated adequately. In many areas of the NHS people are under serious pressure to pick up the slack from a lack of any joined-up workforce strategy, this in turn has serious consequences for patient care.

We will scrutinise the workplan further and provide additional comment.

Royal College of Podiatry
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