Proposed 2% expansion in adult nurse training places is paltry – RCN

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Planned growth in adult nursing training places in England of just 257 in 2016/17 is ‘paltry’, according to the RCN head of policy Howard Catton.

The number of adult nursing training places commissioned by Health Education England will increase from 14,160 in 2015/16 to 14,417 in 2016/17.

Commenting on the 2% increase Mr Catton said: ‘It is a paltry number that is dwarfed by the scale of the shortages that we know we have.’

He contrasted the proposal with RCN research showing there are more than 10,000 nursing vacancies in London. Mr Catton estimates there are more than 20,000 vacancies in England.

Mr Catton said feedback from trust providers on their nurse staffing demand suggested an increase of closer to 3,000 training places is needed.

‘You have got to consider affordability as well, I am not being naïve,’ he added. ‘If money wasn’t an issue we would be looking at close to 3,000. But we should be doing more than 257.’

In its 2016/17 commissioning and investment plan, HEE forecast that an extra 80,000 healthcare staff, across all professional groups, could be available to the NHS by 2020.

Mr Catton said this is based on ‘assumptions about what rates of retention, retirement and attrition are’.

He added: ‘The reality of what we see happening to retention and attrition may be very different to the assumptions HEE is making, if you know that the nursing population is not only ageing but people are quitting early because of the pressure.’

The Unite national officer for health Barrie Brown said: ‘The consequences of the HEE plan will be that we will still be looking at a shortage of nurses. That will mean greater reliance on the agencies and bringing in nurses from overseas.’

Jim Buchan, a workforce expert from Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, said HEE must function in the ‘real world of a politicised NHS’, which means the priority pressure is for funding constraints.

HEE was unable to provide a regional breakdown of the 2016/17 commissions or say when it would be available. An HEE spokesperson said the proposed training levels are forecast to meet future demand by enabling 21,000 additional adult nurses to be available by 2020.

She added: ‘The increase in commissions this year is what our local team have agreed is sufficient to achieve this goal.’

PICKET LINE BOOST FOR JUNIOR DOCTORS

Nurses are preparing to join junior doctors on the picket line next week when the medics are due to stage a 48-hour strike against government plans to change their contracts.

The first bout of industrial action was held last week and nurses used their breaks and spare time to support their colleagues. Nurses used social media to back the strike, which involved doctors working emergencies only. Bassetlaw Hospital emergency department nurse Kirsty Bowers tweeted: ‘I am a proud nurse supporting our junior doctors who do an amazing job #ProudNurse #NeedRecognition #JuniorDoctors.’

Despite the strike action, hospital trusts reported it was business as usual for nurses and other ward staff.