College lobbies MEPs to increase entry requirements for nursing courses

The RCN has written to members of the European parliament urging them to bring entry requirements for nursing courses across the continent in line with those of the UK.

The college wants to be sure that all European nurses who emigrate to the UK for work have had 12 years general education before they start their nurse training. The current minimum requirement in the European Union (EU) is ten years.

The Europe-wide qualifications increase, proposed by the European Commission, is opposed by some EU member states, including Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Hungary.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) recently revealed a 78 per cent surge in the number of nurses applying to work in the UK from other parts of Europe in the past six months. The number rose from 701 in April to 1,248 in October, with applications coming mainly from Greece, Ireland, Spain and Portugal.

Under European law, the NMC must allow nurses from other EU member states to register as long as they have ‘suitable qualifications’, including ten years of general education.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will vote in January on whether to increase the general education requirement to 12 years in all member states. A committee of MEPs reviewing the directive voted to keep the ten-year requirement earlier this month, but this will be superseded by the vote in January.

RCN general secretary Peter Carter described the result as ‘disappointing’.

Other changes to the directive are expected to make it easier for professional regulators such as the NMC to test the English language skills of overseas nurses.

Changes also include plans for European regulators to share details of registrants who have been struck off the nursing register in one country, but who could travel abroad to work in another country.

The UK-wide Institute of Health Visiting was launched by health minister Dan Poulter last week to bolster support for the profession and provide its members with access to the latest research and practice materials.

The institute, which has charitable status, was founded by independent health adviser Cheryll Adams, and comes 150 years after the first health visitors were employed by local authorities and factory owners to support new families.

The institute’s first campaign, to start early next year, will encourage good sleep habits in children by equipping health visitors with up-to-date advice for parents.

Speaking at the launch event, Dr Adams said: ‘The unique role health visitors play in society should not be undervalued. They walk through every door where there is a baby, and work with families from all backgrounds to help children receive the best possible start in life.’

The institute’s chair is Sally Russell, who co-founded the parenting website Netmums.

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Arbitrator to help former NHS public health workers

The creation of an independent body that will help public health nurses forced to work for local authorities sort out disputes with their new employers has been agreed in principle, Nursing Standard has learned.

From April next year, England’s 152 local authorities will take over responsibility for public health from primary care trusts (PCTs), which are due to be dismantled.

Around 4,500 public health workers, including hundreds of nurses currently employed by PCTs, will be transferred to councils.

Local authorities will also take over the commissioning of school nursing services from April next year, followed by the commissioning of health visiting services from 2015.

The new arbitrator, likely to be called the Public Health Staff Commission, was called for by health unions and will give former NHS public health staff a route to resolve disputes with local authorities on issues relating to their transfer.

RCN senior employment relations adviser Karen Didovich said the body should reduce costly and time-consuming legal disputes.