

Government over halfway to delivering 50,000 more nurses by 2024

- Progress report published today outlines timing and plans for achieving the milestone
- Extra nurses will help the NHS recover from the pandemic, tackle COVID backlogs and ensure it continues providing world-class care in the years to come

The government is on track to meet its manifesto commitment to deliver 50,000 more nurses in the NHS by 2024, with over 27,000 more nurses now working across the NHS.

A progress report published today shows that overall total nurse numbers now stand at 327,907, as of December 2021, compared to 300,904 in September 2019. By March 2024, there are set to be around 351,000 full-time equivalent nurses to provide world-class care across the health service. The new report also sets out the government's plans for reaching the target.

The government is focused on recruiting and retaining nurses to compensate for those retiring, reducing their hours or leaving the NHS.

The report is published ahead of a speech this week from the Health and Social Secretary on his plans for long-term healthcare reform to support the NHS to recover and tackle the COVID backlogs.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

It's fantastic to see the progress we have made towards our manifesto commitment of delivering 50,000 more nurses by 2024. There are now over 27,000 more nurses providing exceptional care and treatment for patients across the country every day.

Nurses are the absolute backbone of our NHS, without whom we would have been lost throughout the pandemic and who will be vital in helping the NHS tackle the COVID backlogs. This government will continue to do everything we can to recruit and retain even more nurses and to support our NHS.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

We committed to deliver 50,000 more nurses in the NHS by 2024, and we are over halfway to meeting this target with over 27,000 more nurses already in our NHS compared to September 2019.

I'm grateful to all our NHS nurses who've shown immense commitment during the pandemic, working tirelessly to look after us and our

loved ones. It is this dedication that is inspiring the next generation and ensuring the NHS continues to provide world-class healthcare.

As part of the progress report, government is outlining where additional nurses will come from and how they will be recruited. This includes:

- Domestic recruitment, including undergraduates, postgraduates, apprenticeships, nursing associates and assistant practitioners converting to fully qualified nurses;
- International recruitment; and
- Successful retention of existing staff

Overall more than 50,000 nurses will be recruited to offset those who are retiring or leaving the workforce, delivering a net total of at least 50,000.

International recruitment is expected to deliver between 51,000-57,000 more nurses while around 68,000-75,000 more nurses will be trained in England by 2024.

Retention is also a key part of the plan and is expected to contribute between 3,000-9,000 nurses to the overall target by addressing the reasons why staff leave the NHS. The government and NHS are focused on making the NHS the best place to work through providing health and wellbeing initiatives, expanding flexible working and putting a greater focus on career development – initiatives which are already helping to retain more existing nurses.

This includes £37 million to fund 40 staff mental health hubs nationwide, that sit alongside a dedicated helpline and a 24/7 text support services.

Ruth May, Chief Nursing Officer for England, said:

The NHS is caring for more patients than ever before but, to continue doing so, it is vital that we boost the number of nurses in the NHS and reach the target of 50,000 more nurses by 2024.

While there is much more to do, the progress we have made with over 27,000 more nurses now working across the NHS in England than in September 2019, is testament to the tremendous efforts being made to recruit, retain and develop more nurses, and ensure the NHS remains one of the best places in the world to work and receive care.

Professor Mark Radford CBE, Chief Nurse at Health Education England and Deputy Chief Nursing Officer for NHS England, said:

Over the past few years we have seen an increase in the numbers of people signing up to our universities to start their education as nurses, with a record number of college and school leavers applying

for a nursing degree in 2021. It is brilliant to see so many people who are keen to start a rewarding and challenging career in nursing which is so critical to all areas of the NHS.

To continue on track to meet the 50,000 target, we will carry on working with our partners in health, social care and education to support and train new nurses as well as welcoming back people who want to return to the profession and ensuring the existing workforce, who have been so crucial to our pandemic response, are supported and given opportunities to develop in their career.

Also set out in the report are plans to respond to any shortfalls, including ramping up international recruitment, whilst maintaining the highest ethical standards and adhering to the Code of Practice.

The 50,000 nurses target is defined as including all full time equivalent registered nurses working in the NHS in England. This covers all NHS providers across acute, community, mental health and ambulance settings, and all those employed in general practice.

It does not include non-NHS providers, including social care providers and social enterprises, though these sectors will benefit indirectly as the numbers of nurses trained increases overall.

Applicants to nursing courses at the January deadline increased by 34% in 2022 when compared to 2019 and all eligible students will benefit from a training grant worth at least £5,000 a year, with up to £3,000 extra available for childcare and those studying certain specialisms.