

Something for something – better pay and better productivity in the public sector

The big decline in public sector productivity over the pandemic, and the failure to get back to previous levels now we are well past lockdowns is disturbing. The government needed to accept the Pay Review Body recommendations, as it did last year when they were tough on staff. It also needs to impart a something for something approach to senior public sector management so better paid and better motivated people deliver more.

In parts of the public sector leaving rates are high and sickness rates are high. These are usual signs of low morale that can become self reinforcing. If too many people leave or are absent the rest of the staff feel put upon and may have unrealistic workloads. If too many people feel their grading and job specification is unfair there will be more people leaving. If an organisation has to rely on temps and recently appointed staff too much it will be more difficult to get things done efficiently and smoothly. Experienced staff will need to devote more time to informal training and mentoring to get things done reducing their own effectiveness. The NHS employs far too many temps at agency rates well above regular wage levels for the same job as a result of not retaining enough payroll staff.

The NHS workforce plan sets out to tackle some of these issues, but it will only succeed if management buys into the need to ease the tasks of the medical staff, provides good back up and removes some of the burdens of form filling and training not central to the medical tasks of treating patients well. Management success requires each team member to feel they are valued, to know they are good at what they do, and to take an individual and a team pride in delivering great quality at a realistic cost. Promotions, rosters and back up need to be organised to get the most out of people, the most important resource of these public services. Senior managers who cannot lead the staff, end the strikes and raise morale need to be trained and mentored to do so, with bonuses and promotions dependent on success.