Recover, reward, renew

A pandemic plan for the healthcare workforce

There is a tension between the rhetoric of ‘building back better’ and the reality of an exhausted workforce

Illustration: Ben Jennings/The Guardian

Work-related stress levels in the NHS are accelerating

NHS Staff Survey 2021

Worrying numbers of NHS staff say they are struggling to cope

IPPR/YouGov polling of 1,006 NHS staff in February 2021

Large numbers of staff have thought about leaving the NHS

IPPR/YouGov polling in February 2021 found:

- **25 per cent** of NHS staff say they are more likely to leave their jobs than a year ago
- **29 per cent** of nurses and midwives, the occupations with the biggest shortages, say they are more likely to leave the sector than a year ago
- **18 per cent** of medical and dental staff, such as doctors, say they are more likely to leave the UK than a year ago, the highest of any healthcare occupational group

So what do NHS staff want?

Policy priority	Per cent
A pay rise	70
Better employee benefits	33
Flexible working hours	29
Fewer administrative tasks	22
More career progression opportunities	19
More training and learning opportunities	18
Better mental health support	18
More professional autonomy	10
Better childcare support	5
Don't know	2
None of the above	6

IPPR/YouGov polling of 1,006 NHS staff in February 2021

The International Labour Organisation definition of 'decent work' considers the following elements:

- employment opportunities
- adequate earnings and productive work
- decent working time
- combining work, family and personal life
- stability and security of work
- equal opportunity and treatment in employment
- safe work environment
- social security (such as pensions)
- social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation.

A plan for a healthcare workforce in a pandemic

1 Recover

- Strengthened mental health support for all staff
- Guarantee annual leave entitlements for five years and compensate inflexibility
- Employee-in-charge flexible working

2 Reward

- Progressive pay rise package for NHS staff

3 Renew

- Expand workplace benefits including subsidized meals, travel cost reimbursement and staff room upgrades.
- Portable health and care competency system to allow staff to work across settings and regions
- Stronger action to start stamping out institutional racism

And a need to radically rethink the workforce of the future