

REC Health & Social Care - Backing the NHS and care sector at a time of crisis

The UK recruitment industry places a million people into permanent jobs every year, and ensures that a million contractors, locums and temporary workers are placed into roles across the economy on any given day. This paper provides a roadmap for harnessing the expertise of specialist health and social care recruiters at this time of national emergency. Below are four steps that - taken together - can help bridge staffing shortages and ensure that recruitment professionals are partners to the sector during the Covid-19 crisis and in its aftermath.

1. Look after ALL NHS and care workers – including locums and temporary staff

Agency workers must have the same access to PPE and Covid-19 testing as substantive and bank staff. Regardless of their type of contract, everyone must be able to carry out their duties safely. At this critical time, specialist recruiters are prioritising the duty of care they have towards the people they are placing into front-line roles. We do not wish to see agency staff turning down jobs because they fear that they will not be safe at work.

The REC is committed to working with government, trade unions and other stakeholders to drive good practice in the management of a flexible workforce. Together, we can enhance worker wellbeing; the end-goal is to also boost productivity and the delivery front line services. Our work with the Royal College of Nursing on the [Healthy Workplace Toolkit for an Agency Workforce](#) project is a good template for what can be achieved through partnership.

Call to action:

- Accelerate the provision of PPE and Covid-19 testing to temporary and locum staff working in the NHS and across the care sector.
- Extend the RCN/REC Healthy Workplace toolkit approach to other categories of temporary and locum staff in the healthcare sector.
- Encourage Trusts to participate in the Cabinet Office scheme for workers who cannot work in their roles at this time, to ensure they are protected.

2. Build sustainable recruitment supply chains

We want to ensure that the recruitment market is understood and managed effectively. As part of this, the REC is in regular dialogue with DHSC, NHS England/Improvement, framework providers and other stakeholders such as NHS Employers. We call for the establishment of a new forum to bring all these parties together and drive a collaborative approach to workforce challenges and sustainable recruitment supply chains. Cost control priorities can run alongside a clear focus on compliance and sustainability of supply. A joined-up approach is also needed to ensure consistency between bank and agency staff.

The current crisis has underlined the importance of working together to adapt quickly to external developments. Framework operators must ensure that terms and conditions reflect

the current crisis and provide clarity on how audits will be conducted. Sustainable supply chains also depend on prompt payment as cash-flow is a major challenge for those who have to pay temporary staff before they receive payment from the end-user. We support Cabinet Office guidance in this area, including the specific steer on ['Payments to Suppliers for Contingent Workers impacted by COVID-19'](#).

Call to action:

- Keep framework requirements under regular review and develop pragmatic solutions - such as speeding up compliance checks - that recognise the current crisis.
- Ensure prompt payment to suppliers, in line with Cabinet Office guidance, and review internal procedures (such as Purchase Orders) to protect flexible staffing solutions.
- Establish a new stakeholder forum to drive consistency and co-operation in workforce planning and management.

3. Set the right standards for recruitment

With over 100,000 unfilled vacancies prior to the current crisis, the health and care sector was already facing a significant recruitment challenge. This has been exacerbated by COVID-19. We want to work with government to harness the contribution of recruitment experts within REC membership.

The REC is working closely with the No10 Policy Unit and government departments, including a formal Partnership Agreement with the Department for Work & Pensions. Our aim is to embed a similarly collaborative approach in the healthcare sector. The recent letter from Health Minister Helen Whately focused on "*constructive measures to ensure that temporary staffing agencies can work with the NHS to support high quality patient care*". This is significant progress and a strong building block.

Call to action:

- Draw upon the expertise of recruitment professionals to deliver agile and flexible staffing arrangements at a time when they are needed most, including any support needed for the new Nightingale Hospitals.
- We will not tolerate profiteering during the crisis. Compliance and professional standards are at the heart of the REC's work, we have offered to work with the Competition and Markets Authority taskforce during the Coronavirus crisis.
- Post-crisis, we are keen to develop a formal partnership agreement with the Department of Health & Social Care to set standards in recruitment.

4. Take a lead on longer-term workforce planning

The focus must remain on immediate workforce mobilisation to address the current crisis. However, policy developments at this time can set the tone for future workforce planning priorities. We welcome the announcement that doctors, nurses and paramedics will automatically have their visas extended, free of charge, for one year. Let's build on this with a fundamental reset of the government's approach to immigration policy, post-crisis.

As well as providing 24/7 recruitment services, our industry is committed to playing a proactive and compliant role in international recruitment drives and in promoting careers in healthcare through the REC's Future of Jobs Ambassadors initiative. Driving the good work agenda and promoting good recruitment practice through the REC's Good Recruitment Collective will remain priorities.

Call to action:

- Launch government-backed review of future NHS and care sector workforce strategy, to learn lessons from the crisis and involve recruitment and workforce planning specialists.
- Review immigration policy (including the NHS surcharge) in light of the crisis, as well as proactive approaches to international recruitment and promoting careers in healthcare.
- Promote engagement of Trusts and healthcare employers in the REC Good Recruitment Collective to embed good hiring practices and facilitate peer to peer learning.