



Layla Moran MP
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

23 December 2024

By email: layla.moran.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Chair,

Thank you again for inviting me to give evidence to the Committee as part of the inquiry into the NHS Ten Year Plan, looking at the move of care from acute to community. Following the session, I wanted to follow up with the Committee on several issues that were raised.

The issue of our concern about the potential impact of the proposed changes to Level 7 apprenticeship funding was raised on specialist, post-registration nursing education programmes. These courses are required for vital, specialist nursing roles including District Nursing and Health Visiting. These roles are critical to addressing current workforce shortages and delivering the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, which projects the need to grow District Nurse numbers by over 150% and Health Visiting training places by 74% by 2031/32. Evidence shows that since 2020/21, Level 7 apprenticeships have been a vital route for growing specialist nursing roles, with starts in District Nursing and Specialist Community Public Health Nursing apprenticeships rising significantly.

As you may know, the apprenticeship levy allows employers to receive funding for individuals to undertake the academic and specialist practice elements of their qualifications. Many employers depend on the levy to fund leadership, specialist, and advanced nursing education and training apprenticeships to develop their workforce and meet the increasingly complex health and care needs of the population.

Current proposals from Government are to remove access to the apprenticeship levy for employers needing to fund workforce development via Level 7 apprenticeships.

Without access to this funding, we are concerned that some employers, particularly those in social care, primary care, and public health, will be further unable to afford to support individual nurses to undertake specialist qualifications. This risks a significant decline in the number of specialist nurses and nurse leaders trained via this route, denies nurses the vital opportunity to develop their academic and clinical knowledge, and undermines progress towards the ambitions set out in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.

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It is worth also acknowledging that the same issues with affordability and not being able to use the levy – or any other funding – to cover backfill also applies to healthcare staff pursuing a nursing degree apprenticeship. Since the Long Term Workforce Plan relies on growth of the nursing workforce via this route, without addressing this barrier to access for potential nurses and their employers, this also presents a wider issue for nursing education and workforce supply.

We set out detailed asks on this issue within our [submission](#) to Skills England, and we ask the Committee to consider highlighting the importance of coordination and accountability for decisions made across different departments that could negatively impact the nursing workforce, particularly at a time when retention and recruitment of the nursing workforce are at critically low levels.

Separately, the RCN is supportive of the idea of an amendment to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (Transfer of Functions etc) Bill, currently in the Lords and soon to progress to the Commons. The amendment would place a duty on the Secretary of State to have regard to workforce needs in health and social care when exercising powers under the Bill. This would include regular consultation with stakeholders and adjustments to funding for skills and apprenticeships to address workforce shortages, emerging skill requirements, and regional disparities. Ensuring a robust domestic pipeline of health and social care professionals is vital, and we would welcome the Committee members' support for such an amendment, particularly in light of the need for cross-governmental thinking.

I look forward to meeting you next month to discuss how the RCN can further support the Committee's work. We remain committed to offering the full cooperation of the RCN in any way that may assist you and the Committee in its vital scrutiny of health and social care issues.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Nicola Ranger,
General Secretary & Chief Executive

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