Biggest ever expansion to NHS medical workforce

- Government delivers on commitment to increase training places by a quarter
- New work to boost doctors from disadvantaged backgrounds as part of government commitment to social reform
- Rural areas also set to benefit with increase in trainees working in areas that have struggled to attract doctors

An extra 1,500 doctors a year will be trained in the NHS by 2020 in the biggest ever expansion of the medical workforce in England, Health Minister Philip Dunne confirmed today. This is a 25 per cent increase in current numbers of domestic medical students.

From next year, existing medical schools will be able to offer an extra 500 places to future doctors, whilst the remaining 1,000 places will be allocated across the country based on an open bidding process. The extra places will be targeted at under-represented social groups such as lower income students, as well as regions that usually struggle to attract trainee medics.

Minister of State for Health Philip Dunne said:

“We’re committed to giving more talented students the chance to be part of our world-class NHS workforce. Not only is this the biggest ever expansion to the number of doctor training places, but it’s also one of the most inclusive; ensuring everyone has the chance to study medicine regardless of their background, and ensuring the NHS is equipped for the future with doctors serving in the areas that need them the most.”

Coastal and rural locations tend to struggle to attract graduate doctors, so medical schools will have to demonstrate a commitment to addressing this when they bid for the additional places. Having these extra places will allow medical schools to send more trainees to rural areas, ensuring local patients will benefit – with previous studies showing doctors tend to remain in the areas they trained in.

As part of the ambition to build a fairer society, the Government has also pledged to ensure the places are allocated to medical schools who will work closely with their local communities to help talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds become doctors, widening access to medicine and ensuring the profession reflects the population it serves. The extra places will also play a key role in ensuring the NHS has the doctors it needs the most by giving priority to General Practice and psychiatry, supporting the mental health workforce plan published earlier this month.

Professor Wendy Reid, Executive Director of Education and Quality & National Medical Director, Health Education England said:

“Health Education England welcomes the additional funding that has been made available for an extra 1,500 medical undergraduate places.
“We look forward to leading with HEFCE on the allocation of these places. The extra places will help the NHS meet the diverse healthcare needs of patients up and down the country.”

Alongside the plans to train 1500 more medical students, 10,000 additional training places for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals will be funded by the Government, with some of the places available to students as soon as next month.

Demand for training places has always been high - latest figures show over 45,000 students have applied for 23,000 nurse training places this year. Historically, thousands have been rejected despite having the required grades.

The extra 10,000 training places for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals means there will be approximately 100,000 training places available between now and 2020, representing an 11 per cent increase on current figures.

Philip Dunne added:

“For too long, a cap on training places has meant thousands of talented students are rejected from university courses each year despite meeting requirements for medicine or nursing. These students will now be able to fulfil their potential as our future NHS nurses, midwives and allied health professionals.

Professor Brian Webster-Henderson, Chair of the Council of Deans of Health, said:

“We welcome the confirmation from the Government of clinical placement funding for the additional 10,000 places for nurses, midwives and allied health professionals. We have been working closely with the Department of Health to ensure that universities have the certainty to be able to plan to expand provision over the next three years.

“Although universities have reported a good number of high quality applicants, we will need to monitor applications from mature students where we have seen a decline this year. Effective promotion of healthcare careers will be vital to ensuring that universities can recruit additional students and educate the healthcare workforce required for the future”.

As part of the response to the consultation, the Government has also confirmed:

- It will continue to consider return on taxpayer investment.
- The Government will continue to fund clinical placements for international students commencing study at English universities in 2018-19 while it undertakes further cross-government work on the implementing the change in 2019-20.

Professor Alistair Fitt, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University and Chair of Universities UK Health Policy Network said:

“We welcome the government’s expansion of the number of doctors, nurses and other health professionals. This will help to meet the workforce need and to increase participation from disadvantaged backgrounds.
“UK universities train our world class doctors, nurses and health professionals to provide leading edge care that is safe and compassionate. These fulfilling careers, shaped in our outstanding research and learning environments, deliver enormous public value.

“We look forward to continuing to work closely with the NHS to educate the high quality health professionals of the future.”

Notes to Editors

· The consultation ran on gov.uk for 12 weeks from 14 March 2017 until 2 June 2017 and had over 3,600 responses.
· A report by HEE London LETBs (the Case for change; multi professional workforce transformation) in May 2015 says: Research commissioned by the Department of Health and published in 2013 concluded that ‘many doctors do not change geographical region in their successive career moves, and recent cohorts appear less inclined to do so. (UK Medical Careers Research Group, Oxford University, Geographical movement of doctors from education to training and eventual career post: UK cohort studies (2013).)’

Case study - Widening participation
The expansion programme provides an opportunity to incentivise social mobility and widen participation in the medical profession. Medical schools already offer a variety of outreach schemes with some offering summer school for secondary students that assist with medical school applications and gaining work experience, while others outreach to primary school to inspire children at a young age to consider medicine.

Queen Mary University of London

· Queen Mary University of London has multiple partnerships with schools in the area, helping to improve standards of education and inspire young people to fulfil their potential.

· The School of Medicine and Dentistry launched a ‘Bridge the Gap’ scheme five years ago with 10 schools from known areas of social deprivation.

· They also encourage existing medical and dental students to support potential applications from deprived areas through their SAMDA scheme (Student Assistance in Medical and Dental Applications)