

JUNE 2019

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# **INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT SURVEY**

An analysis of results from a survey undertaken by NHS Employers and the Department of Health and Social Care of NHS employing organisations in England, on past and projected recruitment of overseas nurses, doctors and allied healthcare professionals in 2018/2019.



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## Summary

In early 2019, NHS Employers, in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), invited all NHS trusts in England to take part in an international recruitment survey.

The questions were split into three parts and gathered information on the recruitment of qualified/registered overseas nurses, medical staff, and allied healthcare professionals between January to December 2018. In addition, employers were also asked for projected 2019 recruitment data for these professions along with specific questions relating to the process of overseas recruitment. Employers were additionally given the opportunity to share other key information relating to the recruitment of overseas professionals.

The three-week online survey received 90 individual organisational responses, representing all regions in England (North, Midlands, London and the South). This response rate is incredibly positive given the length of the survey, the input required from various departments to gather the data, and mandatory demands for trust intelligence.

The findings enable us to share overseas recruitment trends and predicted employer activity during 2019.

We refer to nurses, medical staff, and the allied healthcare professions separately in this report, in line with the questions posed.

## Background

Employers in the NHS continue to face workforce supply challenges across professions. Growth in patient demand and a focus on quality, combined with a shortfall of staff over recent years, has left employers with vacancies, some of which can be seen month on month.

For many years, organisations have recruited significant numbers of skilled healthcare professionals from both within and outside of the European Economic Area (EEA). A substantial proportion of these are registered nurses.

While there is a strong focus in the NHS to increase domestic supply through improved attraction and recruitment, use of apprenticeships and the creation of new roles, these strategies take time and the NHS will continue to rely on overseas staff for some years to come to fill vital vacancies and to ensure the safe and effective care of patients.

## Purpose: why we have conducted the international recruitment survey

To help inform ongoing discussions with the DHSC, NHS arms-length bodies, Home Office colleagues and professional regulators regarding the NHS Long Term Plan, it is valuable for us to understand the collective demand for nurses, medical staff and other allied healthcare professionals from overseas.

The survey results provide us with a broad snapshot of the recruitment of overseas professionals in 2018. It also allows us to identify the need for overseas professionals in the coming year and where these individuals are coming from. The information will help to inform future discussions and targeted pieces of work to further understand NHS workforce demand and influence elements of overseas recruitment. This includes policy development, workforce planning, recruitment processes, attrition rates, and identifying best practice. The information will also help us to represent employers effectively on international recruitment and related issues.

## Method – how we have engaged with HR directors

The intelligence gathered was obtained through a three-week online survey, sent to all 238 NHS trusts in England. A link to the survey was shared with the human resource director in each organisation through the NHS Employers regional engagement service. The style of the survey and methodology resembles previous workforce surveys NHS Employers has conducted with employers.

The survey asked a series of questions relating to overseas recruitment within organisations from January 2018 to December 2018 for the registered/qualified nurse workforce, medical staff and allied healthcare professionals. It then sought information on overseas recruitment planned for 2019 by organisations. Specific questions included which countries employers had targeted, planned recruitment numbers, headcount now in employment and the length of the recruitment process. The survey also provided space for employers to share other past activity or future overseas recruitment plans.

## Profile

- Survey returns were received from 90 NHS organisations in England.
- 62 responses were from acute hospital trusts representing 69 per cent of responses.
- 12 responses were from mental health trusts.
- Five were from community trusts.
- Four were from ambulance trusts.
- Seven stated 'other' which includes mental health and community, integrated acute and community, and a specialist trust.

## Key findings

### General

1. On a scale of 1-10, when asked how important successful international recruitment is to fill vacant posts, 61 per cent of trusts scored this between eight and 10.
2. Local recruitment not meeting the supply demand required by trusts was stated as the main reason for needing to recruit from overseas.
3. One of the biggest barriers faced by individuals in overseas recruitment is language testing requirements.<sup>1</sup> This is closely followed by visa and professional registration delays.
4. When employers were asked what would help to make overseas recruitment easier, the top multiple-choice response was a streamlined registration processes.

### Overseas nurse recruitment

5. During 2018, 4,611 overseas nurses were offered employment. 1,509 are now employed and the remaining nurses are either in the pipeline or assumed to have dropped out of the process.
6. Of the 90 trusts that responded, 54 have plans to recruit nurses from overseas in 2019 with a projected number of 2,613 nurses to be recruited.

### Overseas medical recruitment

7. During 2018, 405 overseas doctors were offered employment. 160 are now employed and the remaining doctors are either in the pipeline or assumed to have dropped out of the process.

1. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) has since reduced the pass score of the writing element of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to 6.5 from 5 December 2018 which is unlikely to be reflected by employers for the purposes of this survey.

8. In 2019, 33 trusts are planning to recruit doctors from overseas, with a projected number of 265 doctors being sought.

### Overseas allied healthcare recruitment

9. Ten trusts recruited allied healthcare professionals from overseas in 2018, but only 35 offers of employment were made.

10. Eight trusts are planning to recruit allied healthcare professionals during 2019, with 286 individuals (primarily paramedics) being sought.

### Countries

11. The countries with the highest rate of UK overseas recruitment for nurses were the Philippines and India; while for doctors, the results highlighted India and Pakistan (for Pakistan this was through collaborative arrangements with overseas royal colleges or the Medical Training Initiative, the latter doesn't fill workforce shortages).

### Success rates

12. There is a sizeable difference between the offers of employment made and actual numbers starting employment, particularly for nurses.

13. For 2018, 67 per cent of offers are yet to translate into actual employment. It is projected that it will take up until October 2019 to bring 78 per cent of these nurses into positions in the UK.

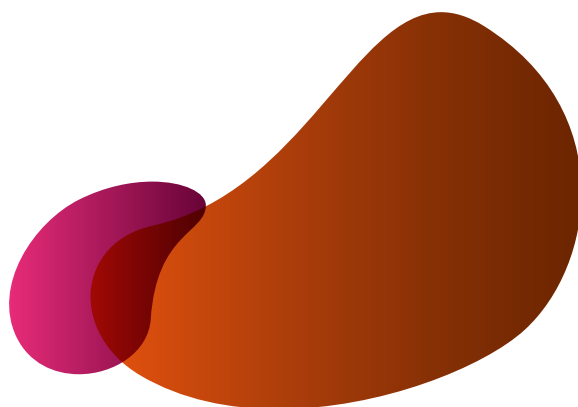
### Timescales

14. The time it takes to bring professionals to the UK differs and this can vary considerably among trusts.

15. For overseas nurse recruitment, most trusts advised it takes seven to eight months, however nine per cent of trusts report it only takes up to three months, while 13 per cent of trusts report it takes 12 months or more.

16. For the recruitment of overseas doctors, more than a third of trusts report it only takes four to six months and a further 20 per cent only takes up to three months, suggesting the recruitment of doctors is quicker than nurses.

17. The planned recruitment of nurses in 2019 shows an average of 215 nurses being required each month. Based on the conversion rate from offer to employment, this could mean that between 600 and 700 nurses may enter the pipeline each month, for example applying to join the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register, sitting language tests etc.



## Section A – Summary of respondents

- 238 NHS provider trusts were identified and surveyed.
- 90 individual trusts responded.
- Responses were received from ambulance, community, hospital and mental health organisations across all the health education regions (see Figure 1).

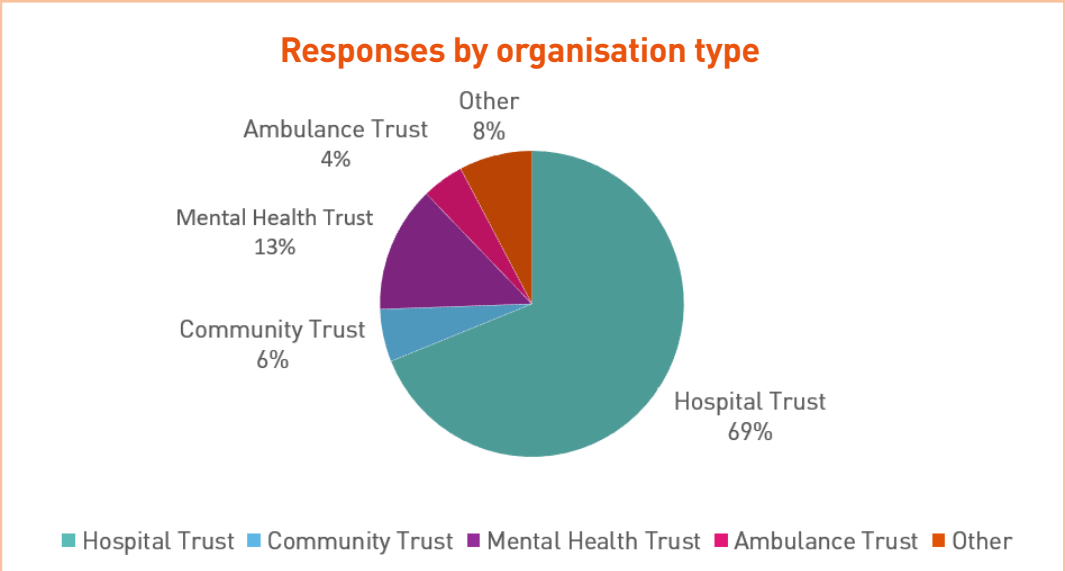


Figure 1

Figure 2 shows the geographical spread of respondents.

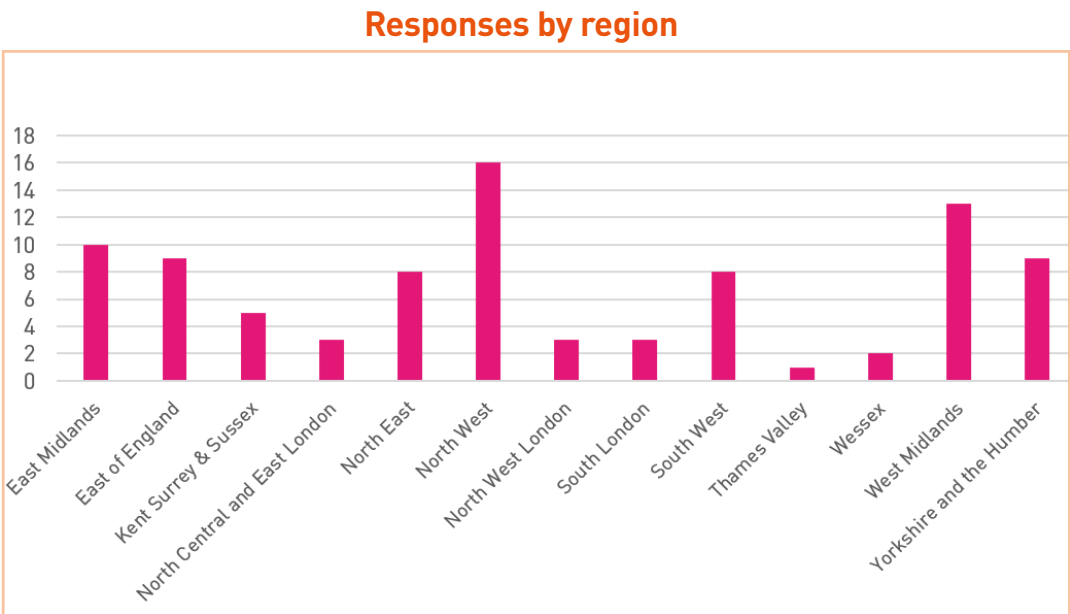


Figure 2

## Section B – Department of Health and Social Care questions

The DHSC was keen to determine why employers recruit from overseas, the successes, the barriers organisations face, what would be helpful to enhance the process, and to understand how a central function could support overseas recruitment. These five questions were multiple choice and respondents were asked to select all that apply.



Figure 3

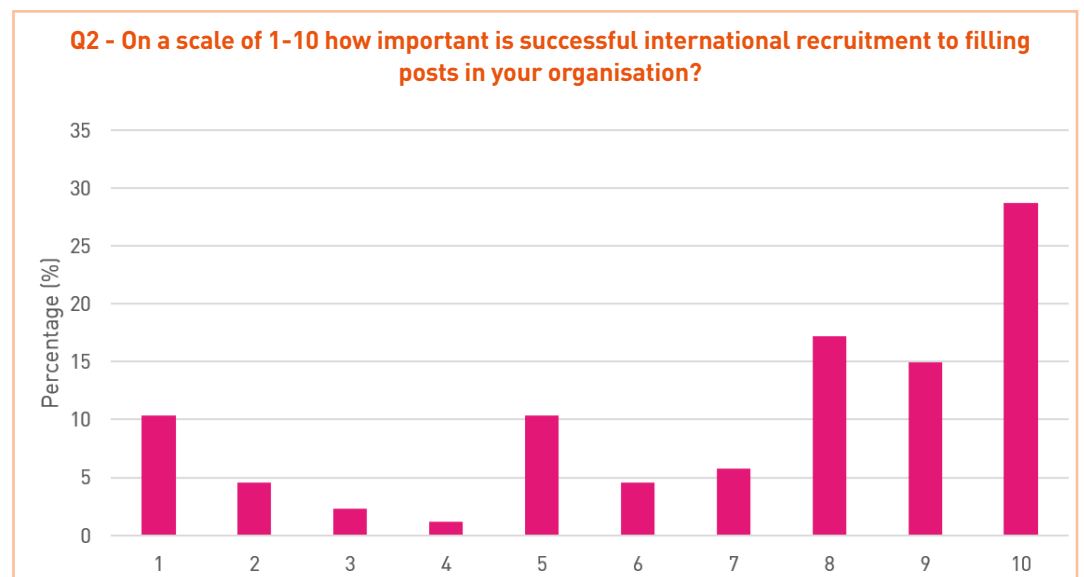


Figure 4

Employers were then asked to explain their answer to Q2. Below are the key themes shared by employers in order of frequency/the number of times raised:

- A shortage of skills domestically means that local recruitment does not meet the demand of the trust therefore international recruitment plays an important part of their recruitment strategy (21).
- International recruitment is vital to filling vacancies in their trust (17).
- International recruitment forms part of trusts recruitment strategy but in support of strong domestic recruitment (6).
- International recruitment is very effective for hard-to-fill roles (6).



Figure 5

Employers were also asked as part of Q3 to include any other barriers to international recruitment. Further points made included:

- international recruitment is costly both in terms of agency fees and the immigration health surcharge
- high investment of resource is required from the employer, both in the recruitment and pastoral support for employees once they arrive in the UK
- employers would like more accurate, consistent and timely support to questions raised with officials at the Home Office and from regulatory bodies.

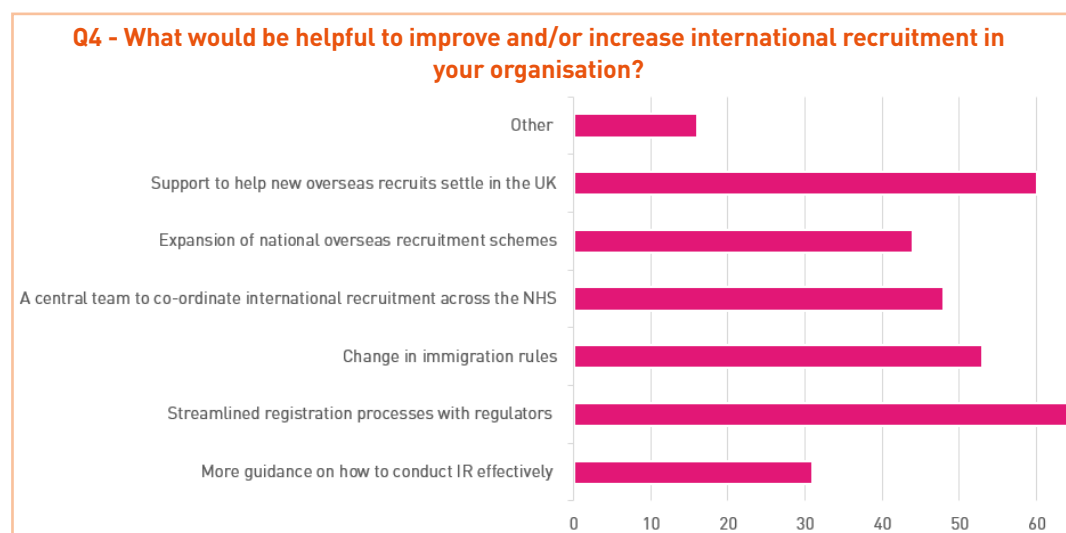


Figure 6

Employers were then asked as part of Q4 what would be helpful to improve/increase international recruitment. For ease we have grouped these responses into key themes in order of importance to trusts:

- Regulatory process improvements/support for passing registration exams.
- Central or regional function to coordinate, streamline and simplify processes .
- Guidance on the recruitment process and immigration rules.
- More support and guidance in relation to the provision of pastoral support.



Employers were also asked as part of Q5 as to how a central function could help, however only two employers responded to this question. Feedback is below.

- “I am not sure a central function would be helpful, but possibly at an STP local level so that local needs can be recruited to.”
- “Strategic oversight and unlocking of barriers e.g. language tests, local market tests, NMC challenges.”



Figure 7



## Section C – 2018 overseas recruitment

### C1 Nursing workforce

- 45 organisations (50 per cent of respondents) recruited nurses from overseas during 2018.
- 28 of these organisations recruited from non-EEA countries only.
- Four stated they only recruited individuals from within the EEA.
- 11 trusts recruited from both EEA and non-EEA countries.
- 4,611 qualified/registered nurses from overseas have been offered positions and are assumed to either be employed within the NHS or be passing through the recruitment and professional registration phase.
- Of the 4,611 offers of NHS employment, 1,509 nurses are now employed equating to 33 per cent of the offers initially made.

### Recruitment process and travel timescales

Travel details are unknown for 675 of those nurses offered employment however where this has been shared we know the following:

- It is anticipated that 1,040 (22.5 per cent) of these new recruits will have passed the NMC Computer Based Test and will be ready to travel to the UK before March 2019.
- 477 nurses are expected to be ready between April and June 2019.
- 388 are expected to be ready between July and September 2019.
- 522 are expected to be ready from October 2019 onwards.

### Method for recruitment

- 34 of the 45 organisations who recruited from overseas during 2018, used an agency to assist them with the process.
- 11 of the 45 either used the Global Health Exchange or another collaborative/regional approach.

The time it takes to get an overseas nurse into employment varies quite considerably as Figure 8 highlights.

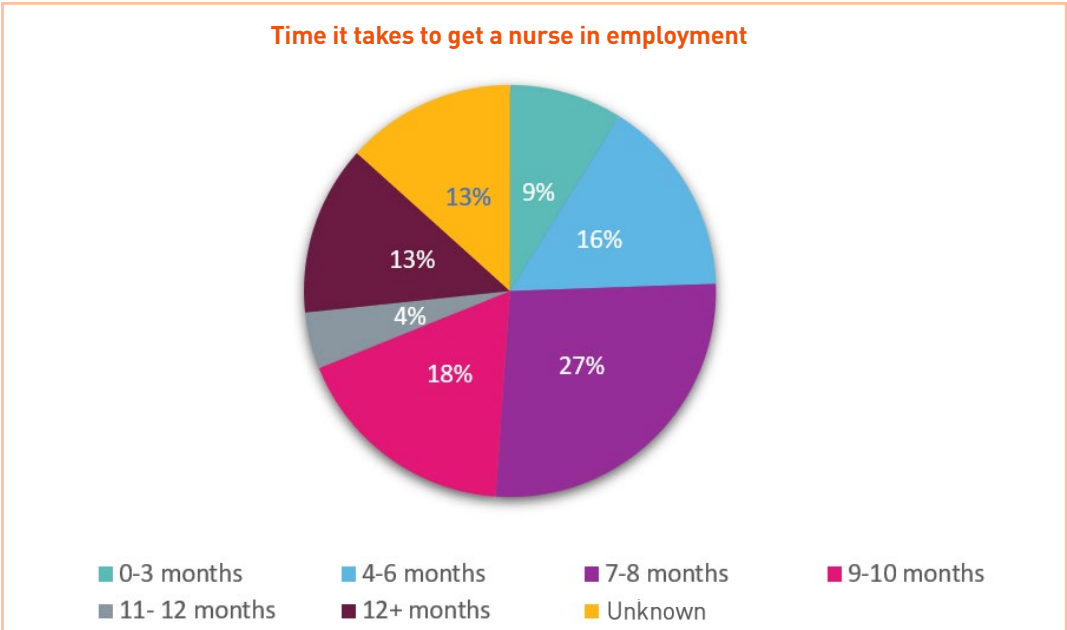


Figure 8

Figure 9 provides an overview of the countries recruited from for nursing in 2018, highlighting the Philippines and India as the most recruited from countries.

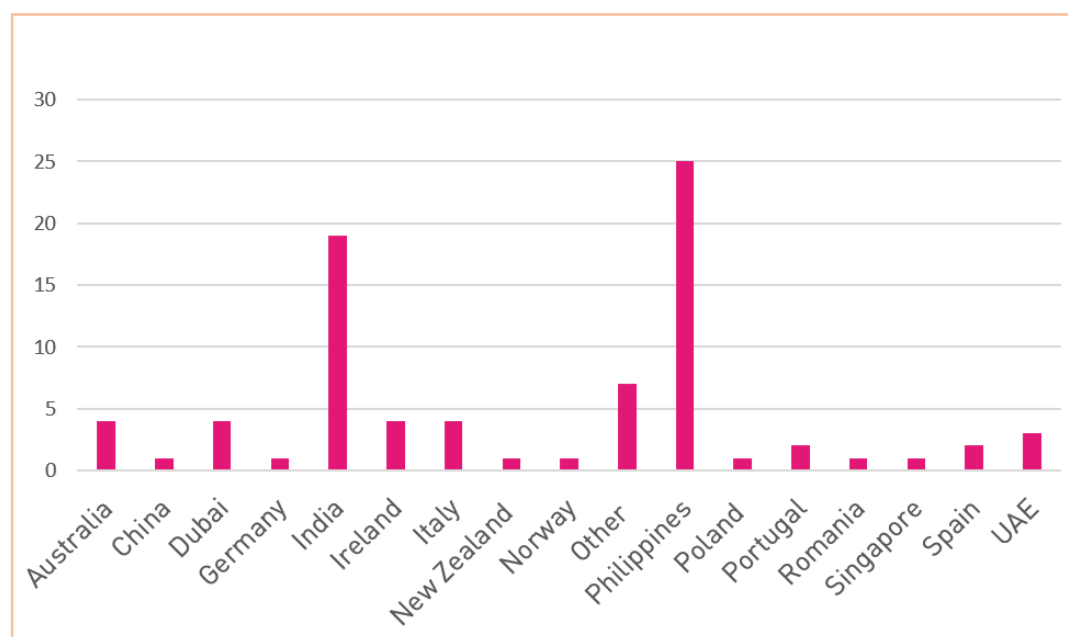


Figure 9

Table 1 shows the number of nurses offered employment and now in employment from each of the most recruited from countries.

## C2 Medical healthcare professionals

Country	Number of nurses planned to recruit (headcount)	Number of nurses offered employment (headcount)	Number of nurses now in employment (headcount)
Australia	40	347	25
Dubai	85	140	60
India	784	1051	419
Ireland	55	45	20
Italy	74	62	44
Philippines	1729	2813	900
UAE	70	42	6

Table 1

- 35 organisations (39 per cent of respondents) stated that they had recruited doctors from overseas during 2018.
- 19 of these organisations targeted only non-EEA countries for recruitment.
- 13 trusts recruited from both EEA and non-EEA countries.

- Of the 405 offers of employment, 160 doctors are now employed within the NHS equating to 40 per cent of the offers initially made.
- Trust grade doctors and consultants were the most recruited staff groups in 2018, followed by staff grade and associate specialist.
- A wide range of specialities were recruited in 2018 including but not limited to: emergency medicine, radiology, paediatrics, anaesthetists, diabetes, elderly care, trauma and orthopaedics, and psychiatry.

Table 2 below highlights the most popular countries recruited from for medical recruitment, the number of posts offered and the numbers of those doctors now in employment.

Country	Planned	Offered	In employment
India	219	174	78
Pakistan	80	86	24

Table 2

### Recruitment process and travel timescales

Travel dates are unknown for 21 doctors offered employment, however where this has been shared we know the following:

- It is anticipated that 57 of these new recruits will have passed the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) and will be ready to travel to the UK before March 2019.
- 62 doctors are expected to be ready between April and June.
- 93 are expected to be ready between July and September.
- 12 are expected to be ready from October onwards.

### Method for recruitment

- 16 of the 45 organisations who recruited from overseas during 2018 used an agency.

It is important to highlight that during the consecutive months between December 2017 and July 2018, trusts reported issues in recruiting overseas healthcare professionals due to high demand of restricted certificates of sponsorship.

The time it takes to get an overseas medical professional into employment varies quite considerably as Figure 10 below highlights.



Figure 10

Figure 11 below provides an overview of the countries recruited for medical professionals in 2018, highlighting the India and Pakistan as the most recruited from countries. This data highlights both targeted recruitment and for 'other', where individuals have secured roles directly, without instigation from the trust.



Figure 11

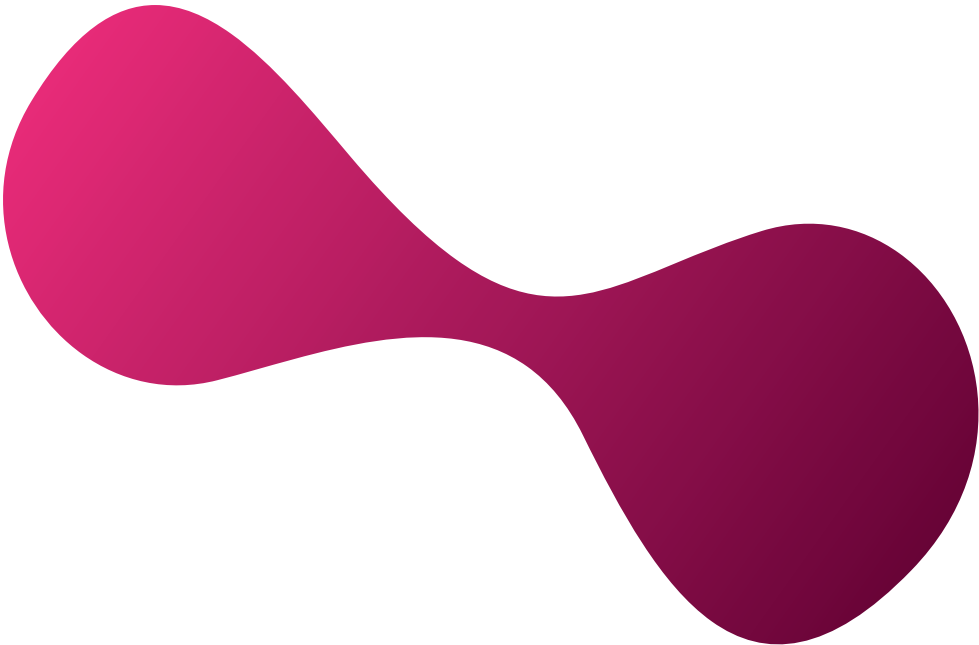
### C3 Allied healthcare professionals

- 10 organisations told us they had recruited allied healthcare professionals during 2018.
- Six organisations recruited these from within the EEA.
- Six organisations recruited individuals from outside of the EEA.
- 35 offers of employment were made with 31 now in post.
- Paramedics and radiographers were the most common allied healthcare professions recruited during 2018 and have had the best employment success rates.
- The two popular countries identified for allied healthcare recruitment were Australia and Portugal.
- The top three allied healthcare professions reported are highlighted below in Figure 12.

It is important to highlight that from December 2017 to early July 2018, trusts reported issues in recruiting overseas healthcare professionals due to high demand for restricted certificates of sponsorship. This impacted on employers' ability to recruit some skilled professions.



Figure 12



## Section D – 2019 planned overseas recruitment

### D1 nurses

- Of the 90 trusts who responded, 54 are seeking to recruit nurses from overseas in 2019.
- The combined projected number of nurses being sought is 2,613.
- Three trusts plan to recruit only from within the EEA.
- 31 trusts plan to recruit from non-EEA countries only.
- 14 trusts plan to recruit from both EEA and non-EEA countries.
- The Philippines and India are the top non-EEA countries being targeted for predicted nurse recruitment in 2019.
- Of the 54 trusts who plan to recruit nurses in 2019, 28 state they will use an agency.
- Nine trusts don't plan to use an agency for their overseas nurse recruitment.
- Four trusts plan to use the Global Health Exchange.
- Planned nurse recruitment in 2019 features across the HEE regions as seen in Figure 13.

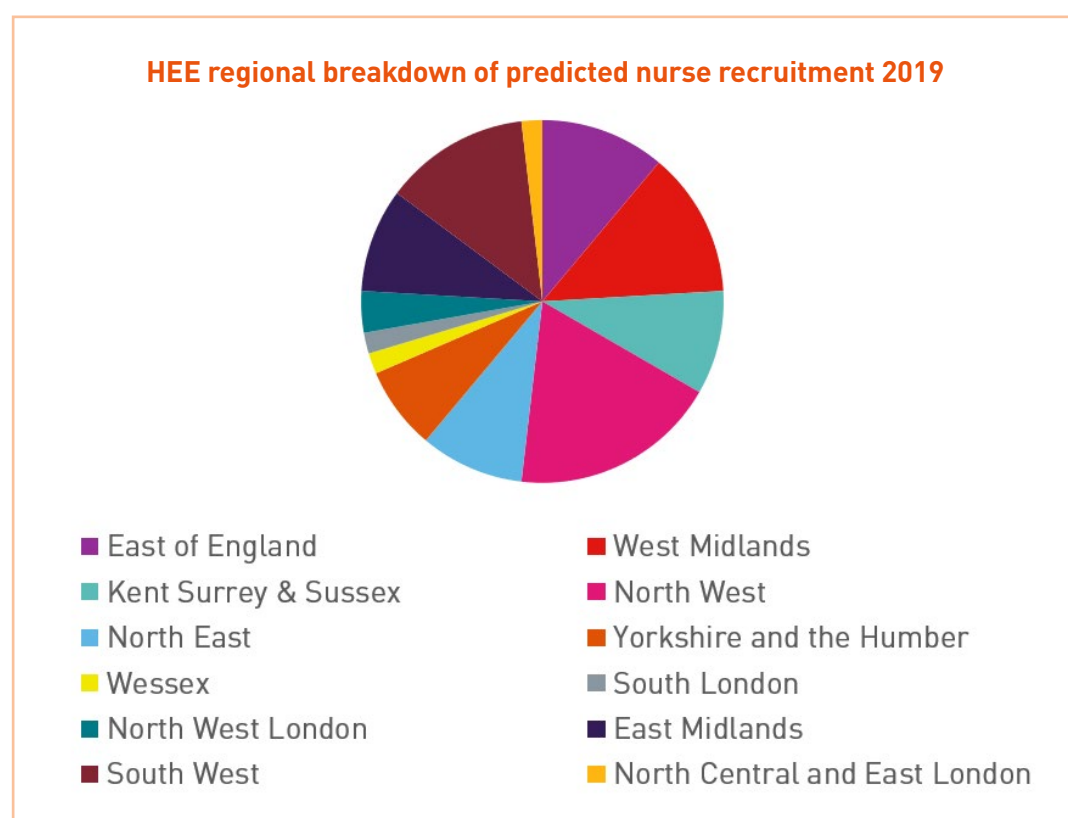


Figure 13

Table 3 shows the planned numbers of nurse recruitment within the most targeted countries.

Country	Number of nurses planned to recruit in 2019
Australia	75
Dubai	160
India	916
Philippines	1134
USA	63

Table 3

### D2 medical

- Of the 90 trusts, 33 plan to recruit doctors in 2019.
- A total of 265 doctors are being sought.
- Eight trusts plan to enlist the help of an agency.
- Eight trusts don't intend to use an agency.
- Three trusts plan use a collaborative overseas recruitment approach. Two of these are international trainee fellowship programmes and the other is with the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Pakistan.
- Of the trusts who advised on the specialities of doctors they seek to recruit, the main areas identified are emergency medicine and radiology.
- The main staff groups being sought are consultants, staff grade and trust doctors.
- Of the 33 trusts, two plan to recruit doctors only from within the EEA.
- 12 trusts plan to recruit doctors from outside of the EEA only.
- 16 trusts plan to recruit from both within and outside of the EEA.
- India is the top known country for predicted medical recruitment in 2019.
- The second is Pakistan, however, of the 265 doctors being sought, 20 of these are in relation to the Medical Training Initiative and not to fill workforce shortages.

### D3 allied healthcare professionals

- Of the 90 trusts, eight are planning to recruit allied healthcare professionals during 2019.
- Two of these are ambulance trusts and the other six are hospital trusts.
- The total number planned for recruitment is 286, with 270 of these relating to paramedic roles from Australia (250 of these are planned in London).
- The other allied healthcare professions being approached are radiographers (from Australia) and physiotherapists (from the Philippines).



## Section E – Next steps

We will continue to work with employers and stakeholders in the NHS to understand workforce demand and, in conversations linked to the workforce priorities within the NHS Long Term Plan, support them to consider alternative methods of filling vacancies such as HEE's Global Health Exchange programme. We will also support employers to maximise their domestic attraction, recruitment and retention strategies.



## NHS Employers

The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We help employers make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues to ensure that their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice. We keep them up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion, providing practical advice and information, and generating opportunities to network and share knowledge and best practice.

We work with employers in the NHS to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

The NHS Employers organisation is part of the NHS Confederation.

## Contact us

For more information on how to become involved in our work:

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