



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Edward Argar MP
Minister of State for Health

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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

21.11.2022

Dear *George*,

Thank you for your correspondence of 8 January on behalf of a number of constituents, about the Health and Care Bill 2021-2022. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Whilst I appreciate your constituents' concerns, I believe that this Bill will achieve the reforms set out in the *NHS Long Term Plan*, and the vast majority of it reflects what the NHS has asked for. It will make permanent some of the innovations that we have seen implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bill is designed to improve our health and care system, level up health outcomes across the country and enable people to live longer and healthier lives. It will also incorporate the lessons learned from the pandemic.

As I set out in committee, we believe that the current provisions in the Bill are clear. However, given the often misleading claims that we intended for private companies to sit on the boards, we have also amended the Bill at the House of Commons Report Stage to put beyond doubt that Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) will not be controlled by the private sector. ICBs are NHS bodies guided by the NHS Constitution and with the values of the NHS at their heart. This amendment makes clear that no one may be appointed to an ICB who would undermine the independence of the NHS, either as a result of their interests in the private healthcare sector, or otherwise.

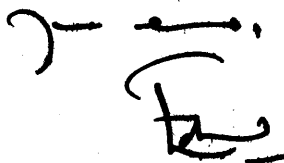
Regarding your constituents' concerns for the NHS workforce, Clause 35 of the Bill proposes a new duty on the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to publish a report on the workforce planning and supply system in the NHS in England at a minimum of every five years, with NHS England and Health Education England (HEE) assisting in its preparation if asked. The aim of the report is to be transparent about the workforce system.

I can assure your constituents that continuing to grow the workforce remains a top priority for the Government. The monthly workforce statistics for September show that there are record numbers of staff working in the NHS, with almost 1.2 million full-time equivalent staff, the headcount being over 1.3 million. This includes record numbers of doctors and nurses. We are making good progress on the 50,000 nurses target and have recently expanded the number of medical school places. Workforce levels and projections are already kept under close review by the department and the other bodies involved in workforce planning and supply.

On long-term workforce planning, the department has also already commissioned HEE to work with partners to develop a robust long-term strategic framework for the health and regulated social care workforce for the next fifteen years, which for the first time includes regulated professionals in adult social care. We expect the framework to be published in spring 2022.

To make the most of this work, on 21 November we announced that we are merging HEE with NHS England to ensure greater integration of service, workforce and financial planning. This will put long-term planning and strategy for healthcare staff recruitment and retention at the top of the NHS' agenda.

I hope this reply is helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Argar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

EDWARD ARGAR MP