Trusts scramble to address nurse staffing concerns  NursingTimes.Net

The NHS is continuing to recruit hundreds of extra qualified nurses a month with numbers at their highest for a decade, latest workforce data shows.

The continuing spike in recruitment is clear evidence that many trusts are now concerned about staffing levels, in the wake of the Francis report into care failings at Mid Staffordshire Foundation Trust and early findings from the Care Quality Commission’s new inspection regime.

Across the NHS workforce, there were 314,173 whole-time equivalent qualified nurses and midwives in February, which is 8,148 more than in August 2013.

Nearly 70% of the increase was among hospital nursing staff. There were 174,632 WTE registered nurses and midwives working in the acute sector in February, which is 5,583 more than in August 2013 and 570 more than in January.

The latest workforce figures were published last week by the Health and Social Care Information Centre.

They indicate there are now more qualified nurses and midwives in the NHS than at any point since monthly data began to be collected in September 2009 and more than in any year since 2003.

However, while more nursing staff are beginning to trickle through to the frontline, survey findings published earlier this month have revealed trusts still have a long way to go.

A joint poll by Nursing Times survey and ITV revealed more than eight of 10 nurses said they did not have enough time to give patients adequate care.

In addition, a survey of 104 trusts by NHS Employers showed an overall shortage of over 12,500 whole-time equivalent nurses in January. It found 83% of trusts were experiencing qualified nursing workforce supply shortages and 45% had actively recruited from outside the UK in the last 12 months to fill vacancies.

As well as the overall figure – reported last week by Nursing Times – the NHS Employers survey revealed regional variations in vacancy rates and number of posts vacant across the 12 local education and training board areas in England.

The vacancy rate ranged from 18% in South London to 6% in the North East.