



Organising non EU overseas nurses

Earlier this year, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) introduced changes in the way in which nurses from non EU countries must demonstrate their skills in order to join the register – enabling them to live and work as a registered nurse.

UNISON has been successful in helping members through this upheaval and encouraged staff to become members and also committed stewards.

Nurses coming to the UK from non-EU countries are required to pass a clinical test called the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) in order to gain their license to practice.

Previously, applicants would have two chances to pass these exams. However, following pressure from UNISON, the NMC announced that non-EU nurses would be allowed a third attempt to pass the test.

Initially, these changes did not apply to applicants who applied before April 2017 – many of whom are UNISON members.

UNISON challenged this as being arbitrarily unfair and successfully negotiated with the NMC the right to represent our members affected in this way on a case-by-case basis. As a result of our efforts, a large number of these nurses have now also been given the chance to take the test a third time.

This success has led to many nurses joining the union and more nurses becoming ready to be shop stewards.

Last February, at Cambridge University hospital (CUH), three of our members failed their second attempt at the OSCE test. Their employer suspended them from work without pay and they were told that a disciplinary procedure to dismiss them would follow.

This would have very serious consequences for these nurses, as their visas required that they be employed specifically by CUH. They would not only lose their jobs but be forced to leave the country.

UNISON took these cases to the NMC, which led to permission being granted for the members to sit a third attempt. Subsequently, all three passed. UNISON then successfully negotiated their reinstatement with the employer and full back pay.

These nurses have now become UNISON activists, supporting members at work and talking one to one with other overseas nurses about their experience.

One of our stewards, Jade, told us: “I was very vocal with my colleagues about the need to join the union after my own ordeal. I am honoured and thrilled to be a UNISON rep. My work as an efficient professional nurse will go hand in hand with being a passionate UNISON representative”.

Jade has now successfully represented another overseas nurse to the NMC and is scheduled to attend UNISON stewards training in September, where she wants to improve her negotiating and communications skills.

UNISON has also negotiated a slot in the induction programme of overseas nurses at CUH. This gives new staff the opportunity to find out about UNISON, the work we do and to become a member. The more members we have, the stronger our union to stand in your corner.

If you are interested in knowing more about how similar work can be done in your workplace, please contact Susan Cueva:

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