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Press release

Strictly embargoed until 00:01, Thursday 29 November 2007

Auditor General reports on NHS checks on overseas staff

The Auditor General for Scotland is today publishing a report on the performance of the NHS in carrying out pre-employment checks of overseas staff.

The report, *Overseas staff in the NHS – pre-employment checks*, looks at whether NHS boards are following their own procedures on pre-employment screening of staff recruited from outside the European Economic Area (EEA).

It says there is evidence boards have a very high level of compliance with their stated procedures. The percentage of personnel files containing evidence of pre-employment checks ranged from 90 to 99 per cent, depending on the check.

The Auditor General for Scotland, Robert Black, said: "Healthcare professionals recruited from outside the UK play an important part in enabling the NHS to provide care to the people of Scotland. The NHS carries out pre-employment screening for all its staff to make sure they recruit the right person for the job. This report looks at whether NHS boards in Scotland are following their own policies for carrying out pre-employment checks on staff from overseas. I am pleased to report that we found boards have a high level of compliance with their procedures.

"However our report highlights areas where the system can be improved to ensure that accurate information is available on the number of overseas NHS staff."

At September 2007 the reported figure of non-EEA employees in the NHS in Scotland was 1,161 members of staff, 89 per cent of whom are doctors or nurses. But this is likely to be an underestimate as it can be difficult for boards to provide accurate numbers of overseas staff. This is for a number of reasons, such as people with indefinite leave to remain in the UK not needing work permits and not all staff information being held centrally.

The report recommends that immigration status is included in the national workforce information system. It also says NHS boards prioritise the wider use of electronic personnel records and ensure that recording the immigration status and associated information about work and residency permits are completed routinely.

The Auditor General undertook this focused piece of work following security incidents at Glasgow Airport and in London in June which allegedly involved overseas staff working in the NHS. The Scottish Government is currently revising its policy and guidance on pre-employment checks for overseas staff in the NHS.

In carrying out the study Audit Scotland asked all NHS boards for data about overseas staff. It then checked compliance with procedures at five boards; Ayrshire & Arran, Grampian, Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Lanarkshire, and Lothian.

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Notes to editors

1. The report looks at pre-employment screening of people who originate from outside the European Economic Area (EEA). European Community law gives EEA nationals a right to live and work in the UK without needing work permits. The EEA consists of the EU countries plus Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Nationals from Switzerland have the same rights as EEA nationals. For more information see: www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/applying/eeaeunationals
2. Audit Scotland looked at compliance with the following key pre-employment checks in its sample of five boards: identity; work references; qualification and regulatory checks; work and residence permits; and Disclosure Scotland.

3. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
4. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland.
5. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.