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Prosperity and health in 2018



Professor Frank Peck of the University of Cumbria's Centre for Regional Economic Development writes for in-Cumbria on the big issues of the day and the economic data behind them. This month, he focuses on the health economy in Cumbria

As we enter 2018, no doubt New Year greetings will be exchanged by many, and such greetings will often refer to either prosperity or health or indeed both.

Health and prosperity certainly seem to be connected. After all, the ability to train, learn, work and earn a living all depend in the first instance on good health.

For a significant number of people living in Cumbria, however, health and prosperity are connected much more directly. These are individuals who are employed in this sector and depend on these services for their livelihood.

Activities categorised under "health" in official statistics account for around 13 per cent of all employment in Cumbria. In terms of jobs, therefore, the "health economy" in the county is the third ranking sector after manufacturing (16 per cent) and accommodation and food services (14 per cent).

It is quite striking to note that over 30,000 people in Cumbria depend directly on the health economy for employment. These figures can be divided into three sub-categories.

The largest of these is human health activities that account for around 19,000 jobs in the county.

This includes, prominently, 9,500 workers employed in hospital activities, a further 3,000 in general medical practices, 1,400 in dental practices and over 4,000 other workers in a wide range of services allied to health such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, homeopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture and medical massage.

Then there are those employed in residential care (around 7,000 workers).

This includes those working in nursing and residential homes for the elderly where there is increasing demand due to ageing of the population.

Finally, there are over 5,000 people employed in social work activities unrelated to the provision of accommodation.

This includes, for instance, services to the elderly and disabled in the community and at home as well as

childcare provision.

The current Strategic Economic Plan for Cumbria refers to the health sector alongside education as a key part of the "social infrastructure" of the county.

This is, of course, quite true and important.

After all, a healthy and well-educated workforce is vital for the social well-being of communities. This categorisation, however, perhaps underplays "health" as an economic entity in its own right.

This sector not only underpins social fabric but also acts as a significant provider of income for many thousands of residents. The wages and salaries paid to these employees then generates further jobs in the county through expenditures in shops and services.

And then there are the spin-offs associated with linkages between health and other sectors through purchase of goods and services. It is likely that a lot of these purchases will leak out of the county, particularly those involving specialist equipment and services.

But support for skill formation is one aspect that has a major impact locally.

There are significant links, in particular, between health and higher education at the University of Cumbria where courses are offered in nursing and midwifery as well as a range of health-related subjects such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, social work, psychotherapy and radiography.

These links to the skills system are vital not least because the LEP Skills Plan has identified "health and social care" as a sector experiencing persistent skills shortages and recruitment difficulties.

The health and social care sector certainly underpins the social wellbeing of Cumbrian communities.

But we should not overlook the significance of this sector also as a provider of income for many households and a major contributor to the economic wellbeing of Cumbria.

'The ability to train, learn, work and earn a living all depend in the first instance on good health'

