Education Strategy

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW)

Consultation Draft – October 2026

GIG CYMRU NHS WALES

Addysg a Gwella Iechyd Cymru (AaGIC)

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW)

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Strategy
on a page

Our Ambition
"To make education and training a strategic capability for NHS Wales: shaping a learning health and care system and driving safe, effective and responsive care."

Strategic Themes
and Priority Actions

1. Skills for the future
- Future-ready curricula and skills
- Expand learning closer to home
- Strengthen interprofessional learning
- Establish a national digital capability framework

2. Attractive routes into careers
- Diverse career entry routes
- Flexible modular pathways
- Welsh-medium and bilingual pathways

3. Multi-professional workforce
- Shared learning models
- Flexible foundation pathways
- Supported practice transitions
- National academies

4. High-quality learning environments
- Strengthened learning environment standards
- Educator capability and support
- Place-based learning

5. Sustainable planning and funding
- Flexible, sustainable commissioning
- Multi-year planning and commissioning
- Future-focused funding
- Community and place-based investment
- Evidence-led investment

Strategic Principles that underpin education and training

- designing education around future health and care needs
- investing where value and impact are greatest
- building an adaptable and resilient workforce
- putting learners at the centre

Foreword

At HEIW, we are privileged to work as part of NHS Wales, alongside Welsh Government and partners across education, regulation and service delivery, to help shape the workforce Wales needs. People are at the heart of health and care, and the quality, safety and experience of care depend on how well we support staff to learn, develop and thrive.

Wales has a proud tradition of public service, partnership and care rooted in its communities. As health and care needs continue to change, so too must the way we educate and train our workforce, ensuring people have the skills, confidence and adaptability to deliver high-quality care in every part of Wales.

Our education and training system has strong foundations and much to be proud of including the innovation, collaboration and focus on quality that have shaped delivery in recent years. This strategy builds on that good practice while looking ahead to the future capabilities Wales will need. The world around us is changing rapidly, and we need a longer-term view of the skills our workforce will need, supported by more flexible, inclusive and innovative ways of learning.

Over the last year, we have listened to colleagues across NHS Wales, learners, educators, universities, colleges and wider system partners. Their insight has helped ensure this strategy reflects Wales as it is today, while recognising its strengths, challenges and ambitions for the future.

This strategy is ambitious. It sets out how we will use our national role to help shape a workforce that is ready for the future: confident, adaptable and supported by continuous learning throughout their careers. It recognises that ongoing education and learning are essential to helping the NHS adapt to changing population needs and make the most of opportunities to improve care. The strategy focuses on learning that is accessible throughout people's careers, ensures people have the skills to deliver high-quality care in practice, supports multiprofessional working, strengthens Welsh language capability, and uses digital, simulation and emerging technologies where they add value.

We cannot achieve this alone. In partnership with learners, educators, the NHS workforce and organisations across the wider system, we can build clearer and more personalised learning pathways, develop new routes into healthcare careers, and help people gain the right skills at the right time to deliver excellent care.

This strategy is a commitment to the people who work in, and will join, NHS Wales and the communities they serve. By investing in education and embracing new ways of learning, we can help build a confident, capable, compassionate and resilient workforce, ready to improve health, reduce inequalities and support better care for Wales now and for generations to come.

Ms Alex Howells
Chief Executive, Health Education and Improvement Wales



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Introduction

About us

HEIW is a Special Health Authority serving NHS Wales. One of our primary statutory responsibilities is to commission and provide education and training for a wide range of healthcare staff. This represents around 85% of our expenditure and more than £330 million each year. As the Statutory Education Body in Wales, we also work with UK regulators to oversee and assure the quality of education for a range of professions.

> Our purpose is "as part of the NHS, to work with partners to develop a skilled and sustainable workforce that improves care and population health".

Our role in education and training

Over the last 8 years HEIW has supported significant growth and innovation in healthcare education and training across Wales.

- **Introduced** new contracts for pre- and post-registration education and training, expanding access and supporting routes such as distance learning and part-time provision.
- **Expanded** medical training routes in Wales to support the delivery of sustainable workforce solutions and supporting more diverse learners, less than full time training pathways and locally employed doctors not in training.
- **Developed** an innovative dental training scheme that is making a difference in attracting dentists to train in rural Wales through enhanced financial, educational and pastoral support.
- **Reformed** postgraduate education for pharmacy professionals in response to regulatory change and created a multi-sector training model for pharmacists expanding the focus on primary and community care.
- **Introduced** higher-level qualifications for optometrists, contributing to modernised eye care services.
- **Established** seven primary and community care academies and introduced the first national General Practice Nurse training programme for Wales.
- **Set up** a national endoscopy academy offering multiprofessional programmes to upskill the workforce to quality-assured standards.
- **Developed** a simulation strategy to ensure that simulation is underpinned by quality standards supported by the development of a faculty model to support trainers.
- **Improved** access to work-based learning and apprenticeship programmes, expanding routes into healthcare careers.
- **Developed** Y Ty Dysgu, a national digital learning management system offering quality-assured asynchronous learning.
- **Supported** NHS Wales in its delivery of More Than Just Words and the Active Offer to strengthen use of the Welsh language across the NHS in Wales.

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These are just some examples of innovative approaches that are helping to reshape healthcare education and training in Wales in response to patient and service needs.

The need for an education strategy

We identified the development of an education strategy as a priority in 2025/26 recognising that annual education and training decisions need to be guided by a clearer long-term direction. Without this, there is a risk that individual planning cycles focus on immediate pressures without paying enough attention to the future skills, learning models, investment choices and workforce capabilities NHS Wales will need over the next 7–10 years.

This strategy focuses on how education and training can help NHS Wales meet population health needs and support HEIW's core purpose: developing a skilled and sustainable workforce that improves care and population health. It therefore positions education as a means of enabling better care, workforce sustainability and service transformation, rather than as an end in itself.

Our ambition

Our ambition is to make education and training a strategic capability for NHS Wales: shaping a learning health and care system and driving safe, effective and responsive care.

Strategy scope

The strategy focuses on areas where HEIW has the clearest role and influence, including education and training that enables people to enter healthcare roles, gain the required qualification or registration, and prepare for initial practice. It also includes formal training routes where these are required for a defined role, regulated pathway or recognised area of practice.

Continuing Professional Development supports qualified staff to continue developing after entry to practice, helping them maintain and apply the knowledge, skills, confidence and behaviours needed to respond to changing population, service and technological needs. CPD is addressed through a separate but aligned framework.

Although individual professions are referenced where relevant, the strategic themes at the centre of this strategy are designed to work across HEIW's functions and professions. They promote greater equity and consistency in education and training, while recognising the distinct roles, scopes of practice and regulatory requirements of different professions. This means using education and training to strengthen shared capabilities, support interprofessional learning and prepare learners for the team-based, integrated models of care Wales will increasingly need.

In developing this strategy, we recognise that we do not hold all the levers needed to deliver this change. Some ambitions will depend on decisions and actions by our partners. Our role will be to use the levers we do have, including workforce planning, commissioning, quality assurance, delivery, education

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intelligence, partnership working and national influence, to shape and support change across the system.

While the formal scope of this strategy is healthcare education and training, it has been developed with a clear understanding of the wider health and social care system in Wales and national policy direction. Social care is central to national ambitions for integrated, community-based and preventative care, and we will continue working with Social Care Wales and wider partners to align education and training approaches where shared capabilities, learning pathways and workforce ambitions overlap.

Finally, the scope of this strategy is linked to workforce planning but distinct from it, as it focuses on the wider system issues that underpin education and training. The strategy does not set out to determine education and training numbers and places as this will continue to be linked to service need.

Welsh language commitment

Through this strategy, HEIW reaffirms its commitment to the Welsh language as an essential part of high-quality, person-centred care and as a core capability for the future workforce of NHS Wales. Our ambition is to embed Welsh language and bilingual provision across education and training so that learners, educators and staff are supported to develop the confidence, skills and opportunities needed to deliver the Active Offer and meet the needs of Welsh-speaking patients, service users and communities.

Across the strategy's aims and pillars, we will use our national role to strengthen Welsh language capacity, increase access to bilingual learning, support Welsh-speaking educators, and ensure education and training contribute meaningfully to the delivery of strategic direction such as *Cymraeg 2050* and *More Than Just Words*.

In doing so, we aim to move beyond compliance towards a system in which the Welsh language is visible, valued and routinely built into how the future health and care workforce is planned, educated and supported.

External context

Whilst responsibility for health policy and the NHS is devolved to Welsh Government, the education and training environment in Wales will continue to be influenced by the wider regulatory landscape, which operates on a UK basis and drives programme requirements and curricula content.

There is currently a significant programme of medical education reform, likely to place greater emphasis on clinical generalist capabilities and more flexible, competency-based training pathways. Other statutory regulators are also reviewing aspects of their education and training standards. The NMC has consulted on proposals to change nursing and midwifery practice-learning requirements, including nursing programme hours and the duration and structure of midwifery programmes. Its separate review of advanced practice is expected to move to the development of standards from spring 2027.

These developments may create opportunities and requirements for individual professions. Importantly, however, regulatory standards generally retain considerable scope for education providers and commissioners to determine how

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curricula and learning models are designed and delivered in response to local and national workforce needs. Strategically, HEIW is focused on working with regulators, and within regulatory requirements, to facilitate the redesign of education around the capabilities Wales needs.

Case for change

High-quality patient care depends on a workforce that is attracted into health careers, supported through education and training, retained within NHS Wales and able to keep learning throughout their working lives. Education and training are therefore central to improving quality, safety, productivity, workforce sustainability and population health.

The scale of change facing NHS Wales means we must do more than maintain current supply routes. We need an education and training system that helps shape the skills, behaviours and ways of working needed for future models of care.

Wales is starting from strong foundations. There are high-quality programmes, robust professional and regulatory arrangements, committed education providers, strong partnership working and good examples of innovation across pre-registration, post-registration and postgraduate education and training. Over recent years we have made significant progress in modernising healthcare education and training. We have a strong platform to build on, but this alone will not be enough to meet the scale and pace of future change.

Much of the current education and training system still reflects uni-professional education models, rigid delivery models, annual commissioning cycles and placement arrangements built around established service patterns. These approaches have supported important developments but now need to evolve further to provide the flexible, multi-professional learning and place-based experience NHS Wales requires.

The health and care system is now working in a very different context. Demand is rising and becoming more complex, with more people living longer with multiple long-term conditions, growing mental health needs and persistent inequalities in health outcomes. As services move further towards prevention, primary and community care, integrated working, digital practice and greater involvement of people and communities, education and training must adapt to help make those changes possible.

Placement capacity, supervision and funding arrangements are now central strategic issues. Future workforce supply cannot be secured simply by commissioning more places if there are not enough high-quality learning environments, sustainable supervision models or funding mechanisms to support them. This means placement planning, educator capacity and investment decisions need to be considered together, rather than as separate operational issues.

The workforce is changing too. Learners increasingly need education that is flexible, inclusive, accessible and compatible with work, caring responsibilities and different life stages. Traditional routes into healthcare degrees will remain important, but they will not be enough on their own to meet future workforce demand. Wales will need a broader mix of high-quality routes into healthcare careers, including further

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education, work-based learning, apprenticeship style programmes, assistant and support worker pathways, and routes that fully utilise the opportunities afforded by recognition of prior learning processes.

Technology, science and innovation add further urgency. Artificial intelligence, genomics, digital tools, simulation, learning analytics and new models of remote and virtual care are already changing practice. The education system cannot respond simply by adding more content to already crowded curricula. It needs to prepare new professionals who can use evidence, data and technology safely, ethically and effectively, and adapt as practice changes.

There is also a pressing need to strengthen the education capacity that supports high-quality training. Future supply depends on more than funded programme numbers; it also requires sufficient placements, supervision, educator time, bilingual capacity, digital infrastructure and quality-assured learning environments across acute, primary, community, public health, independent and third sector settings. Without these conditions, education providers and services will struggle to expand or redesign provision safely and sustainably.

The financial context also strengthens the case for change. Public resources across health and education are constrained, so the education and training system must make better use of what is already available. This means reducing duplication, improving coordination, scaling what works and redirecting effort from activity that delivers limited impact. Future investment must show clear value for learners, services, the workforce and the people of Wales, with decisions guided by evidence, outcomes and long-term sustainability.

Existing funding and commissioning arrangements have developed over many years, with more than 100 individual funding streams linked to specific professional pathways. This reflects the history and complexity of healthcare education, but it can make consistency, transparency and fairness harder to demonstrate. It can also reinforce professional and organisational silos, limit flexibility, and make it harder to develop system-wide solutions such as multiprofessional learning, modular and stackable pathways, shared capabilities, technology-enabled learning and community-based education at scale.

The case for change it is therefore based on the recognition that a system designed mainly around existing professional pathways, traditional delivery models and annual planning cycles will not be enough for the future. Without purposeful and urgent change, education and training will become less able to respond to population health need, less accessible to a diverse future workforce, less aligned with service transformation, and less able to demonstrate value in a constrained environment.

> The central challenge is to develop an education and training system that actively shapes the future workforce Wales needs. This means making better use of current resources while reshaping education and training around population health, prevention, integrated care, digital and scientific opportunities,

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flexible lifelong careers, sustainable learning environments and evidence-informed investment. The choices made through this strategy will shape how well NHS Wales can develop, retain and support a workforce able to deliver safe, high-quality, equitable and sustainable care for the people of Wales.

Key drivers

Our research and horizon scanning identified a set of inter-connected drivers that will shape the future NHS Wales workforce and the education and training system that supports it. These drivers are not separate pressures; they reinforce one another and point to the need for education and training that is more flexible, evidence-informed, inclusive and aligned to future models of care. They include:

- Demographic and population health changes affecting demand for services, patterns of need and the future supply of healthcare workers
- Workforce, cultural and learner expectation shifts affecting how people enter, progress through and engage with education and training
- Technological, digital and scientific advancement changing professional practice, learning methods and the capabilities required of the workforce
- Welsh Government policy both within and outside health driving transformation towards prevention, population health, community-based care, Welsh language provision, patient safety and value with a clear focus on skills development and improving education provision
- Financial and sustainability challenges across health and education, requiring clearer choices about value, quality, access and long-term viability

These issues are explored more fully in the supporting technical document. The following sections provide an overview of the key drivers and why they matter for education and training in Wales, with references to relevant national evidence and policy where available.

Demographic changes

Wales faces significant demographic and population health pressures that are reshaping demand for health and care services. These pressures include an ageing population, more people living with multiple long-term conditions, increasing mental health need, and persistent health inequalities. Public Health Wales' long-term strategy for 2023–2035 highlights the need to support a sustainable health and care system focused on prevention and early intervention, while Welsh Government projections set out in *Science Evidence Advice NHS 10+ years* point to major challenges for NHS Wales over the next 10 to 25 years.

The pattern of need is also changing. Public Health Wales has projected continued increases in non-communicable diseases and cancer incidence if current trends continue, with ageing, risk factors and wider determinants all contributing to future demand. More people will need support for frailty, long-term conditions, rehabilitation, mental health and complex care closer to home. This strengthens the need for education and training

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that prepares the workforce for prevention, population health, community-based care, shared decision-making and working across professional and organisational boundaries.

At the same time, the future supply of learners is likely to become more challenging. Demographic change will affect the number of young people entering post-16 and higher education, as the size of the 18-year-old population is projected to decline from 2030 onwards. A-level participation in Wales is lower than in other UK nations, and application rates to higher education from Welsh students have plateaued. This makes it increasingly important to engage young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), as well as those who may not currently see healthcare as an accessible career option requiring a diverse range of approaches.

Vocational and work-based routes are likely to become increasingly important as Wales seeks to widen access into health and care careers and respond to workforce supply pressures. This underlines the need for clearer progression pathways linking further education, workplace learning and routes into regulated healthcare professions. As competition for learners and workers grows, education and training must help widen access, support different entry routes, fully utilise Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes and create clearer pathways for people at different stages of life and career.

Workforce, cultural and generational shifts

Wales must respond to changing learner and workforce expectations. This is not simply a generational issue; it reflects wider changes in work, family life, technology, career patterns and expectations of flexibility. More people are balancing learning with paid work, caring responsibilities or portfolio careers, and they increasingly expect education to be accessible, inclusive, digitally supported and relevant to practice.

Examples in Wales already show this shift. Around one in four resident doctors now train less than full time, rising to 60% of GPs and a third of hospital resident doctors in Wales. Similar changes are seen in other professions, including growing interest in distance learning, work-based learning and alternative routes into nursing, midwifery and allied health professions. These trends create opportunities to widen access and improve retention, but they also require careful planning to balance flexibility, quality, supervision and service continuity.

The education system will need to support clearer progression, full utilisation of recognition of prior learning, more inclusive learner support and stronger attention to differential attainment. It will also need to reflect the values that matter to future learners, including wellbeing, equity, flexible routes, meaningful work, bilingual provision and accessible ways to enter and progress through education and training.

Technological and scientific advancement

Technology and scientific advances are changing how health and care are delivered, how professionals work and how learners learn. Artificial intelligence, digital tools, genomics, simulation, remote monitoring, virtual care and learning analytics are creating new possibilities for diagnosis, treatment, prevention, education and service redesign.

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The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital and remote approaches, but many of these changes were already developing. The next phase will be more complex, as technology becomes embedded in everyday clinical practice, education, assessment, supervision and workforce planning. This means education and training must move beyond basic digital skills and develop digital professionalism, data literacy, critical thinking, ethical judgement and the confidence to use technology safely and effectively.

Artificial intelligence is likely to affect the size, shape and skills of the workforce, although the full impact remains uncertain. Current evidence suggests that AI is more likely to augment professional practice than replace it in the short term, but the pace of change means Wales will need active horizon scanning, adaptable curricula and support for learners and educators to use technology safely and effectively.

Policy drivers

Several national policy drivers are directly relevant to this strategy. Together, they point to the need for education and training that supports prevention, population health, integrated community care, Welsh language provision, patient safety, productivity, sustainable services and more flexible post-16 learning pathways.

Welsh Government's *Programme for Government 2026–2030* sets out four broad ambitions for a Wales that is healthy and active, prosperous and secure, ambitious and learning, and united and connected. Its commitments relevant to this strategy include improving NHS performance, strengthening primary and community care, moving more care closer to home, modernising digital and data infrastructure, and developing a longer-term approach to workforce planning. It also emphasises a more responsive skills system and the sustainability of tertiary education, including an independent review of higher education funding and organisation. Together, these commitments reinforce the need for accessible, high-quality education and training that supports changing models of care, responds to future workforce needs and delivers long-term value for Wales.

A Healthier Wales, the long-term plan for health and social care, set a clear direction towards prevention, early intervention, person-centred care, rehabilitation, reablement and care closer to home. *Community by Design* reinforces this direction through a community-first approach, integrated systems thinking, population health management and better use of the whole multiprofessional team. These policies require education and training to prepare the workforce for care that is delivered across pathways, settings and organisational boundaries.

This requires education and training to think beyond NHS Wales alone, recognising the shared skills and behaviours needed across health, social care and wider community partners to deliver national ambitions for integrated care.

This reinforces the need for place-based education and training that reflects local population needs, strengthens learning across community settings and supports collaboration across health, social care and wider partners.

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There is also a greater emphasis on quality, safety, efficiency and workforce productivity. The *National Patient Safety Plan for NHS Wales 2026–2031* establishes patient safety as an essential priority and emphasises listening, leadership, learning, psychological safety, prevention and continuous improvement. This has direct implications for curricula, supervision, learning environments, quality improvement capability and the behaviours expected across the workforce.

Quality is a fundamental driver of this strategy. We will work with learners, educators, providers, regulators and NHS organisations to ensure education and training are safe, effective, equitable and person-centred. Through robust quality assurance, learner insight and evidence-informed improvement, we will reduce unwarranted variation, strengthen learner experience and address systemic barriers affecting access, attainment and outcomes.

Welsh language policy is also central. *Cymraeg 2050* sets the long-term ambition to increase the number and use of Welsh speakers, while *More Than Just Words* makes clear that Welsh language provision in health and social care is a matter of need and quality, not simply preference. Education and training therefore need to strengthen bilingual learning, increase Welsh-speaking educator capacity and support the workforce to make the active offer a normalised aspect of patient-centred care.

Reform of the post-16 education landscape through Medr, alongside the Welsh Government review of higher education, creates an important opportunity to align healthcare education more strongly with further education, higher education, workforce needs and national priorities. The review is expected to produce an interim report on student support in summer 2027 and a final report in the following winter. This will provide important context for future commissioning, partnership working and decisions about the sustainability and shape of healthcare education provision in Wales.

> The key question is what capabilities the workforce will need to deliver safe, effective and sustainable care in line with national priorities, and how education and training should respond.

Financial and sustainability challenges

Both the health and education sectors face significant financial and sustainability pressures. Rising demand, inflation, workforce shortages, estate and infrastructure pressures, placement capacity, educator availability and increasing expectations all affect the affordability, viability and resilience of education and training provision. In this context, investment decisions will need to show clearer value for learners, services, education providers and the people of Wales.

Higher education faces challenges from the real-terms decline in UK tuition fees, inflation, global competition for international students and future policy changes affecting international student income. Where healthcare programmes rely on cross-subsidy from other provision, this raises questions about long-term programme viability, capacity and sustainability. These pressures increase the need for stronger collaboration with universities, colleges, Medr, NHS Wales and Welsh Government.

As noted above, the Welsh Government review of higher education will provide important context for the future shape,

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funding and sustainability of higher education provision in Wales.

Learners are also experiencing financial pressures, including placement-related costs, travel, accommodation and the need to balance study with paid work. Although bursary support is available in Wales for healthcare programmes, these pressures can affect participation, wellbeing, attainment and progression. Financial sustainability therefore needs to be considered alongside widening access, learner experience and workforce supply.

The key question is how education and training can remain financially sustainable while widening access, maintaining quality and delivering value for learners, services and the people of Wales.

> Taken together, these drivers point to the need for an education and training system that can adapt over time, use evidence more consistently, support innovation where it adds value, and make transparent choices about what to expand, redesign or stop. This strategy responds to that challenge by setting principles and themes that can guide future planning, commissioning and partnership working.

Strategy development

We took a collaborative approach to developing this strategy, starting with a discovery phase in 2025 that included:

- Inviting stakeholders to share their views via a **call for evidence**
- **Discussions** with a wide range of learners and educators to identify what is working well and key areas that we need to focus on
- A **literature review** focussing on identifying the key characteristics of successful healthcare education programmes both within the UK and globally
- **Horizon scanning** where we have reviewed over 150 publications relating to health and healthcare education and training to inform our perspective.

We have also engaged with stakeholders over the last 18 months through workshops with NHS Wales, the education sector, learners, educators, professional and regulatory bodies, and our Stakeholder Reference Group.

We used Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons Framework, advocated by the Future Generations Commissioner, to support thinking about change over time. It recognises that organisations need to improve what they do today, test new ideas and prepare for a different future through three lenses:

- **Horizon 1:** Improving and getting the best from the current system.
- **Horizon 2:** Trying and growing new approaches that could replace or reshape the current system.
- **Horizon 3:** Creating the future system we ultimately want to achieve.

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Strategic Principles

We have developed strategic principles to guide how education and training should evolve over time. They provide continuity beyond individual planning cycles and offer a practical touchstone for decisions, particularly where there are trade-offs, competing priorities, risks or opportunity costs.

The principles guide how each strategic theme will be developed and delivered, ensuring decisions reflect future health and care needs, achieve the greatest value and impact, build an adaptable workforce and put learners at the centre.

Principle 1: Design education for future health and care needs

We will design education and training around the future health and care needs of the people of Wales, prioritising approaches that prepare learners for future models of care, local population health needs, place-based working, multi-professional learning and team-based practice.

Principle 2: Invest where value and impact are greatest

We will invest in education and training that delivers the greatest value and impact for learners, the workforce, services and the people of Wales. This means prioritising scalable, sustainable and evidence-informed approaches, while creating space to stop, test or adopt activity based on value, quality and impact. This will ensure any positive effect on driving safe, respectful and service person-centred services can be understood and maximised

Principle 3: Build an adaptable and resilient workforce

We will develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for the workforce to adapt and innovate in response to changing population needs, new technologies, service transformation and future uncertainty.

Principle 4: Put learners at the centre of education and training

We will design education and training around learner needs, experience and progression, using learner insight to remove barriers, strengthen wellbeing and attainment, and make routes into healthcare careers clearer, more flexible and easier to navigate.

Strategic Themes

The discovery phase helped us identify the main areas where education and training will need to change over the next 7–10 years. These themes reflect what we heard from learners, educators, NHS Wales, education providers and wider partners, alongside the evidence from horizon scanning and policy review.

Taken together, they summarise the key shifts needed to prepare the workforce for future models of care: developing shared and profession-specific capabilities, creating more attractive routes into and through careers, strengthening multi-

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professional education and team-based practice, improving learning environments, and ensuring education investment is planned and used sustainably. The following section sets out each theme in more detail, including our long-term ambition and priority areas for delivery.

At the heart of these themes is a clear skills agenda: ensuring learners develop the technical, digital, improvement, Welsh language and population health capabilities needed for future care.

By setting out these strategic themes through ambitious statements supported by priorities for delivery, we aim to provide a framework that is both bold and practical. It recognises the scale of change required, while focusing effort on the areas where education and training can make the greatest contribution to future workforce capability, service transformation and better outcomes for the people of Wales, helping to fulfil our purpose.

The five strategic themes are:

1. Skills for the future
2. Attractive routes into healthcare careers
3. Developing the multi-professional workforce
4. High-quality learning environments
5. Sustainable planning and funding of education and training.

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STRATEGIC THEME 1

Skills for the Future

Our long term ambition

Education and training prepares the workforce with the future-facing skills, capabilities, behaviours and confidence needed to improve population health, reduce inequalities, deliver person-centred care and work safely and effectively in an increasingly digital and data-driven health and care delivery environment.

What does this mean?

This theme sets out the skills and behaviours that need to be built into initial education and training routes. It brings together population health, prevention, inequalities, person-centred care, digital, data and scientific practice into a clear skills agenda for future healthcare professionals. The focus is on preparing new entrants to work across boundaries, use evidence and technology well, and improve outcomes for the people of Wales.

- Working with regulatory and other bodies, curricula and training programmes are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect population health priorities, prevention, public health, genomics, frailty, long-term condition management, health inequalities, digital professionalism, data literacy and the ethical use of artificial intelligence.
- Learners are equipped to work effectively in digitally enabled, virtual, remote, community and technology-supported models of care, while maintaining safe, compassionate and person-centred practice.
- Digital, data, technological and informatics capabilities are embedded in initial education and training, establishing a common national baseline while recognising different roles, responsibilities and levels of practice.
- Approaches to co-production, shared decision-making, "what matters to me", quality improvement and patient safety are embedded in initial education and training, shaping professional behaviours from entry into practice.
- Interprofessional education and collaborative practice support integrated models of care, shared capabilities and effective working across organisational, professional and community boundaries.
- Education investment and commissioning decisions are informed by population health, workforce, service, digital and educational intelligence, ensuring resources are aligned to areas of greatest need and impact.
- Welsh language capability is developed as part of future-facing skills, enabling the workforce to support the active offer and deliver care in Welsh where needed.

Priority areas for delivery

Working with local and national education providers, regulators and other partners, we will use our commissioning, quality and partnership arrangements to influence future provision and support the following priorities:

- **Refocus curricula on the capabilities Wales needs most**, embedding prevention, population health, inequalities, frailty, long-term conditions, genomics, person-centred care,

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artificial intelligence, digital capability and Welsh language provision as core requirements.

- **Shift learning decisively closer to home**, expanding education in primary, community, preventative and integrated care settings so future workforce capability reflects where care is moving.
- **Expand interprofessional learning in priority areas**, preparing learners for team-based care, shared accountability and confident transition into practice.
- **Establish a national digital capability standard**, setting clear expectations for digital, data, artificial intelligence and technology skills at every career stage and level of practice.

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STRATEGIC THEME 2

Attractive routes into healthcare careers

Our long term ambition

Education and training in Wales provides a broader, attractive mix of routes into healthcare careers, complementing traditional degree pathways to create route options for learners and supporting them to progress towards initial qualification and entry to practice. Providing flexible, less-than-full-time and portfolio-based routes is essential to attracting and retaining a diverse range of learners, widening participation and maintaining a strong, sustainable pipeline into the NHS Wales workforce.

What does this mean?

For individuals, this means being able to see healthcare as a career that is available and accessible to them, with routes that recognise their circumstances, strengths and ambitions. This could include convenient entry points from further education, work-based and apprenticeship-style pathways, opportunities to learn while earning, and support to build the confidence, skills and qualifications without unnecessary duplication. It focuses on person-centred learning that is equitable, accessible and supports progression towards initial qualification and entry to practice over different time spans.

Our long-term ambition

- Academic and workplace learning are equally valued, with each making a distinct and complementary contribution to occupational competence, critical thinking, research literacy and professionalism.
- Education and training systems actively promote equity, diversity and inclusion while balancing learner flexibility with the service requirements needed to sustain safe, high-quality care.
- Differential attainment is treated as a systemic equity issue, with data used to identify and address barriers linked to factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic background, language and other learner characteristics.
- Learners can progress towards registration through nationally recognised pathways that allow academic credit and workplace learning to be accumulated over time, creating more accessible routes into healthcare careers within professional, regulatory and programme requirements.
- Welsh-speaking learners are supported to enter, progress and thrive in healthcare careers, with clearer routes into Welsh-medium and bilingual learning.

Priority areas for delivery

Working with NHS Wales and our education partners we will:

- **Target new routes into healthcare careers where workforce need is greatest**, using further education, work-based, apprenticeship-style and assistant/support worker pathways to widen access and create clearer progression into priority roles.
- **Shift towards modular, credit-bearing provision** that enables learners to build recognised qualifications in stages, makes full use of relevant experience and

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previous study, and reduces unnecessary repetition within professional and regulatory requirements.

- **Build Welsh-medium and bilingual routes into future provision**, working with education partners to strengthen access, learner support and progression where these routes can be delivered sustainably.

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STRATEGIC THEME 3

Developing the multi-professional workforce

Our long term ambition

Education and training in Wales actively shapes the future multi-professional workforce needed for integrated, community-focused and person-centred models of care. It develops shared and complementary capabilities through initial education and training, so learners are prepared to work confidently in teams, across pathways and beyond traditional professional boundaries.

What does this mean?

This means using initial education and training to shape how future professionals learn, work and lead together, rather than focusing on programmes profession by profession. It considers the shared and complementary capabilities teams need to deliver integrated care, while preserving the distinct expertise, scopes of practice and regulatory requirements of each profession. Learners will be supported to understand each other's roles, work safely across boundaries, delegate appropriately, and apply common approaches to leadership, quality improvement, digital practice, population health and person-centred care.

Our long-term ambition

- Shared capabilities are clearly defined for the multi-professional workforce including, for example, leadership, digital and data skills, population health, quality improvement, patient safety, supervision, communication and person-centred care.
- Interprofessional learning is embedded in priority areas of shared practice, enabling learners to learn with, from and about each other in ways that improve team-based care.
- Multi-professional education supports new models of integrated, community-focused and preventative care, with learning designed around pathways, teams and population need rather than professional silos.
- Modular and stackable learning supports clearer, more flexible routes into initial qualification and entry to practice, enabling learners to build recognised credit and develop shared capabilities across professions.
- Common entry pathways or foundation routes for healthcare professionals are explored where they improve team-based practice, support consistency across professions and deliver better value for money.
- Nationally coordinated learning models, including academies where appropriate, are used to develop priority multi-professional skills where consistency, scale and shared expertise add clear value.
- Transitions from education into practice are strengthened through clearer expectations for team-based working, supervision, delegation, practice readiness and early career support as learners move into registered practice.
- Multi-professional teams have the Welsh language awareness and capability needed to support the active offer and deliver person-centred care.

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This must be done whilst preserving professional identity and specialist expertise. It requires identifying where learning should be shared, where professions should learn alongside each other, and where profession-specific education should remain distinct to protect standards, safety and scope of practice, and to meet population needs.

Priority areas for delivery

- **Shift from predominantly profession-specific curriculum development to shared capability design in priority areas**, enabling learners to develop common skills together while protecting the profession-specific knowledge, standards and scope required for safe practice.
- **Explore common entry and foundation pathways in selected areas**, creating a shared starting point from which learners can progress into distinct professional routes where this widens access, reduces duplication and improves flexibility within regulatory requirements.
- **Make readiness for team-based practice a defined outcome of transition from education into employment**, with clear expectations for supervision, delegation, shared accountability and early career support.
- **Develop and scale the national academy model** to build priority multi-professional skills more consistently and efficiently.

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STRATEGIC THEME 4

High-quality learning environments

Our long term ambition

Learning environments across Wales are high quality, inclusive and sustainable, supported by skilled educators, effective supervision, bilingual provision and the right digital, physical and placement infrastructure.

What does this mean?

This means treating learning environments as a strategic part of initial education and training, not simply as places where placements happen. High-quality education depends on sufficient placements, skilled educators, supportive supervision, inclusive learning cultures, digital infrastructure, simulation, learning analytics and consistent quality standards. It also means rebalancing learning so learners have greater exposure to primary, community, public health, independent and third sector settings.

Our long-term ambition

- High-quality learning environments are available across acute, primary, community, public health, independent, third sector and digital settings.
- Learners receive safe supervision, inclusive support, bilingual provision and consistent quality wherever learning takes place.
- Educators, supervisors, mentors and assessors are developed, valued and supported to deliver high-quality initial education, supervision, placement learning and assessment.
- Placements closer to home help learners develop skills for prevention, population health, long-term conditions and integrated community care.
- Digital platforms, simulation and learning analytics improve access, quality, feedback, assessment and learner support.
- Education infrastructure and placement capacity are planned nationally, with investment focused on quality, sustainability and workforce need.
- Placement capacity, supervision and funding are planned together as part of the national learning environment infrastructure.
- Place-based learning environments are developed across Wales, enabling learners to understand local population needs, community assets and care pathways.

Priority areas for delivery

Working with NHS Wales, education providers and system partners, we will:

- **Set and assure a consistent national baseline for learning environments**, requiring effective supervision and assessment, inclusive learner support, reasonable adjustments, bilingual provision, digital access and demonstrable action on quality concerns.
- **Build educator capacity as essential national infrastructure**, establishing clearer expectations and coordinated development and support for educators,

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supervisors, mentors and assessors involved in initial education, placement learning and assessment.

- **Rebalance learning towards primary, community, public health and wider place-based settings**, aligning placement capacity, educator support and quality assurance with local population needs and future models of care.

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STRATEGIC THEME 5

Sustainable planning and funding of education and training

Our long term ambition

Education and training investment is focused where it can make the greatest difference, ensuring provision is affordable, sustainable and delivers clear value for learners, the workforce and NHS Wales.

What does this mean?

This means making clearer choices about what education and training is commissioned, where it is delivered and how it is funded. The strategy re-enforces the value of a once for Wales approach where the equity, efficiency and effectiveness of Education and training decisions are enhanced through central co-ordination. Decisions will be based on evidence of workforce need, learner demand, quality, affordability, value for money, provider sustainability and long-term viability. It also means developing more agile commissioning arrangements that can respond to changing workforce, service and learner needs, while still giving education providers enough stability to plan and deliver high-quality provision. We will work with partners to redesign provision where needed, reduce duplication, strengthen collaboration across further and higher education, and focus investment on the areas that will have the greatest impact for learners, services and the people of Wales.

Our long-term ambition

- Education planning and commissioning are aligned with workforce, service and population health priorities and the strategy provides a platform for understanding the short, medium and long-term planning & commissioning outlook.
- Commissioning arrangements are more agile, enabling timely changes to education provision while maintaining quality, stability and value.
- Investment decisions are transparent, evidence-informed and take account of quality, affordability, value for money and long-term viability.
- Data and insight are used to understand demand, outcomes, cost, impact and sustainability across education and training provision.
- NHS Wales, education providers, Medr, regulators and Welsh Government work together to reduce duplication, strengthen provision and manage shared risks.
- Further and higher education routes are used effectively to widen access, support flexibility and sustain high-quality provision.
- Planning and commissioning decisions take account of Welsh language needs, supporting sustainable bilingual provision where it improves access, experience and care.

Priority areas for delivery

Working with partners, we will:

- **Review the current commissioning approach with higher education institutions**, using forthcoming contract reviews to test whether arrangements support

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flexibility, quality, workforce priorities, provider sustainability and value for money.

- **Develop multi-year commissioning and financial plans**, aligned with longer-term workforce modelling, population need and service transformation, while retaining flexibility to respond to changing demand.
- **Work with Welsh Government to inform future education funding policy and mechanisms**, including options that support modular, work-based and less-than-full-time provision.
- **Realign investment towards primary, community and place-based learning**, alongside the placement, supervision and educator capacity needed to deliver it safely.
- **Use evidence to reshape investment**, including learner demand, completion, workforce outcomes, cost, quality and programme viability.

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Delivery

Some areas within the strategy are within our direct control, while others will require collaboration with partners. In a constrained financial environment, progress will require clear choices and trade-offs, balancing benefits, risks and opportunity costs. Where priorities affect other organisations, particularly commissioned providers, significant changes will need to be signalled well in advance to allow time for adjustment.

We recognise that not every priority can progress at the same pace, and that delivery will require clear choices about where effort, capacity and investment are focused to achieve the greatest benefit for learners, services and the people of Wales. This will mean managing important tensions between long-term ambition and current financial constraints, the pace of transformation and pressures facing services today, and the need for national consistency alongside flexibility to respond to local needs.

Delivery will also need to manage two key risks. First, some priorities depend on action by partners outside HEIW's direct control, including regulators, education providers, NHS Wales organisations and Welsh Government. Second, progress will be affected by the resources, capacity and capability available across the system. These risks will need to be managed through clear prioritisation, phased delivery, strong partnership working, early engagement with affected organisations and regular review of what is affordable, achievable and likely to have the greatest impact.

A separate delivery plan will be developed alongside an appropriate oversight and governance mechanism.

Delivery will include defining, commissioning and quality assuring the priority skills and capabilities the future workforce needs, using evidence and education intelligence to understand progress and impact.

We will use our Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) to ensure that partners are kept informed and able to engage in discussions that continue to help shape our strategic direction.

Review

The pace of change in healthcare is rapid and we have designed the strategy to be flexible enough so that it remains relevant in light of the inevitable changes that will occur. We will therefore review it regularly, using horizon scanning, stakeholder insight, education intelligence and evidence about impact to ensure it remains aligned with contemporary healthcare models, professional and regulatory reform, and developments in digital, simulation, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AI	Artificial intelligence
CPD	Continuing professional development
FE	Further education
GMC	General Medical Council
GP	General practitioner
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
HCSW	Healthcare support worker
HE(I)	Higher education (institution)
HEIW	Health Education and Improvement Wales
IMTP	Integrated Medium Term Plan
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NHS Wales	National Health Service in Wales
NMC	Nursing and Midwifery Council
SCW	Social Care Wales
SRG	Stakeholder Reference Group

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Glossary of terms

This glossary explains selected terms used in the strategy, focusing on those that may have a specific meaning in the context of education and training, workforce planning and health and care transformation.

Term	Definition
Academic credit	A measure of learning level and volume.
Active Offer	The provision of a service in Welsh without someone having to ask for it.
Artificial intelligence	Technology that can perform tasks usually requiring human judgement, such as analysing information or supporting decisions.
Asynchronous learning	Learning that people access and undertake in their own time, rather than live or at a set time.
Commissioning	Planning, funding and securing education and training to meet workforce needs.
Competency-based	Progression based on demonstrating required skills and capabilities rather than time served.
Credit-bearing learning / provision	Learning that has been level and volume assessed against a relevant framework e.g. the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	The ongoing learning that takes place after initial qualification and entry to practice. It enables staff to maintain, develop and apply the knowledge, skills, confidence and behaviours needed to meet changing population, service and technological needs.
Co-production	Working with people, communities and partners to design, deliver or improve services or education together.
Data literacy	The ability to understand, interpret and use data appropriately.
Differential attainment	Differences in achievement or outcomes between groups of learners due to multi-factorial educational disadvantages.
Digital learning platforms	Online systems used to deliver, manage or support learning.
Educator workforce	The people who teach, supervise, mentor or assess learners. In this context, the term includes people performing this role with or without a formal title or designation.

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Term	Definition
Faculty development	Training and support that helps educators improve their teaching, supervision and assessment practice.
Health inequalities	Unfair and avoidable differences in health between groups or communities.
Immersive technology	Technology that creates realistic or interactive learning experiences, such as virtual or augmented reality.
Integrated care	Care that is coordinated around people's needs across services, professions and organisations.
Interprofessional learning	Learning where people from different professions learn with, from and about each other.
Learning analytics	Using data about learning to understand progress, improve support and enhance education.
Learning environments	The places, settings and cultures where learning takes place.
Mentorship	A supportive relationship where an experienced person helps someone learn, develop and reflect.
Micro-credentials	Short, focused and quality-assured learning awards that recognise specific skills or knowledge and may be credit-bearing or combined into larger qualifications.
Modular learning	Learning organised into smaller units that can be taken separately or combined over time.
Multi-professional	Involving people from different professions learning or working together.
NEET	Refers to those not in education, employment or training
Person-centred care	Care that is shaped around what matters to the individual.
Population health	The health outcomes of a whole population and the factors that influence them.
Population health management	Using data and insight to understand population needs and target support more effectively.
Preceptorship	Structured support for newly qualified staff as they move into professional practice.
Quality assurance	Processes used to determine whether education and training meet required standards.

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Term	Definition
Quality improvement	A systematic approach to making improvements that result in better outcomes.
Recognition of prior learning	A process for recognising pre-existing learning for the purpose of entry to a programme or exemption from part of it.
Remote care	Care delivered when the person and professional are not in the same place.
Research literacy	The ability to understand, use and apply research evidence.
Shared decision-making	A process where professionals and individuals make decisions together, based on evidence and what matters to the person.
Simulation	A learning method that recreates real situations so people can practise safely before delivering care to patients.
Stackable learning	Learning made up of smaller units that can build towards a larger award or qualification.
Supervision	Support and oversight that helps learners or staff develop safely and effectively.

Term	Definition
Unwarranted variation	Differences in access, quality or outcomes that cannot be explained by need or context.
Virtual care	Care delivered using digital or online methods, such as video or remote monitoring.
What matters to me	A person-centred approach that focuses on what is important to the individual.
Widening access	Removing barriers so more people can enter and benefit from education or careers.

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