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Health Education and
Improvement Wales (HEIW)

Retaining and Valuing Nurses within the NHS in Wales

A Nurse Retention Plan



Contents

Purpose	1
Context	1
Strategic Drivers	1
Development of the Plan.....	2
Case for Change	2
Our Action Plan to Improve Retention	4
Compassionate Leadership and Culture	4
Valuing Our Staff	5
Supporting New Starters and Those Changing Roles	5
Supporting International Nurses	6
Development and Career Planning	7
Flexible Working	7
Flexible Retirement	8
Health and Wellbeing	9
Recognition and Incentives.....	9
Evaluating Impact	10
Understanding Data and Information	11
Supporting Delivery	12
References	13

Purpose

This Nurse Retention Plan has been produced as a key action in the development of a sustainable nursing workforce plan and in response to the National Workforce Implementation Plan (NWIP). It is one of the first deliverables in the development of a wider National Retention Work Programme and will provide organisations with recommendations and support to address the challenges of nurse retention in Wales. The Plan is intended to supplement and strengthen the work that many organisations are already progressing and is supported by the retention guide and the self-assessment tool.

The Plan is aimed at supporting the retention of nurses employed in **NHS Wales organisations**. Nurses employed in the wider health and care system would also benefit from the actions in this Plan and it is recommended that their employers consider adopting some of these to improve the retention of their nurses.

Context

Nursing is the largest workforce in healthcare and plays a pivotal role in delivering care and services throughout Wales. The profession is at a critical point in relation to retaining the skilled nursing workforce. Despite a growing number of nurses entering the profession (NMC 2022), the gap between the supply and demand has never been wider. Whilst organisations strive to increase the number of nurses through attraction and recruitment strategies, it is also vitally important we focus on retaining our nurses. There are several significant challenges associated with this as highlighted in a series of reports including the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) reports “Nursing in Numbers 2021” and “Retaining Nurses in the Profession: What Matters? 2022”. The reports’ findings have informed this retention plan, the production of a complementary Retention Guide resource and the Retention Self-Assessment tool.

Strategic Drivers

The following policy drivers provide the strategic foundations for the development of this Plan.

- ✦ A Healthier Wales: Our Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care (2020) sets out the ambition to have: **‘a motivated, engaged and valued health and social care workforce with the capacity, competence and confidence to meet the needs of the people in Wales.’** The Workforce Strategy (WFS) sets the strategic direction through 32 actions across 7 themes, with wellbeing, Welsh language and inclusion threaded through all that we do. The actions across all of the themes combine together to support staff retention.
- ✦ The National Workforce Implementation Plan, published by Welsh Government in February 2023, outlines a series of actions relating to the workforce. One of those actions is: **‘HEIW will deliver a nurse retention plan as part of the work being completed on a strategic nursing workforce plan. This will draw on findings of the RCN report Retaining Nurses in the Workforce: What Matters? (2022)’**
- ✦ The Royal College of Nursing’s report, **‘Retaining Nurses in the Profession: What Matters?’** presents crucial findings and recommendations derived from an evidence-based literature review and a survey of RCN members.
- ✦ Supporting compliance with The Health and Social Care Quality Act (2023)

- ✦ The Wellbeing and Future Generations Act (2015) also advocates for a healthier and more resilient Wales.
- ✦ The Nurse Staffing (Wales) Act (2016) requires health service bodies to have regard for the provision of appropriate nurse staffing levels in clinical areas identified as 25B. This is to ensure their nurses have the time to provide the best possible care for patients.

Development of the Plan

As part of the development of a Strategic Nursing Workforce Plan, retention emerged as one of the critical issues affecting the workforce. A Retention workstream was established to oversee the creation of this Retention Plan which was supported by nursing and workforce colleagues across NHS Wales and wider stakeholders, including the Royal College of Nursing Wales.

Resources and guidance developed by NHS England have also been reviewed and this has informed the development of:

- ✦ **The Retention Guide - Improving Retention Together.** This resource provides options and solutions to improve retention across the NHS Wales, however its content is relevant for the wider healthcare system as well.
- ✦ **A Self-Assessment Tool.** This tool enables leaders and managers to review retention practice and develop a baseline position for their ward; site; and organisation. It will enable Health Boards and Trusts to pinpoint areas of concern and drive actions forward.

Case for Change

Organisations in NHS Wales are aware that workforce challenges are currently the biggest threat facing the health service and are already having significant consequences for both patients and staff.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges to workforce stability, causing more of our staff than ever to decide to leave their jobs, with some leaving the NHS altogether. Clinical workforce shortages generally, and Registered Nurse shortages more specifically, remain a critical concern across Wales.

The global workforce shortages and the increasing service demands means our reliance on recruitment will be an increasing challenge. Recruitment therefore is not the only way to ensure that we have enough staff.

Improving retention is one of the ways to reduce the gap between the number of nurses working in the health service and the number that are required over the medium term. Whilst developing retention solutions can be complex, it is an efficient and effective strategy in addition to recruiting and training more people.

There is no single or simple solution to improve retention. We have developed this National Nurse Retention Plan following a detailed review and analysis of the research.

This has been undertaken to investigate how workplace factors relate to nurses' decisions to stay in their jobs. This report lays out a set of high-impact interventions that, if put into action now, could help to improve the current workforce crisis.

A literature review of evidence from, Professional Bodies and think tanks (The Kings Fund, Nuffield Trust, and Advisory Board) provide a variety of reasons for nurses leaving the profession.

The NMC (2022) survey highlights retirement as the most common reason cited for

leaving, however interestingly some citing pressures to retire early, interestingly 9.9% cited they were concerned about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements.

These are:

- 🔗 Burnout
- 🔗 Disillusioned with role
- 🔗 Impact of patient care
- 🔗 Inflexible working arrangements
- 🔗 Lack of compassionate leadership
- 🔗 Lack of development in career
- 🔗 Pay
- 🔗 Poor culture
- 🔗 Retirement
- 🔗 Safe staffing
- 🔗 Stress and anxiety
- 🔗 Work life balance

Furthermore, there were 3,221 vacancies for the nursing, midwifery and health visiting workforce in Wales as of 31 December 2022. Welsh Government states this is likely to be an underestimate. (Welsh Government, 2023).

One of the impacts of this high number of vacancies is a significant increase in the use of bank and agency nurses which can impact on the quality of care. In 2018/19, agency and locum spend for registered nurses and midwives was £65,440,433. By 2021/22 the spend had increased to £133,428,905.

Whilst this increase may partly be caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it is still a significant cost that could otherwise be re-invested into supporting frontline services.

This Nurse Retention Plan will address the key themes that impact on retaining the nursing workforce in Wales. From the survey undertaken by the RCN (2022) nurses reported a range of needs and expectations they identified as important in the workplace. They were:

- 1. Clear, structured career development and progression**
- 2. Care and support (personally and professionally) from leaders and teams**
- 3. To be valued and appreciated**
- 4. Mentorship and preceptorship**
- 5. Flexibility to achieve work-life balance**
- 6. To be supported and enabled to meet the expectations of patients and the public with the required resources to deliver safe quality care.**
- 7. To be included in decision making for service improvement**

In addition to our research above, there are several other nurse retention areas to consider:

Our Action Plan to Improve Retention

The case for change shows the need to transform retention for our nursing workforce. This next section will set out the actions required at both a national and local level to influence improvements in retention rates of our nursing workforce. Healthcare organisations need to recognise and determine the amount of protected time to be invested to bring about improvements in nurse retention. The focus of the actions is on staff experience, recognising that national discussions are ongoing regarding pay and reward.

Compassionate Leadership and Culture

A positive compassionate culture can powerfully shape how nurses deliver care, manage their work, interact with patients, colleagues, and carers, develop, and improve ways of delivering services. Understanding how staff perceive the culture of teams, services and organisations and how they want to be treated is an important function of the role of leaders at every level.

Action	Responsibility	Timescale
All NHS Wales organisations to implement a 12 month roll out of the HEIW principles of compassionate leadership into development programmes. This development programme should be targeted at nurse leaders in both operational and strategic roles.	HEIW Health Boards and Trusts Special Health Authorities (SHAs)	March 2024
Organisations to complete the Retention Self-Assessment Tool for the nursing workforce at ward, department, and site level. Data and information from this will be used as a baseline to identify good practice and areas for improvement and inform the local retention improvement plan.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	March 2024
Organisations should review the results from the 2023 NHS Wales staff survey and any other local surveys, in partnership with professional bodies and trade unions.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs Professional Bodies Trade Unions	December 2023
Executive Directors of Nursing should ensure that nurses in leadership and management positions in their organisation are empowered to access HEIW's Gwella Compassionate Leadership resource.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	December 2023
All organisations should embed the compassionate leadership principles for health and care in all employee processes, e.g., corporate induction programmes, onboarding, local induction, career conversations and PADR processes.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	March 2024

Valuing Our Staff

Line managers play a key role in supporting at an individual and team level, throughout the career of a nurse, this should be through a process of engaging, enabling, empowering, and energising. Quality preceptorship will ensure newly qualified nurses feel valued and inspired and is an important foundation at this early stage. Clinical supervision is of equal importance to ensure nurses at all levels can reflect on the clinical practice they undertake.

www.gov.wales/all-wales-approach-career-spanning-support-nurses.

Improved staff engagement and communication can, for example, reduce sickness absence levels, make nurses feel more valued and impact positively on patient care.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Organisations must provide protected time for preceptorship and clinical supervision aligned to the recommendations contained in the All Wales Approach to Enhancing Preceptorship and Clinical Supervision in Nursing Practice.	Welsh Government Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	March 2024
Senior nurse leaders and managers should ensure the provision of training, resources and support for line managers to have regular wellbeing conversations with their staff.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	November 2023
Organisations should review their concerns policies in line with their local schedules and communicate to all staff to ensure complainants are safeguarded when doing so.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	March 2024
Organisations should strengthen relationships with Higher Education Institutions to understand the needs of undergraduate nursing students in relation to employment and workplace experiences supported by the Practice Education Facilitators.	HEIW Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	March 2024

Supporting New Starters and Those Changing Roles

Providing a positive and engaging recruitment and on-boarding experience supports nurses to have the best start to their careers, as well enabling them to feel valued and part of the team and the organisation.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Line managers of nurses should work with workforce colleagues to develop local induction programmes specific to the area of practice and clinical role for new starters. Corporate induction programmes should reinforce organisational values, behaviours and culture.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	January 2024
Line managers of nurses should be supported to hold regular conversations with their teams which will enable them to feel supported and offered development opportunities.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	November 2023

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Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Organisations should review how nurses can undertake and be provided with training, support and time to become a buddy, mentor, or coach.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	November 2023
Line managers of nurses should make their team aware of the additional support and time available to them- such as being partnered with a buddy or having access to a mentor or coach.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	November 2023
HEIW will establish a national programme of work to embed legacy mentoring within organisations to allow nurses considering retirement to stay and share their invaluable experience with junior nurses.	HEIW	June 2024

Supporting International Nurses

Ethical international recruitment is a key priority of the health and social care system in Wales. Positive work has been undertaken to support the attraction, recruitment and retention of international nurses across all Health Boards and Trusts. NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP) continues to work with HBs/Trusts and Welsh Government to coordinate international nurse recruitment activity. Because of this increased activity, it is vitally important that organisations support the retention of international nurses by providing pastoral care to newly recruited nurses; supporting the development of their careers; and ensuring they feel valued.

Action	Responsibility	Timescale
Welsh Government, in collaboration with key stakeholders will explore the development of accreditation opportunities for IENs including the development of an All-Wales OSCE preparation module carrying academic credits.	Welsh Government NWSSP	October 2023
Organisations should put arrangements in place to offer the OSCE preparation programme module, to support internationally recruited nurses coming into Wales to successfully undertake the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) assessments.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	April 2024
Organisations must develop processes to ensure international nurses have equal opportunities for development and promotion.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	January 2024

Development and Career Planning

Supporting the career development of the nursing workforce is imperative to improving retention. Talent and succession planning should reflect the different circumstances of all our nurses which will change at different stages of their career.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Line managers of nurses should have regular career development conversations with their teams as part of the annual PADR process, with this evidenced through ESR.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	November 2023
Organisations should develop rotational posts to support the career development of nurses.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	April 2024
HEIW will develop with partners a framework of transferability of existing accreditation and training across organisations and ensure greater consistency in defining governance / scope of practice for nurses.	HEIW Health Boards and Trusts SHAs HEIs	September 2024
HEIW will undertake a full review of “return to practice” and identify how the current scheme can be improved.	HEIW	March 2024
Organisations must develop processes to ensure all nursing staff have equal opportunities for development and promotion	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	January 2024

Flexible Working

Promoting flexibility increases job satisfaction and morale, and impacts positively on staff attendance, which leads to engaged staff delivering safe and quality care to patients. The actions contained under this section seek to improve the consistency across Wales with respect to the application of flexible working policies and practices.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Organisations will work with Welsh Government to develop guidance, standards and resources to facilitate NHS Wales organisations ability to offer more flexible working options and patterns to support the nursing workforce including training and support for managers and leaders to enable greater creativity and flexibility within rostering.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs Welsh Government	September 2023
To agree a national consistent metric of how many staff have requested flexible working and how many such arrangements have been agreed. This metric can then be monitored to assess the implementation of the flexible working policies and understand the challenges.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs Welsh Government	December 2023

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Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Utilise Health Roster to facilitate self-rostering and team rostering to support flexible working. Nurses at all levels should create a culture required to facilitate this effectively and fairly.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	January 2024
Organisations are expected to respond compassionately to flexible working requests in line with the needs of the service.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	March 2024
Organisations will monitor the number of requests and acceptance rates for flexible working	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	March 2024
Organisations should include “Any Hours will be considered” in nursing recruitment processes.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	October 2023

Flexible Retirement

Offering flexible retirement options enables organisations to retain their most experienced nurses, whilst at the same time offering this valuable workforce a choice on how they continue to work.

Ensuring this cohort of staff are informed and feel able to discuss retirement options will help provide clarity and increase the likelihood of retaining our experienced nurses. As state pension age increases some nurses may opt to stay in work longer utilising flexible retirement and alternative working options to support this. The complexities of changes to pensions must be communicated clearly with nurses so they have a clear understanding of their options.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Heads of Nursing to ensure that leaders and managers have timely conversations with staff in relation to preparing for retirement.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	October 2023
CNO and Executive Directors of Nursing should be briefed on any national changes to pension eligibility and rules so they can assess any potential impact on nursing retention.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs Welsh Government	October 2023

Health and Wellbeing

Organisations are aware of the importance of providing a duty of care to their nurses. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to support workforce wellbeing, and it is therefore important to listen to staff and understand their specific health and wellbeing needs to help improve retention.

There are a number of resources that have been developed by HEIW, Health Boards and Trusts and others, to support the health and wellbeing of teams. However, the use of these resources is inconsistent across Wales.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Organisations should evidence the use of health and wellbeing resources and services by nurses.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	November 2023
Organisations will evidence how they use advice and support from Occupational Health Services as part of their local retention improvement plan.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	April 2024
Data and information held by OH services on the nursing workforce, should be anonymised and aggregated at a national level and be supplied to the CNO and NHS Partnership Forum.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	April 2024
Organisations should implement the recommendations of the All-Wales Staff Welfare Project as part of their local retention improvement plans.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	September 2024

Recognition and Incentives

Despite the fact organisations recognise the contribution nurses make through various local initiatives, the evidence suggests that the nursing workforce feels undervalued for the contribution they make.

Working for the NHS has many benefits associated with it, such as a competitive pension, generous annual leave allowances/annual leave purchase scheme, lease car schemes, access to NHS discount cards, among others. However, it is the day-to-day experience of nurses that is pivotal to improving morale and wellbeing in work.

As we publish this plan, we are cognisant of the significant work underway in social partnership between Welsh Government, NHS Wales employers and trade unions to implement the non-pay aspects of the NHS Wales Agenda for Change pay agreements 2022-24. That work includes (but is not limited to) a focus on reducing agency usage, national guidance on the use of recruitment and retention premia and incentivising bank arrangements. The outputs from these workstreams are expected during 2024 and will help shape this section of the plan in its next iteration. As a consequence of the ongoing work, we have included an action below to review this section in April 2024, and amend this section by no later than 12 months from the date of publication.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
A review of the recognition and incentives section of this plan will be undertaken, to take account of the outcomes from the national programme of work to implement the NHS Wales Agenda for Change pay deals, and any other relevant issues or activities.	HEIW to review with partner	Review in April 2024. Consequential amendments made, and re published no later than 12 months after original publication.
Nursing staff should be informed of the NHS benefits that they are entitled to through recruitment and corporate induction programmes.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	October 2023
Organisations should recognise and celebrate their employees through various recognition schemes.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	April 2024
Organisations should encourage and support nurses to share best practice stories locally, nationally and internationally.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	September 2023
Each organisations retention improvement plan should consider specific reference to the national guidance on the use of recruitment and retention premia (RRPs) and the areas where this will be implemented. All RRP's should be submitted to the Welsh Partnership Forum for ratification. Use of RRP's should be reported in the retention report submitted to the Board.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	April 2024

Evaluating Impact

Organisations must evaluate the work undertaken on actions to improve nurse retention. Any evaluation should be measured against the initial baseline assessment (self-assessment tool) to highlight where progress and improvement has been made and where further work is needed.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Organisations should evaluate and share the findings of their local retention improvement plan in partnership with local Professional Bodies/ Trade Union colleagues.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs Trade Unions and Professional Bodies	April 2024 - interim evaluation October 2024 - complete evaluation

Understanding Data and Information

Understanding the organisation’s workforce data and information will help to support a more targeted approach towards improving retention and should therefore be at the centre of the development of an effective local retention improvement plan.

Action	Responsibility	Timescales
Organisations must adapt/develop their local retention improvement plans to reflect this national Nurse Retention Plan.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	October 2023
Organisations need to increase the percentage of Exit Interviews completed, using the ESR functionality, with common themes captured and analysed at a national level.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	April 2024
Organisations should embed the use of ‘Stay’ interviews process as part of its retention practice with a view to increasing its use as the local retention improvement plan is developed and reviewed. This should include providing education and training for line managers to enable them to undertake ‘Stay’ Interviews and discuss the options for retention.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	April 2024
To further support and standardise the “Stay” interview process, HEIW will produce guidance on the application of “Stay” interviews within HBs/Trusts, including what data and information should be collated and analysed.	HEIW	April 2024
Welsh Government should develop a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor and improve retention. These could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 📌 NHS leaver rates and reasons 📌 Churn rates (movement to other NHS Wales organisations) 📌 Staff survey results 📌 Vacancies 📌 Flexible working requests and outcomes 📌 Retire and return requests and outcomes 	Welsh Government	March 2024
Organisations should analyse nurse retention demographic data and information to improve the equality, diversity and inclusion of the nursing workforce.	Health Boards and Trusts SHAs	March 2024

Supporting Delivery

In the context of current pressures on the NHS, implementation of these actions requires a balanced approach which considers the support and resources needed; the emphasis on local leadership and improvement; and expectations regarding performance management and visibility at Board level.

- ❏ Support and Resources – HEIW will provide short term funding for local retention improvement lead posts to inject additional capacity and focus on retention work in individual organisations, and will continue to support with national resources, tools, and guidance.
- ❏ Local Leadership and Improvement – HEIW will facilitate a community of practice on retention involving all NHS organisations to encourage innovation, sharing and spread of effective retention initiatives.
- ❏ Performance Management and Visibility - It is recommended that a retention report is submitted to the Board twice a year to report on the implementation of the local nurse retention improvement plan, and that retention indicators will be part of performance management and assurance mechanisms with WG.

Local Improvement Leads will focus initially on the nursing workforce but will have a wider remit across the whole workforce as the programme develops.

Each organisation will be asked to **develop a local nurse retention improvement plan by October 2023**. Executive Directors of Nursing and Workforce should lead the development of the local nurse retention improvement plan, to deliver on the national actions in this document and to continue to develop the plan to reflect the emerging priorities from the self-assessment. The development of the local plan should be done in social partnership with professional bodies and trade unions.

HEIW will also establish a **National Retention Programme by October 2023** to facilitate collaboration across Wales in improving retention in the wider NHS Wales workforce. The purpose of this is to share learning and best practice, through a quality improvement approach.

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