



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES

Addysg a Gwella Iechyd  
Cymru (AaGIC)  
Health Education and  
Improvement Wales (HEIW)

# Strategic Perinatal Workforce Plan

Easy read/Summary

2025



## Introduction

This Plan sets out how we will grow, support, and develop the perinatal workforce in Wales. It includes all clinical staff who care for women and babies from pregnancy through to and after birth. It supports the vision of A Healthier Wales and aims to ensure that services are safe, effective, and person-centred.

Perinatal care includes:

- Care during pregnancy, birth and after birth
- Maternity and neonatal services
- Care in hospitals, birth centres, and communities

This Plan focuses on the clinical workforce, such as:

- Midwives
- Neonatal nurses
- Doctors (including obstetricians, anaesthetists, paediatricians)
- Allied Health Professionals
- Health Scientists
- Pharmacists
- Support workers
- Psychologists
- Sonographers and radiographers

Although birth rates in Wales are falling, the care being provided is becoming more complex and more specialised. At the same time, there are significant workforce challenges, including staff shortages in key roles, a need to ensure services are equitable and inclusive, and an urgent requirement to prioritise staff wellbeing and career development.

This Plan has been developed in response to these challenges and opportunities across maternity and neonatal services.

## Literature Review, Research and Horizon Scanning

As part of developing this Plan, a wide range of published reviews, research articles, policy documents and reports were reviewed, including those from professional bodies, national programmes, and academic sources. This evidence highlights the urgent need for change in perinatal services to meet the demands of the future. Key themes identified include the challenges of recruiting and retaining staff across multiple professional groups, increasing workload and service complexity, and the importance of supporting wellbeing within perinatal teams. In addition, technological advances are transforming how care can and should be delivered, offering new opportunities to enhance safety, efficiency, and person-centred care.

## Perinatal Workforce Data and Analytics

A review of the perinatal workforce in Wales shows some important trends and ongoing challenges.

Between 2018 and 2023, the number of midwives in Wales grew by 10%, even though training places increased by 67% during the same period. By October 2024, there were 1,862 registered midwives (1,530 whole-time equivalent), with about one midwife for every 20 births.

The neonatal nursing workforce has grown by 15% since 2014. However, services are still under pressure, with national data showing that 26% of neonatal nurse shifts are not staffed to recommended levels.

Both maternity and neonatal services are seeing high numbers of staff leaving early in their careers. About 1 in 5 nurses and nearly 1 in 4 midwives leave within four years of qualifying.

Although the midwifery workforce is getting younger, this may lead to greater demand for maternity leave and support for newer staff.

In the medical workforce, more doctors in obstetrics, paediatrics, and anaesthetics are choosing to train less than full time, which makes rota planning more difficult. In obstetrics and gynaecology, only a third of entry-level training posts were filled in 2024, with some trainees asking to move out of Wales.

There are also shortages in other parts of the perinatal workforce. Neonatal services have a 55% shortfall in pharmacy staff and a 62% shortage in allied health professionals, especially in psychology and physiotherapy roles.

Finally, there are gaps in workforce data for some staff groups, such as sonographers, radiographers, and those working in combined roles. Better data systems are needed to understand and plan for these areas more effectively.

These insights confirm the need for targeted action to grow, retain and support the multi-professional perinatal workforce, and to strengthen workforce planning through better data and modelling.

## Challenges facing Maternity and Neonatal Services in Wales

This Plan responds to the following issues:

- **Staffing pressures** and workforce shortages
- **Increasing care complexity** (e.g. older parents, more interventions, rising health conditions)
- **Retention risks**, particularly for early career staff
- **Digital transformation**, requiring new skills and confidence
- **Service variation** across Wales

## Engagement

Extensive engagement with the workforce highlighted six key themes:

- Stronger teams and more colleagues
- Better access to development and supervision
- Flexible and family-friendly working
- Positive workplace cultures
- Support for digital working
- Kind and compassionate leadership

## Key Themes

The Strategic Perinatal Workforce Plan is built around four national priorities:

### 1. Growing the Workforce

- Increase the number of staff in perinatal services
- Improve recruitment and retention
- Use data to support smarter planning

### 2. Education and Training

- Provide structured career pathways
- Ensure equitable access to training
- Build skills to reduce health inequalities

### 3. Leadership and Culture

- Support kind, inclusive leadership
- Promote supportive and safe working environments

- Review professional supervision

#### 4. Workforce Transformation

- Develop new and advanced roles
- Strengthen cross-professional collaboration
- Build a digitally skilled workforce
- Promote research roles

## Implementation

This Plan will be delivered over the next three years. We know that delivering the actions will take time, people, and funding.

In line with Welsh Government's Quality Statement, HEIW and health boards we will work together to decide which actions should be done first, especially in year 1. This will be a phased approach, and all actions will need to be costed.

When deciding what to do first, we will look at:

- Whether they support national policies, legal duties, or improve quality and safety
- Which actions will make the biggest difference to the workforce in the short and medium term
- How well they align with HEIW's strategic goals
- Whether the action will benefit the whole multi-professional team

If some actions can be delivered quickly with existing resources, we will start them immediately. Others may need business cases and funding.

Successful delivery will rely on strong partnerships across NHS Wales and with key stakeholders.

## Actions

| Theme                 | No | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Delivery                      |
|-----------------------|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Growing the Workforce | 1  | Engage and collaborate with the national retention programme, local retention leads, organisations and the perinatal workforce, to promote retention best practice and equip and empower the perinatal workforce to positively impact retention at a local level through the delivery of targeted retention interventions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | HEIW (lead) and health boards |
|                       | 2  | <p>Actively promote careers in perinatal services to attract our future workforce.</p> <p>a. <u>Promoting Careers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a perinatal work experience model as part of the Strategic Framework for NHS Wales Careers to welcome and encourage potential applicants into NHS Wales.</li> <li>• Use HEIW's Widening Access Programme to engage under-represented and disadvantaged groups.</li> </ul> <p>b. <u>Expanding Training Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance and promote opportunities within existing training programmes to provide perinatal experience and placements for pre-registration nurses, medical students, physician associates, allied health professionals, and foundation doctors.</li> <li>• Create a unified approach for student midwife placements for those studying outside of Wales, whilst ensuring this does not impact on placements for those students studying in Wales.</li> </ul> <p>c. <u>Supporting Recruitment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a consistent process for recruiting newly qualified midwives into Wales after the streamlining process.</li> </ul> | HEIW (lead) and NWSSP         |

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take targeted steps to improve recruitment into Obstetrics and Gynaecology training programmes.</li> </ul> <p>d. <u>Flexible Training Options:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot less than full time (LTFT) training places for paediatrics and anaesthetics to address rising demand.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                    |
| 3 | <p>Enhance data-driven workforce planning and analytics for perinatal services to align workforce supply with future demand.</p> <p>a. <u>Implement Workforce Modelling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop scenario-based forecasting to anticipate future supply and demand trends, integrating pipeline data, population demographics, and workforce analytics to inform HEIW's Education and Training Plan.</li> </ul> <p>b. <u>Strengthen Workforce Data Infrastructure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and address data quality issues and gaps in workforce data collection across maternity and neonatal services.</li> <li>• Establish a multi-professional perinatal workforce dashboard to monitor staffing trends and skill mix.</li> </ul> <p>c. <u>A structured method of assessing acuity and complexity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and scope acuity tools used to measure the intensity of intervention required to meet the needs of women and babies across all settings, conducting an options appraisal for an All-Wales approach.</li> </ul> | HEIW/Health Boards |
| 4 | <p>Address projected workforce gaps, optimise sub-specialist training opportunities, and develop a standardised approach to workforce uplift calculations.</p> <p>a. <u>Consultant Workforce</u></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | HEIW               |

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a 10-year projection of consultant workforce gaps across Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Neonatology, and Obstetric Anaesthesia.</li> <li>• Develop targeted strategies to recruit and retain specialist roles, ensuring service resilience.</li> </ul> <p>b. <u>Expand Training and Sub-Specialist Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase access to sub-specialist training posts in areas such as fetal and maternal medicine, including cross-border training opportunities within Wales across organisational boundaries and NHS England where necessary.</li> <li>• Update HEIW Specialty School strategies to optimise training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Neonatal GRID sub-specialties, and Obstetric Anaesthesia, aligning training placements with future workforce and population health needs.</li> </ul> <p>c. <u>Establish a Standardised Workforce Uplift Framework</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a clear methodology for workforce uplift calculations, accounting for factors such as sickness, training, and maternity leave. Use historical workforce data from the past three years to determine required staffing levels and resilience measures.</li> </ul> |                  |
| 5 | <p>Improve workforce supply and shape through an All-Wales approach to international recruitment.</p> <p>Collaborate with NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP) and health boards to identify medical workforce vacancies and consider options for an All-Wales approach to the ethical international recruitment of perinatal medical staff.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | HEIW             |
| 6 | <p>In partnership review the sonography workforce in Wales and develop workforce solutions to meet the demand for obstetric ultrasound scans.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | HEIW and the NHS |

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|  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Work with NWSSP to develop guidance for health boards on ESR data capture to develop accurate workforce intelligence.</li> <li>b. Develop a multidisciplinary skill mix workforce model for ultrasound that considers future technology developments</li> <li>c. Strengthen the midwifery sonography workforce by implementing a structured pathway for training, supervision, and career development.</li> <li>d. Collaborate with NHS Executive National Imaging Programme, Strategic Maternity and Neonatal Network to develop a better understanding of demand data for perinatal sonography services.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Executive<br>(National<br>Imaging<br>Programme) |
|  | 7 | <p>Review and strengthen <b>local</b> workforce planning and transformation considering projected birth rates, increasing complexity of pregnancies, and service user needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop and implement a multi-professional skill mix model for the perinatal team, including new and emerging roles based on the Strategic Clinical Maternity and Neonatal Network Service Specification. Utilise the visual guide (Appendix 4) to support workforce planning and development of a workforce model locally.</li> <li>b. Utilise HEIWs workforce observatory to support local workforce planning <a href="#">Workforce observatory - HEIW</a></li> <li>c. Develop a method of calculating the hours required for roles e.g. Specialist and Leadership roles for medical, nursing and midwifery within perinatal services with appropriate job planning support in direct clinical care and SPA time for the work to be completed.</li> <li>d. Identify critical positions within perinatal teams for the purpose of robust succession planning, assess and develop current staff members who might be able to fill these positions.</li> </ul> | Health Boards                                   |

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|  | <p>Strengthen <b>national</b> workforce planning in perinatal teams including consideration of new and emerging roles, alternative career routes, and sustainable workforce pipelines to meet population needs and demand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. Develop a career progression and educational pathway that enables maternity support workers to become registered midwives.</li> <li>f. Develop good practice guidance to support portfolio pathway routes into specialist registration.</li> <li>g. Develop a workforce planning toolkit to inform obstetric, obstetric anaesthetist and neonatology staffing levels in Wales</li> <li>h. Create guidance for deploying Physician Associates (PAs) in perinatal care, ensuring alignment with their scope of practice, regulatory requirements, and supervision needs.</li> </ul> | HEIW |
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| Theme                  | No | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Delivery |
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| Education and training | 8  | Develop a career development framework, and an education and training plan to support the provision of Pharmacy and Allied Health Professional workforces in perinatal services to meet professional body recommendations/standards. | HEIW     |
|                        | 9  | Develop a programme of support for Locally Employed doctors in perinatal services to include tutors, induction, supervision, educational opportunities, and e-portfolios.                                                            | HEIW     |
|                        | 10 | Progress the career development and training of the support worker workforce, across maternity and neonatal services including theatres and community settings.                                                                      | HEIW     |

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|    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop an All-Wales competency and career progression framework for perinatal support workers at levels 2, 3 and 4, including options for progression from non-registrant to registrant (nursing and maternity).</li> <li>b. Commission work-based learning for level 2, 3 and 4 staff working in perinatal teams to provide opportunities for learning and development specific through the Education and Training Plan process</li> <li>c. Provide training for health board colleagues to enable them to assess and sign off work-based learning competencies, ensuring effective supervision and supporting the development of expertise.</li> </ul> |                        |
| 11 | <p>Develop training and resources to reduce inequalities in health and outcomes for Black and ethnic minority women, birthing people, and babies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop a compulsory training programme for perinatal teams in NHS Wales focussing on cultural awareness and unconscious bias.</li> <li>b. Develop training and resources to support the assessment and diagnosis of conditions in Black and ethnic minority women and babies to improve equity and reduce inequalities.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                 | HEIW                   |
| 12 | <p>Improve the education and training opportunities of the perinatal workforce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a multi-professional Core Competency Framework with minimum standards and stretch targets.</li> <li>• Develop career pathways for the perinatal workforce, aligning education with advanced, enhanced, and consultant practices to expand roles for midwives, nurses, allied health professionals, healthcare scientists, and pharmacists.</li> </ul> <p><b>Early priorities include:</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                  | HEIW and NHS Executive |

- Standardise the Qualified in Speciality (QIS) neonatal nursing training across Wales in collaboration with key partners.
- Review and optimise paediatrics and neonatology teaching, including SPIN and GRID training.
- Develop multi-professional work-based learning for transitional care, neonatal outreach, and perioperative care (maternity theatres).
- Prioritise commissioning for enhanced maternity care and ultrasound education modules through the Education and Training Plan process.
- Develop and implement a Genomics Workforce Development Toolkit to prepare the wider perinatal workforce to maximise the benefits of genomics.
- Establish a Practice Development Midwife and Practice Education Facilitator All-Wales forum to standardise training and education across Wales.
- Create a digital learning hub within 'Y Ty Dysgu' for perinatal resources.
- Develop training in 'Motivational Interviewing' skills for health professionals, to support person/family-centred approaches to behaviour change.
- Develop an interactive e-learning module on 'Shared Decision Making' facilitating a person/family-centred approach to care.
- Commission training focused on remote and advanced clinical decision-making, developing care beyond the clinical setting.
- Promote Welsh-language progression opportunities for the workforce to meet anticipated increased demand for service users.
- Develop educational resources to support the implementation of the National Bereavement Care Pathway for Pregnancy and Baby Loss.

|                                             |    | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Delivery                   |
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| Leadership, succession planning and culture | 13 | <p>Develop resources for NHS Wales to promote a culture of safety, learning, and support within perinatal teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Collaborate with the NHS Executive to establish an All-Wales response to incidents, focusing on just culture, psychological safety, staff wellbeing, shared learning, and co-production. Align work to national guidelines and regulation.</li> <li>b. Develop an evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of actions implemented following an incident.</li> <li>c. Develop All-Wales training for all professionals involved in perinatal incident investigations.</li> <li>d. Develop an All-Wales compassionate approach to support staff emotionally and psychologically after challenging or traumatic incidents.</li> </ul>                                            | HEIW and the NHS Executive |
|                                             | 14 | <p>Develop and implement targeted multi-professional programmes and resources to embed compassionate leadership and an open and positive culture in perinatal teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Pilot the Staff/Team/Team of Teams (STATT) leadership course in one health board to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration across professions and services. If successful, expand and implement the programme across perinatal teams throughout Wales to enhance teamwork and leadership in maternity and neonatal care.</li> <li>b. Implement a train the trainer approach for compassionate leadership and compassionate people practices within perinatal teams to develop a compassionate culture.</li> <li>c. Target and market existing leadership programmes to aspiring leaders in the perinatal team.</li> </ul> | HEIW                       |

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|  |    | d. Development of resources to support leaders in creating and maintaining a culture of civility and respect within perinatal teams.                                                                                                                                          |      |
|  | 15 | Undertake an All-Wales review of the provision of educational/clinical supervision for all perinatal professionals, including training/education available for supervisors, with recommendations for practice.<br><br>Develop a multi-professional Supervision Hub on Gwella. | HEIW |

|                          |    | Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Delivery               |
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| Workforce transformation | 16 | Work in partnership to develop an All-Wales approach and set of principles to implement rotational posts and regional working.<br>Develop principles to facilitate cross health board development opportunities and shared training. | NWSSP & WOD colleagues |
|                          | 17 | Develop the multi-professional workforce model and learning opportunities for a potential Maternal Medicine Network in Wales, incorporating new and emerging roles.                                                                  | HEIW                   |
|                          | 18 | Develop a digitally ready workforce.<br><br>a. Roll out HEIWs Digital Capability Framework in perinatal teams. Utilise the data to identify training needs and commission training/education informed by the evidence gathered.      | HEIW                   |

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|  |    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Develop a digital competency passport, based on the Digital Capability Framework for healthcare in Wales.</li> <li>c. Develop a targeted digital leadership programme for multi-professional perinatal teams that will support digital transformation, service improvement, automation, and data literacy.</li> <li>d. Provide perinatal staff with knowledge and skills to safety and positively integrate artificial intelligence into practice</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                          |             |
|  | 19 | <p>Develop research opportunities for perinatal staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop a career framework to increase research opportunities including clinical academic roles for pharmacists, midwives, nurses, and allied health professionals within perinatal services.</li> <li>b. Support the identification of talented academics early in pre-registrant training to fast track on academic pathways following qualification (i.e. Health and Care Research Wales fellowship)</li> <li>c. Create accessible resources within 'Y Ty Dysgu' to support staff to navigate a career in clinical academia.</li> </ul> | HEIW/HEI/HB |

## Benefits

This Plan sets out clear aims to strengthen the perinatal workforce in Wales and outlines how progress will be measured.

### Benefits to Families

- ☞ Safer, more responsive, and equitable care
- ☞ Continuity of care and consistent staff
- ☞ Access to care from skilled and consistent teams
- ☞ Cared for by teams working in a positive, respectful culture
- ☞ Reduction in care disruptions due to staff shortages

### Benefits to Perinatal Staff

- ☞ Clarity in roles and collaborative working
- ☞ Better wellbeing and morale
- ☞ Clearer career pathways and job security
- ☞ Right staffing levels and workload balance
- ☞ Access to development and upskilling
- ☞ Psychological safety, respect, and inclusion
- ☞ Structured access to training and support

### Benefits to Employing Organisations

- ☞ Improved service quality and public confidence
- ☞ Reduced vacancies and turnover
- ☞ Cost savings and workforce stability
- ☞ Data-informed decision-making and resource allocation
- ☞ Future-ready workforce with enhanced skills
- ☞ Stronger team performance and retention
- ☞ Efficient talent pipelines and reduced training wastage

