

# Strategic Nursing Workforce Plan:

## 2025 – 2030



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## Definition of Nursing

“Nursing is a safety critical profession founded on four pillars: clinical practice, education, research, and leadership. Registered nurses use evidence-based knowledge, professional and clinical judgement to assess, plan, implement and evaluate high-quality person-centred nursing care. The work of registered nurses consists of many specialised and complex interventions.

Their vigilance is critical to the safety of people, the prevention of avoidable harm and the management of risks regardless of the location or situation. Compassionate leadership is central to the provision and co-ordination of nursing care and informed by its values, integrity and professional knowledge.

Responsibility includes leading the integration of emotional, physical, organisational, and cognitive nursing work to meet the needs of people, organisations, systems, and populations. Registered nurses are decision makers.

They use clinical judgement and problem-solving skills to manage and co-ordinate the complexity of health and social care systems to ensure people and their families are enabled to improve, maintain, or recover health by adapting, coping, and returning to live lives of the best quality or to experience a dignified death.

They have high levels of autonomy within nursing and multi professional teams, and they delegate to others in line with the Nursing and Midwifery Code.”

**(Royal College of Nursing 2024)<sup>1</sup>**

## Foreword

As the strategic workforce body in NHS Wales our role includes developing sustainable and comprehensive plans for our current and future workforce. We have developed the Strategic Nursing Workforce Plan through extensive engagement, with employers, stakeholders, trades unions, professional bodies, and Welsh Government, all of whom played a key role in shaping its development.

We listened to those delivering nursing care to patients and citizens, to understand their priorities. Combined with research, horizon scanning, and workforce data, these perspectives have informed the plan’s actions.

Nursing is the largest profession in the NHS and is central to healthcare, spanning all specialties and sectors, including primary, community, secondary, and private care. The profession faces significant challenges in recruitment and retention, alongside demographic shifts as Wales’s ageing population increases the demand for care.

We know there is both a need and an opportunity to transform the nursing workforce and to reshape how we deliver nursing care.

Technological advances through digital innovation and artificial intelligence offer real possibilities to impact positively on the health and wellbeing of our workforce and the wider population of Wales and to support the delivery of personalised, holistic, and integrated care based in the community.

Together we have developed this ambitious five-year plan which provides the foundation for transformational change to address these challenges. This plan will deliver a sustainable, robust, flexible, and well-supported nursing workforce.

The collective approach we have utilised in developing the plan will continue to be essential as we implement the thirty-two actions contained within the plan over the next five years. We look forward to working collaboratively with our stakeholders to develop a nursing workforce that is competent and confident in meeting the challenges and demands of healthcare in 2030 and beyond.

**Lisa Llewelyn**

**Executive Director of Nursing, Health Professionals and Quality, HEIW**

## Executive summary

Our nursing workforce represents 40% of the NHS Wales workforce.

A nurse's clinical, academic, research and leadership skills span a wide spectrum of health service delivery, including public health, health promotion, antimicrobial resistance, infection prevention and control, mental healthcare, emergency care, community services, primary healthcare, hospital care, independent sector and care in humanitarian and disaster settings<sup>2, 3, 4, 5</sup>.

Nurses are often the first healthcare professional a patient sees and many times the only one.

The next 5 years will demand an even stronger, more diverse and skilled nursing workforce who play a pivotal role in delivering services that include enhancing safe, quality patient centred care in many settings; developing, implementing and driving innovative practice; working collaboratively, and providing clinical leadership in multi-professional teams.

Nurses have a pivotal role in improving the health of our population, influencing health inequalities, and leading on the public health agenda for families and individuals across the life course.

For this to be successfully achieved the nursing workforce will need ongoing support from the systems that educate, train, employ, and enable them to practice autonomously.

This 'Strategic Nursing Workforce Plan' will address the significant and well documented challenges facing the nursing profession in Wales and provides the foundation and a real opportunity for transformational change.

The plan recognises that the health, wellbeing and satisfaction of nurses is integral to delivering exceptional care to meet the current and future needs of individuals, families, and communities.

The plan has been developed by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) in partnership with senior professional leaders, the wider nursing profession, professional bodies, student nurses and stakeholders, through wide engagement and consultation.

For the first time in NHS Wales this plan brings together the many separate initiatives and work programmes currently in place and focuses on the national and essential actions required to develop a sustainable, skilled and motivated nursing workforce.

An extensive review of the literature, nursing workforce data and information, alongside engagement and consultation with the nursing and wider workforce has informed this plan.

The scope includes all nurses on the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) register in Wales including the independent sector, primary care, social care and the nursing support workforce in health.

The plan and actions provide the foundation for growing, transforming and supporting our nursing workforce here in Wales and includes new areas of work as well as reflecting existing work that needs to be continued or accelerated.

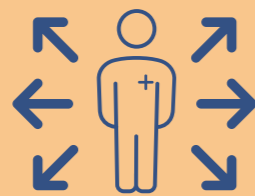
Work on developing this plan commenced in 2023, and we are grateful to everyone who contributed their time and expertise.

The plan reflects the necessary adjustments to align with the current workforce position and emerging priorities.

The implementation and delivery of the actions will be influenced and underpinned by the professional standards within the Nursing and Midwifery Council Code, prioritising people, practising effectively, preserving safety, and promoting professionalism and trust<sup>6</sup>.

The actions outlined in the plan will undergo regular review as part of an ongoing iterative process, ensuring adaptability to emerging priorities and evolving service demands.





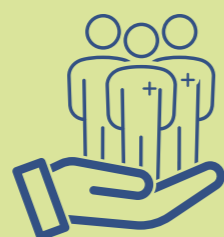
## Growing the nursing workforce

- ❖ Increasing workforce supply to meet demand
- ❖ Attracting and retaining our nursing workforce



## Transforming the nursing workforce

- ❖ Implementing new workforce models, in community and hospital settings, with a real focus on the skills and knowledge required to more effectively influence the health of our population, and the prevention agenda
- ❖ Increasing knowledge and competencies in genomics, data literacy and automated healthcare



## Supporting the nursing workforce

- ❖ Developing flexible opportunities for career and educational development
- ❖ Developing compassionate nurse leaders across all levels
- ❖ Increasing diversity in leadership roles



# Section 1: Nursing Workforce Development Outcomes (2025-2030)

By 2030, nursing in Wales will lead the way in providing compassionate, person-centred, innovative, and equitable healthcare, empowered by lifelong learning, be equipped with advanced skills in technology, deliver data-driven, evidence-based practice and provide professional leadership across all levels of healthcare.

Nurses will deliver holistic, person-centred care that extends beyond treating illness to promoting health, well-being, and equity within communities. Our nursing working workforce will understand the building blocks for health, so that they can actively influence the cumulative impact of health risks throughout life and across the generations.

They will act as professional champions for reducing health inequalities, prevention, mental health, and chronic disease management, strengthening partnerships across health, social care, and voluntary sectors to support a seamless, integrated approach to care.

Wales will create a supportive work culture that prioritises the wellbeing of nurses, their professional development, work-life balance requirements and creation of a diverse and inclusive workforce that is engaged and valued. There will be clear pathways and opportunities for career progression, enabling nurses to have portfolio careers, take up of advanced and consultant roles, and lead innovation in clinical practice, research, and policy development.

Nurses will embrace digital health, telehealth, and artificial intelligence and continue to play a vital role in enhancing productivity and improving efficiency by streamlining processes, adopting innovative practices, and utilising technology, freeing up more time to focus on person-centred care and improving outcomes for individuals and populations.

Our nursing workforce will champion sustainable, environmentally conscious healthcare practices, reducing waste and actively addressing the health impacts of climate change.

## Approach

This is the first Strategic Nursing Workforce Plan for Wales. It is ambitious and provides the foundation for transformational change to address the long-standing challenges and growing demands on the nursing workforce. The plan will deliver a sustainable, robust, flexible, and well-supported nursing workforce.

The plan aligns with national health policies ([appendix one](#)), draws on insights from workforce data, nursing and stakeholder engagement. Phase one was completed in March 2023 and focussed on the immediate priorities – described in more detail in [appendix two](#). Phase two followed a three-pillar approach, triangulating information from [Our Big Conversation: Ein Sgwrs Fawr](#), workforce and population [data and analytics](#) and a review of the [research, literature and horizon scanning](#). This approach informed the development of the strategic nursing workforce actions.

## Summary of Our Big Conversation

Appreciate us	Develop us	Trust us	Support us	Help us
<p><b>Reward us fairly</b></p> <p>A fair and consistent reward structure that makes it worthwhile to take on more responsibility, encourages people to join, stay in or return to the NHS, and recognises the extra time we give.</p>	<p><b>Give us the time to maintain and develop our knowledge and skills</b></p> <p>For our whole careers, and especially when we transition to a new stage in a career, give us the time and support to maintain and develop our knowledge and skills. And assist us in developing our Welsh language skills.</p>	<p><b>Involve us in decision-making and shaping services</b></p> <p>Value our expertise as part of the multi-disciplinary team and as leaders in designing the service of the future.</p>	<p><b>The time to debrief and access to wellbeing services</b></p> <p>Prioritise our wellbeing by listening to us and giving us the chance to debrief at the start and end of a shift. Help us access wellbeing support when we need it.</p>	<p><b>Increase our efficiency and safety through information systems that speak to each other</b></p> <p>We want single sign-on and systems that speak to each other so that we can do less administration, give more time to caring, and avoid some patient safety risks caused by gaps in information.</p>
<p><b>Celebrate and value our contributions to healthcare, education and research</b></p> <p>Recognise us all for our work delivering care at the front line, education and research. Tell our success stories so patients and communities hear how we are helping them.</p>	<p><b>Remove the barriers to our learning and development</b></p> <p>Help us with funding and resources for our learning and increase opportunities for secondment or rotation.</p>	<p><b>Make us feel safe to speak up and listen to us when we do</b></p> <p>Our expertise and experience should be trusted, so when we speak up, we should feel safe and know we will be heard.</p>	<p><b>Facilities and break rooms</b></p> <p>Ensure that we have the basics to take effective breaks during our shifts, including water and break rooms.</p>	<p><b>Reduce daily challenges by giving us enough space and up-to-date equipment</b></p> <p>We need more modern devices connected to the internet and effective Wi-Fi to learn, collaborate, research, and provide services online. We need enough space for everyone to sit and have confidential meetings when we work at desks.</p>
<p><b>Innovate and promote nursing roles and nursing careers to fill gaps in the workforce</b></p> <p>Use our skills across all nursing roles, create new nursing roles, and promote nursing careers to fill the workforce's gaps.</p>	<p><b>Career pathways that work for everyone</b></p> <p>Provide flexible (not just academic or managerial) routes for career progression. Fill the gaps in career pathways for some fields of nursing or nursing roles.</p>	<p><b>Fair solutions to flexible working that trust us to prioritise service needs</b></p> <p>Trust us to work in flexible ways that prioritise the needs of our patients and colleagues. We want to try things like self-rostering or different shift patterns.</p>	<p><b>Leaders and managers who are visible, kind, and compassionate</b></p> <p>We want to see our leaders and managers working alongside us. We want feedback to go both ways. We want to be treated with kindness and compassion when we ask for help, flexibility, and development.</p>	<p><b>Invest in buildings and spaces for better care experiences</b></p> <p>We need buildings and spaces that are more modern, welcoming, and safe for our patients.</p>

## Scope of the plan

Within the scope of the plan:

- ❖ All Nursing and Midwifery Council registered nurses in Wales including those in primary, community, secondary, independent, and social care from the four fields of practice – Adult, Child, Mental Health, and Learning Disabilities
- ❖ The nursing support workforce Agenda for Change (AfC) bands 2, 3 and 4.

Outside the scope of the plan:

- ❖ All professions other than nursing although implementation will need to be aligned with other profession specific plans and Government priorities
- ❖ Domiciliary care workers and support workers in social care ([Direct care workforce plan: 2022 to 2025 | Social Care Wales](#))
- ❖ Pay is a policy decision determined by the Welsh Government and falls outside the scope of HEIW's responsibilities and this workforce plan. Further information on the Wales NHS AfC collective agreement for 2022-24 can be found [here](#). Employers to use the terms and conditions of AfC to support and develop the nursing workforce and to address shortages or recruitment issues.

Given the breadth of the nursing workforce, there are important interfaces with Government priorities and strategic workforce plans developed in other priority areas including [Primary Care](#), [Mental Health](#) and [Genomics](#). These interfaces will be managed during the implementation process to avoid duplication and maximise the use of resources and impact.

## Case for change

In 2021 Welsh Government produced [A Healthier Wales](#) a long-term plan for the improvement of health and social care in Wales. The actions for [A Healthier Wales - Action refresh 2024-25](#) have been updated following the publication of [NHS in 10+ years: An examination of the projected impact of Long-Term Conditions and Risk Factors in Wales](#) describing the challenges the NHS in Wales is likely to face over the next 10 to 25 years. The report made it clear that the current demographic, economic and societal challenges facing our health and care system in Wales will continue to place unsustainable demands on our services.

In response to A Healthier Wales HEIW published a [Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care](#) setting 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 of Wales, for now and for the health and well-being of future generations. A commitment in this Strategy was to develop a strategic workforce plan for nursing, recognising the significant challenges and opportunities facing the profession.

This was echoed in the National Workforce Implementation Plan (NWIP)<sup>7</sup> which acknowledged the immediate and unprecedented pressures on NHS Wales post pandemic, accelerating many of the known workforce challenges including:

- ❖ Declining numbers entering the nursing profession
- ❖ Demographic changes, increased demand for mental health services, care closer to home and a changing burden of disease due to a reducing birth rate and an ageing population

- ❖ Science, research, technology and digital advances which will continue to influence and support the way nurses deliver care
- ❖ Shortage of supply and skills to provide consistent, good quality care and associated financial implications
- ❖ The need to address fatigue and excessive workload impacting on the wellbeing of our nurses
- ❖ Changing aspirations and expectations of nurses and a multi-generational workforce.

Alongside these challenges, a shift from reactive to preventive care is required to enable people to make healthy behaviour changes, manage their own health, and long-term illnesses, and make it easier for people to remain active and independent in their homes and communities. This transformation requires a greater focus and investment in shifting services out of hospital to community-based services, and improved integration between services.

This Strategic Nursing Workforce Plan is important to address:

- ❖ The pressures on the NHS
- ❖ The complexity of care and the nature of nursing given societal changes, the cost of living, climate change and the impact on families and communities
- ❖ An increase in health inequities and factors influencing health—such as obesity, physical inactivity, and substance misuse—which continues to contribute to poor health outcomes, rising co-morbidities, and the persistence of overall health decline and inequalities
- ❖ The increasing prevalence of complex, long-term conditions
- ❖ Workforce supply challenges, rising demand and the use of technology to release time to care.

Wales is not alone in facing the challenges of a reduced pool of healthcare workers. Globally, there are significant shortages of healthcare professionals, estimated to be approximately 10 million by 2030<sup>8</sup>, which reinforces the urgency for robust workforce planning initiatives.



## Section 3: Insights from Supply and Demand Modelling

HEIW developed a workforce modelling methodology to better understand the future gap between workforce supply and demand. This was identified as a priority during Phase one and included reviewing work previously undertaken in this area by the Health Foundation.

Workforce modelling helps in understanding complex, multi-dimensional issues, over time through simulations. The modelling projections are not meant to be seen as an accurate prediction of the future and, as with any projection model, the uncertainty associated with the projections increases over the longer time horizon.

The value of modelling is to provide a transparent evidence-base to begin a conversation on what policy decisions and workforce drivers could impact on the workforce.

The supply and demand model for nursing aims to provide data-driven insights to explore the potential impact of changing policy or implementing new initiatives, such as new workforce models.

The model uses a range of data sources, such as population projections, workforce statistics, service activity, and university training data, to project the supply and demand of the nursing workforce over a 5-year horizon.

Supply and demand modelling has several benefits and impacts for workforce planning, development and transformation. These include:

- ❖ Providing a comprehensive and holistic view by considering various factors that affect the nursing workforce e.g. education attrition rates and part-time working
- ❖ Quantifies and visualises the current and future workforce needs and supply gaps, through assessing the impact of different strategies and interventions
- ❖ Facilitates stakeholder engagement and collaboration, providing a common platform and language for discussing and understanding workforce issues and challenges
- ❖ Visualisation of the projected gap between baseline demand and baseline supply and assesses the impact of different scenarios and interventions on the demand and supply.

The supply and demand model produces a range of outputs and indicators that can be used to assess the current and future state of the nursing workforce.

The modelling enables visualisation of the projected gap between baseline demand and baseline supply and to assess the impact of different scenarios and interventions on the demand and supply.

## Progress of modelling in the different fields of nursing

Initial modelling has been completed for adult and mental health nursing. Learning disability nurse modelling has commenced but additional work is needed due to incomplete demand and workforce data.

Child nursing is a very small workforce and therefore modelling needs to be treated with care as assumptions can heavily impact on the projections.

## Further development

The modelling needs to be further refined to reflect other changes in the nursing workforce which could affect supply and demand including any future changes in the skill mix at Agenda for Change Bands 2 and 3 and the planned introduction of the Registered Nursing Associate role (pending legislative amendments).

Further work is needed to refine local modelling assumptions, and additional data sources are needed to better understand community demand. Future workforce modelling will also take account of community by default as a key driver of future focussed workforce delivery.

## Section 4: Strategic Actions

This section sets out the rationale and strategic actions in the context of three key areas:

- ❖ Growing the nursing workforce
- ❖ Transforming the Nursing Workforce
- ❖ Supporting the nursing workforce.

The actions have been developed through triangulating the information from the review of the literature, analysis of workforce data and modelling, alongside engagement and consultation with the nursing and wider workforce.

The actions are focused on growing, transforming and supporting the nursing workforce through a multi-faceted approach and require varying levels of attention and investment. Some actions are new and will require more effort and resources to implement successfully.

Others are existing initiatives that will need to be accelerated to drive progress. Additionally, there are foundational actions already embedded in day-to-day operations as part of business as usual.



### Section 4.1 Growing the nursing workforce

This section explores the essential components of nursing workforce supply, focusing on the retention, attraction, and commissioning of pre-registration registered nursing programmes. It identifies the key strategic actions to increase the nursing workforce.

Nurses account for approximately 40% of the total NHS Wales workforce, with 29,890 nurses and midwives (headcount) working in July 2024. One thousand four hundred and forty-three registered nurses work in GP Practices<sup>9</sup>, data on those working in social care can be found at [National Social Care Data Portal for Wales](#).

In addition to determining the nursing establishment required, it is essential to consider the overall skill mix and composition of the team supporting individuals. The shifts in the skill mix among registered roles with the introduction of the Registered Nursing Associate (RNA) role, and evolving senior role profiles are all factors that could influence the future shape and supply of the nursing workforce.

These considerations, alongside workforce modelling that incorporates the broader health and care team, will ensure that the workforce is equipped to meet the diverse and evolving needs of individuals effectively.

Reports on future healthcare workforce trends predict healthcare workforce demand will grow faster than the population, with a significant rise in the need for skill mix roles, such as carers and support staff<sup>10</sup>.

There is also a recognition that multi-professional team-based models of care, where professionals work together can improve both quality, access and efficiency of care. The size and shape of the nursing workforce will therefore need to change in response to population demand.

During our consultation, nurses expressed the need for a special focus on increasing workforce numbers through recruitment and retention, finding other solutions to current staffing issues, and reducing vacancies and workload.

#### Band 4 role

Welsh Government has set a policy position to introduce the Registered Nursing Associate (RNA) role in Wales, pending legislative amendments which will create an additional regulated role within the nursing workforce. The RNA is a clinical role that bridges the gap between healthcare support workers and registered nurses, established to deliver person-centred care as part of nursing teams.

RNAs are not a substitute for registered nurses. The skill mix within nursing teams is critical to ensuring safe and effective care for patients. RNAs will complement the work of registered nurses releasing registered nurses to focus on more complex aspects of care and treatment.

RNAs can work with people of all ages, in a variety of settings in health and social care, across all fields of nursing practice. The introduction of this new role to Wales will support widening access into careers in nursing and provide career progression and development opportunities, both for those who work as RNAs but also for individuals who wish to continue with their education and training to become registered nurses.

## Education and training pipeline

Education commissions for pre-registration nurse training programmes have increased over the last 9 years and are currently at record levels, which is supporting a growth in the supply of registered nurses. Whilst this is positive, the size of the pipeline requires continual review to ensure it is reflecting service and population need.

Despite this increase in education commissioning numbers, further work and innovative solutions are needed to increase the uptake of places (fill rates) available on pre-registration nursing programmes. HEIW is committed to addressing this challenge by exploring flexible pathways into nursing, recognising that while the traditional three-year, full-time route will remain available, it may not suit everyone.

Collaborative work with universities has led to initiatives such as a part-time distance learning route for healthcare support workers (HCSWs). HEIW is also progressing a 'Get into Nursing' attraction campaign, alongside developing more 'bridging' modules with Further Education colleges and funding two Access to Nursing 10-week programmes in North and South Wales.

HEIW has worked in partnership with health boards, the Royal College of Nursing (Wales) and Further Education providers to pilot the RCN Wales Healthcare Connect Programme. The aim of this programme is to increase successful applications to pre-registration nursing programmes. More information on evaluation of this programme can be found [here](#).

Additionally, HEIW has introduced international applicants as part of the commissioned pre-registration nursing numbers with a pilot from Autumn 2023 until 2026. One hundred and fifty international students will be recruited annually, with an initial evaluation of the project in December 2024. The initiative will be reviewed each year to ensure that it does not impinge upon opportunities for UK domiciled students.

HEIW has established several routes into pre-registration (RN) nursing to support widening access, rural healthcare and career progression opportunities including:

- ❖ Full time education (3 years)
- ❖ Full time distance learning (3 years)
- ❖ Full time post-graduate pre-registration programme (2 years)
- ❖ Full time accelerated degree programme for HCSWs (2 years)
- ❖ Full time dispersed learning (3 years)
- ❖ Online distance learning for [Return to practice](#)
- ❖ Employed route - part time or flexible for current HCSWs employed in NHS Wales
- ❖ Part time education/term time (4 years).

## Practice education placements

Placement development activity in the next three years will support the consolidation of placement provision in secondary care. Critically however, there will be a much-needed expansion of practice-based learning opportunities in the population and public health arena, primary and community care alongside independent and third sector settings to enable students to have exposure to a wide range of service areas.

This will help develop understanding of the impact of community and family infrastructure and the wider determinants for health, well-being, morbidity and mortality.

Current HEIW mapping data suggests there is further placement capacity available within public health, primary and community care settings that students do not currently access, and which will need a further drive to operationalise. HEIW is implementing a continuing improvement programme for practice-based education and training environments.

In addition to placement capacity further work is required to support the role of the clinical educators. Increases in the nursing workforce and the introduction of new roles in Wales such as the RNA have implications for clinical education and training. The Florence Nightingale Foundation<sup>11</sup> have recently published a [Policy Briefing](#) with recommendations, considered in the 'Growing the Workforce' actions.

## Attraction and image

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) advise that despite an overall increase in university applications, 7% fewer people applied for nursing courses ahead of the January 2024 deadline when compared to the same period previously. Positively, in Wales there was a reported 8% increase from 2,820 to 3,050 applications<sup>12</sup>.

The census report showed that between 2011 and 2021 Wales's younger population decreased by 1.5%, while the older population grew by 17.7%<sup>13</sup>. This shift highlights that fewer young people may potentially choose a career in nursing at the same time as demand for nursing care rises. Attraction into the profession is critical to increase nursing numbers and will require effective recruitment strategies and an understanding of what motivates individuals to enter the profession<sup>14</sup>.

By the end of the decade there will be 5 generations in the workforce (Baby Boomers 1946-1964, Gen X 1965-1980, Millennials 1981-1996, Gen Z 1997-2012 and Gen Alpha 2013 onwards). Generational shifts are driven by various factors, including geopolitical events, technological innovations, digital transformation, economic trends and cultural changes.

These shifts have a profound impact on the workplace, influencing communication styles, leadership approaches and expectations regarding working conditions, benefits and career development<sup>15</sup>.

Future workforce expectations will focus more on job satisfaction, career development, work-life balance, and technology, as well as the opportunity for more specialism and advanced skills. The nursing workforce must therefore adapt and optimise the benefits of a multi-generational workforce to increase productivity and adapt to workforce expectations and needs.

During our consultation, nurses expressed the need to raise the profile of nursing careers through a public campaign, ensuring equitable access to work experience opportunities, and to establish a clear vision for nursing in Wales highlighting the contribution that nurses make to wider society and well-being as the most trusted profession.

The consultation highlighted that nursing is often misunderstood, undervalued, and underappreciated, rather than seen as the highly skilled and safety critical profession it is. Depiction of nursing in the media and popular culture plays a strong role in shaping and reinforcing impressions of, and stereotypes about nursing<sup>16</sup>.

Whilst the public holds a generally positive view of nurses, recognising their dedication and essential role in delivering care, this perception often overlooks the complexity and diversity of nursing roles, especially those outside hospital settings, such as public health, community care and specialist nursing.

The portrayal of nurses as 'heroes' during the COVID-19 pandemic increased public appreciation but also reinforced outdated stereotypes, which can detract from acknowledging their advanced skills and professional expertise<sup>17, 18</sup>. We must therefore raise the profile of nursing as a dynamic, science-driven career that offers diverse and rewarding opportunities.

This includes actively encouraging more men and individuals from a wide range of diverse backgrounds and cultures to pursue nursing, fostering a workforce that reflects the communities it serves and enhances healthcare through increased diversity and inclusivity. HEIW has recently published a [strategic-framework-for-nhs-wales-careers](#). This aims to attract people to roles in health services creating a sustainable workforce for the future, whilst widening access to health careers and opportunities.

## Retention

Retaining nurses is an essential part of workforce supply and directly impacts on the sustainability of healthcare services. High leaver rates have many implications including increased costs for recruiting and training new staff, loss of skills and experience, and reduced quality of care.

In NHS Wales, retaining experienced and skilled staff is crucial for maintaining organisational stability, knowledge, continuity of patient care, and ensuring a secure, motivated workforce. Experienced practitioners bring invaluable expertise, including a holistic understanding of health across the life course, awareness of wider health determinants, and the ability to mentor and guide junior staff, care partners, and the broader team around the person. Implementing effective nurse retention strategies can significantly alleviate the pressures on workforce supply.

Losing staff with high levels of knowledge, skills and experience takes years to replace which is significant when considering why, despite increased growth in the workforce, productivity levels have not increased<sup>19</sup>. When graduates enter the workforce, they need time to acquire experience and skills post qualification.

In 2022/23, more than 12,000 UK nurses applied for a Certificate of Current Professional Status (CCPS) indicating they are pursuing options to work outside the UK which is more than double when compared to the previous year, and four times more than in 2018/19<sup>20</sup>. A multifaceted approach is required to address this, focusing on improving working conditions, offering flexible working, providing opportunities for preceptorship and supervision, succession planning, learning and career development.

The Electronic Staff Record data shows that 20% of nurses leave in the first four years post qualification and a high percentage of those are aged under 29 years. This implies we need to do more to retain our early career and younger nursing workforce. There are also a high number of leavers aged 55+ years.

This is likely due to retirement, however, changes to pensions and the normal pension age (currently 67) means there are likely to be more older nurses in the workforce. Based on predicted healthy life expectancy this may require changes to the workplace to encourage and support older nurses to remain in work, for example, improving workplace design, adapting Human Resource policies, addressing negative attitudes, supporting the use of new technologies and highlighting that job-related training remains important in mid-life allowing for re-skilling opportunities<sup>21</sup>.

Understanding why nurses are leaving would help in the development of targeted retention solutions. The Electronic Staff Record (ESR) data lacks robust and meaningful completion of the 'reason for leaving' field. However, the ESR data shows that resignation is the highest reason given for nurses leaving at almost 50% and for over a third who resign the reason for leaving is not captured. These are two key data capture areas that require improvement.

To support retaining and valuing nurses in NHS Wales, HEIW appointed a national Multi-professional Retention Lead and has funded local Multi-professional Retention Lead posts in each Health Board and Trust. In 2024 HEIW published a [Nurse Retention Plan](#) to support organisations to address the challenges of nurse retention, a [Retention Guide and Self-Assessment Tool](#) form part of the plan.

This plan includes actions to address supporting internationally educated nurses, career planning, [flexible working](#) and retirement, health and wellbeing and recognition and incentives. Focused efforts are required to retain internationally educated nurses and international nursing students, they are essential to strengthening the Welsh healthcare workforce, addressing local staffing challenges, and fostering an inclusive and culturally competent healthcare system.



## International recruitment

In addition to a 3-year pilot of international recruitment of pre-registration students, international recruitment of registered nurses continues in Wales. Our aim is to grow the domestic nursing workforce and reduce reliance on international recruitment, which is not sustainable in the long-term due to the global shortages of health care workers.

 **Actions:**  
Growing the nursing workforce

	Action	Delivery	Status
1	Continue to develop the supply and demand modelling to incorporate improved data and new roles such as the Registered Nursing Association to inform the annual Education and Training Plan going forward. This will be enacted through the usual education and training process.	HEIW	New
2	Target the nurse retention activities at early and late career nurses as part of the Retention Programme to reduce the turnover rate to 5%.	HEIW, Health Boards and Trusts	Accelerate
3	Implement the Registered Nursing Associate (Band 4) role within the nursing workforce by collaborating with partners to ensure its effective integration, aligned with the parameters of practice for the role, which will be published by the Chief Nursing Officer in 2025.  Establish flexible routes for RNAs enabling them to become registered nurses.	HEIW, Health Boards, Trusts and Social Care	New
4	Initiate a redesigned Train Work Live innovative marketing and attraction campaign for nursing careers, to strengthen the image of nursing, inspire career choices and respond to the multi-generational workforce. Utilise different modalities to advertise, advocate and raise awareness of the nursing profession.	HEIW	New
5	Develop a nursing work experience model as part of the Strategic Framework for NHS Wales Careers to welcome and encourage potential applicants into NHS Wales.	HEIW	Accelerate
6	Improve nursing workforce data quality so that national modelling and scenario planning can be refined and improved. Working with NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership, NHS Executive, Health Boards and Trusts.  Support Health boards and Trusts in developing local nursing workforce modelling to inform workforce planning.	NHS Wales Organisations	Accelerate

	Action	Delivery	Status
7	Broaden and expand clinical placement opportunities aligned to commissioning numbers for pre-registration nurses and nursing associates, with a focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>primary and community care, independent and third sector settings</li> <li>public and population health environments</li> <li>innovative models of supervision and assessment</li> <li>expansion of Practice Education Facilitator resources</li> <li>placement opportunities with Digital Health and Care Wales, NHS Executive, Chief Nursing Office, and Public Health Wales.</li> </ul>	HEIW	Accelerate
8	Strengthen the clinical educator workforce to meet future demand. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop a definition and role descriptor for the clinical nurse educator role</li> <li>improve workforce data on the number of clinical nurse educators in the workforce</li> <li>develop an All-Wales competency framework and career progression pathway for the clinical educator role</li> <li>explore the development of Education Internships</li> <li>target and market existing leadership programmes to the clinical educator workforce</li> <li>identify the impact of clinical educators on key health and care metrics</li> </ul>	HEIW, Health Boards and Trusts (Education Leads)	Underpinning
9	Enhance the readiness of those Band 5 Registered Nurses who want to step into Band 6 roles by developing a national, quality-assured competency framework to support their progression and application for these positions as they arise.	HEIW	Accelerate
10	Explore opportunities for increasing the Return to Practice supply pipeline.	HEIW	Underpinning

## Section 4.2 Transforming the nursing workforce

The landscape of healthcare is rapidly evolving, driven by advancements in technology, changes in patient demographics, increase of patient co-morbidities, increased patient expectations and the development of new models of care. The nursing workforce must continue to adapt to these shifts to meet the growing and diverse population healthcare needs.

Healthcare automation will enhance nurses' roles by reducing administrative burdens, allowing them to focus more on person-centred care and complex clinical decision-making. It will also require nurses to adapt to new technologies, necessitating ongoing education and digital proficiency. While automation can improve efficiency and outcomes, it also emphasises the irreplaceable value of the human connection in nursing care.

This section explores a number of workforce transformations that will influence the future of nursing, including the integration of new roles, the shift to community-based care, the rise of virtual nursing, the expansion of prescribing pathways, and the development of digital and genomic capabilities.

The strategic actions within this plan will enhance workforce transformation to reflect advancements in technology, changes in patient demographics, new workforce models and models of care to meet the evolving needs of the population of Wales.

### Team around the person

Nurses play a central role in multi profession teams by ensuring the healthcare process flows smoothly. Nurses are the touchpoint between patients and the rest of the team playing an active role in coordinating care, communication and advocating for patient needs<sup>22</sup>.

The central, safety-critical role of nurses in a multi-professional workforce model lies in their ability to provide holistic, person-centred care while ensuring the safety, continuity, and quality of care. Whilst this plan focuses on strengthening and supporting the nursing profession, interdisciplinary teamwork optimises patient outcomes<sup>23</sup>.

By working collaboratively with other healthcare professionals, nurses can ensure holistic care for patients that address all aspects of their health: physical, emotional, psychological, and social. Studies have shown that such teams can greatly enhance patient satisfaction and recovery rates and reduce hospital readmissions<sup>24, 25, 26</sup>.

The intended rationale is that professionals care for patients in a more holistic way – they exchange information, make shared decisions and plan interventions to meet patients' needs, contributing to better quality care<sup>27</sup>.

Multi- professional and multi-agency workforce models are expected to become the standard practice by 2030, supporting a more collaborative and efficient healthcare system<sup>28</sup>.

A Healthier Wales<sup>29</sup> emphasises the importance of providing care closer to home through a multi-professional, patient-centred model. Achieving this vision requires collaboration across traditional professional and organisational boundaries to deliver seamless services always ensuring that quality is the key driver. This involves nursing maximising their existing skills, developing new roles, and adopting innovative ways of working to address the holistic needs of patients and service users.

## Expanding roles in public health

By 2030, nursing in Wales will need to have better skills knowledge and capacity to identify and influence the social determinants of health and demonstrate diverse experience of how working with individuals, families and communities can be enabled to access and make better choices around the building blocks for health.

They will need to be furnished with a skill set which identifies health inequalities and how these influence an individual's ability to prevent ill health, make healthy choices, and live a longer life in good health. This will involve leveraging epidemiological data and applying unique nursing expertise to improve health opportunities across the life course, from early childhood to the complex needs of an ageing population.

Pre- and post-registration education programmes will play a pivotal role, alongside the refinement and promotion of specialist practice at both individual and community levels. These efforts will enable the delivery of proactive, upstream approaches to prioritising population health, addressing inequalities, and enhancing overall wellbeing.

Nurses currently make an important contribution to improving the health of individuals, families, and communities. Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (SCPHNs), including health visitors (working with families and children aged 0-5 years) and school nurses (school age children) play a vital role in addressing health inequalities.

There is, however, a significant gap in the age groups eligible for these services, particularly in the Welsh context of a decreasing birth rate and an increasing ageing population.

Developing a [SCPHN](#) Public Health Nurse (PHN) role, would help to bridge this gap providing services across the wider age and population range. PHNs could support the health of older adults by focusing on health promotion, prevention, and early intervention, which improves quality of life, health outcomes, reduces healthcare costs, and promotes independence.

They can conduct regular health assessments, offer lifestyle coaching, manage chronic diseases, address frailty and co-morbidities and lead preventive screenings and vaccination programmes, alongside advocacy for age-friendly community policies. They may work in roles across a wide range of sectors and settings, applying their specialist public health knowledge and skills to the people, communities and populations they serve<sup>30</sup>.

This would be an exciting addition to the current career pathway opportunities available to our nursing workforce through postgraduate education, with roles integrated into a redefined community model, working collaboratively as part of the multi-professional team. A focus on the role nurses can make in population health, epidemiology, policy development, research, evaluation and primary and secondary prevention are central to this plan.

### Shift to community care

A shift towards sustainable integrated teams in primary and community care is necessary to manage long-term conditions and promote self-care<sup>31</sup>. The current model of health and care needs to change, from a fragmented system dominated by hospital care to a more preventive, integrated (primary, community, social and hospital services) model<sup>32</sup>. The [Primary Care Model for Wales](#) (PCMW) is a model for primary and community care, developed as a whole system approach to sustainable and accessible local health and wellbeing care.

Focusing on place-based care, care closer to home and multi-professional working. It describes how care will be delivered locally, now and in the future, as part of a whole-system approach to deliver A healthier Wales<sup>29</sup>. This model of care will address local health needs and improve the health and wellbeing of the population rather than traditional siloed and fragmented services<sup>31</sup>.

Our consultation showed the nursing workforce feel they have a role in moving care closer to home, contributing to the prevention agenda and in managing the increase in long-term conditions as highlighted by the NHS in 10+ Years Report<sup>21</sup>. For this to be realised it must be supported and appropriately resourced with better structures and integration between health and social care.

In Wales the [Enhanced Community Care](#) model is supporting the shift towards community care and has the potential to support two key areas impacting on the system: reducing attendances and admissions to hospital for 'step up' and secondly to support reductions in length of stay in hospital through 'step down' enhanced community care, where the acute episode of care is completed in the home setting<sup>33</sup>.

The use of technology is helping to increase the productivity of nursing within the community setting, demonstrating that it is at the cutting edge of nursing workforce development. This will need to be further understood to assist in workforce planning going forward as workloads change and methods to meet the community demand develop. Developing accurate workforce data to show the numbers of nurses working in primary, community and social care will support a better understanding of where nurses provide care and monitoring the shift of care.

## Enhanced, advanced and consultant practice

Providing more community-based care will require an increase in the number of nurses working at enhanced, advanced and consultant levels in the community setting. Nurses play a key role in managing long term conditions, through holistic assessments, care coordination, and public health approaches.

The Electronic Staff Record shows there were 608 advanced nurse practitioners and 56 consultant nurses in Wales in 2024. Expanding the number of specialist and advanced nurses working in multi-professional teams will strengthen Wales's capacity to manage complex healthcare needs, improve population health outcomes, and address workforce challenges across a range of healthcare services.

In 2023 HEIW developed a [Professional Framework for Enhanced, Advanced and Consultant Clinical Practice](#). This workforce resource defines and provides a clear understanding of enhanced, advanced and consultant practitioner roles. The NMC consider that advanced nurse practitioners are well placed and able to enhance the capacity of service transformation and delivery and are proceeding to introduce additional regulation of advanced nursing practice in the UK<sup>34</sup>.

Nurses need advanced and remote clinical decision-making skills to support the required expansion of roles, particularly for nurse practitioners, advanced practice, and community-based nurses, to enable them to independently assess, diagnose and treat people in a timely and effective way.

These skills are especially important in rural or underserved communities, where access to specialised healthcare is limited, and in telehealth, where nurses rely on virtual assessments and digital data. Advanced decision-making helps nurses navigate complex cases, leading to quicker interventions, improved outcomes, and better overall quality of care.

## Quality improvement, innovation and research

Quality improvement, innovation, and research are essential to enable nurses for example to identify and address gaps in healthcare, enhance outcomes, and adapt to the changing needs of patients and communities. Improvement Cymru offer different levels of quality improvement courses for nurses working in health and social care via the [Improvement Cymru Academy](#).

In addition, [Health Care Research Wales](#) offer advice, guidance and training to support research projects. By engaging in research and fostering innovation, nurses contribute to evidence-based practices that drive sustainable improvements in healthcare systems. In Wales, this focus aligns with national priorities such as A Healthier Wales<sup>29</sup>, supporting a culture of continuous learning and enabling nurses to play a pivotal role in transforming services in the future.

## Genomics

As the largest healthcare professional group, nurses have a central role in bringing the benefits of genomics to everyday health care which will require a transformation in nursing practice, education, and research. All nurses will need to develop an understanding of genomics, its impact on future healthcare and treatments and any associated ethical issues to maximise its use within care pathways<sup>35</sup>.

Whilst nurses' knowledge and understanding of genomics is still, in its infancy<sup>36</sup> there is an opportunity for nurses to be part of and influence the transformation of pathways and genomic services to maximise their potential. HEIW recently developed a [Strategic Workforce Plan for Genomics](#) and a multi-professional Genomics E-Learning available at [Y Ty Dysgu](#).

## Prescribing

The NMC [Future Nurse Proficiencies](#) equip undergraduate nurses with foundation knowledge in pharmacology. The NMC report that the number of nurses with a Nurse Independent/Supplementary Prescriber qualification has increased significantly since March 2018, from 39,677 to 59,326<sup>37</sup>.

From a workforce perspective this change in practice promotes professional autonomy and career advancement for the nursing workforce. A clear prescribing pathway is needed, to ensure nurses have access to the necessary education and resources to further develop and utilise their new skills, expand their roles and enhance patient care.

## Nursing in a digital era

The digital agenda transforms nursing by augmenting care, combining traditional care with new technologies, focusing on holistic well-being and prevention<sup>38</sup>.

In addition, the evolving landscape of healthcare is providing new opportunities for nurses to take on emerging roles in areas such as telehealth, clinical informatics, health informatics, and remote monitoring<sup>39</sup>.

Technology will revolutionise diagnostics in the future and opens up exciting opportunities for nurses to facilitate a patient driven method of collaboration, sharing results and information outside of a traditional consultation model, enabling and empowering ownership of health outcomes.

As well as increasing nursing workforce numbers, nurses need to be freed up from work that technology or automation can do. Nurses continue to report excessive workload, which must be addressed so nurses can utilise their unique skills and expertise within the multiprofessional team. The move from the traditional hierarchical or delegated model to a distributed model across the care team is essential if nurses are to practice autonomously and effectively.

To support nurses to practice in a more digital healthcare environment will require a blend of technical proficiency, critical thinking abilities, adaptability, and ethical awareness. From the engagement nurses viewed digital and technological advances positively.

There was a strong view that advances in digital are taking place at different rates but have not yet adopted the whole-system approach required to drive significant workforce or service transformation. To maximise efficiency and improve productivity, current systems needed to be better joined up to avoid, for example, logging in multiple times to different systems. Nurses must lead and participate in the design and implementation of digital health solutions including AI.

Nurses also want ongoing digital skills training to maintain and enhance their skills, keep pace with new technological advances and overcome concerns and resistance relating to new systems. HEIW has developed a [Digital capability framework](#) to identify the skills, attitudes and behaviours to increase digital capability across NHS Wales. The Framework is designed as a self-evaluation of digital capability and identifies areas for development, signposting individuals to further resources.

HEIW has worked with education providers to ensure that digital skills are included in undergraduate programmes, including data analytics, artificial intelligence and digital healthcare technologies.

Digital literacy is built into all HEIWs post graduate education contracts. In collaboration with Agored Cymru HEIW has developed a level 2 digital qualification for HCSWs [Unit \(agored.cymru\)](#) alongside qualifications as part of the apprenticeship framework including a level 3 and 4 qualification in Health Informatics [Qualification \(agored.cymru\)](#).

The rise of mobile devices and applications will expand telehealth, benefiting those with multiple chronic conditions and those in rural areas. Telehealth enables accessible and timely clinical interventions, health promotion, education, assessment, and monitoring, without requiring individuals to leave their homes or workplaces.

In addition to telehealth the role of the virtual nurse has been developed in America and other countries. Virtual nurses' complete admission health and medication history, discharge health promotion and education and other administrative work to provide bedside nurses more hands-on time with people.

Virtual care will provide flexibilities for nurses, reducing physical demands or onsite presence whilst continuing to care for people and lend their experience to bedside nurses. This innovative model of virtual care should be explored further to consider its benefits and risks and suitability for implementation in Wales.

It is important to remember that digital transformation goes beyond workforce efficiency, playing a crucial role in wellbeing and health outcomes. As digital skills become essential for improving quality and reducing health inequalities, digital exclusion risks worsening these disparities by limiting access to healthcare and necessary resources.

The Access Denied<sup>40</sup> report highlights how older people are disadvantaged by healthcare's digital shift and calls for staff to enhance their digital capabilities. Equipping Nurses, with these skills, will ensure individuals and the families they care for can navigate digital health tools, leading to better health outcomes and improved quality of life.

## Environmental sustainability

As the largest part of the health and care workforce, nursing is at the forefront of providing care to communities and people affected by climate change<sup>41</sup>. Nurses play a key role in environmental sustainability initiatives across NHS Wales as outlined in [Sustainability in Nursing](#) with practical guidance available at [Climate Smart Strategies in Nursing and Midwifery Practice](#).

Building on this work, HEIW will prepare nursing and midwifery professionals to deliver sustainable healthcare across the system, to meet the requirements of the [NHS Wales Decarbonisation Strategic Delivery Plan](#) and support the delivery of Welsh Government's ambition for a net zero public sector in Wales by 2030.

HEIW will fund twenty training places for nurses and midwives on the Centre for Sustainability Introduction to Sustainable Healthcare Course 2024/25 as part of our Climate Smart Champions project.

This area is fundamentally linked to the opportunities and risks associated with the impact on health and well-being now and for future generations, as well as the role nurses play in environmental, industrial and occupational risk factors to health.



## Actions: Nursing workforce transformation

	Action	Delivery	Status
11	<p>Support the acceleration of community focused nursing roles by commissioning education supporting enhanced and advanced skills and underpinning the shift to prevention and primary and community care.</p> <p>Early priorities to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Work with Social Care Wales to identify educational requirements for nurses, including a Health and Social Care Specialist Practice Qualification (SPQ)</li> <li>❖ Commission a Community Learning Disability and Mental Health SPQ</li> <li>❖ Commission Specialist Community Public Health Nurse, Public Health Nurse (PHN) and Occupational Health Nurse (OHN) training programmes</li> <li>❖ Through the Education and Training Plan make recommendations to increase Specialist Community Public Health Nurse commissioning numbers for School Nursing and Health Visiting</li> </ul>	HEIW, Social Care Wales and the Strategic Programme for Primary Care (SPPC)	New

	Action	Delivery	Status
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Commission Advanced Practice level 7 education for nurses and fund PhD level learning and development for nurses</li> <li>❖ Commission training focused on remote and advanced clinical decision-making</li> <li>❖ Develop work-based learning for the integrated health and care approach, from preventative to enhanced community care</li> <li>❖ Develop training in motivational interviewing skills for health professionals</li> <li>❖ Support the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) in collaborating with partners to assess the feasibility and requirements for fast-track and pre-registration dual registration initiatives</li> <li>❖ Complete focused work on the future of population and public health nursing as a career choice, to influence health and well-being for now and for future generations</li> </ul>		
12	With partners complete a review of existing technology that is being used locally that can be developed in nursing through spread and scale and review emerging technology that can be used most effectively by nurses, building on the Topol Review <sup>42</sup> and the <a href="#">Digital and data strategy for health and social care in Wales</a> .	HEIW, DHCW, SPPC, Health Boards and Trusts	New
13	Develop and implement a Genomics Workforce Development Toolkit and Capability Framework in the nursing profession to prepare the wider nursing workforce to maximise the benefits of genomics.	HEIW	New
14	Review nurse education curricula with HEIs to ensure they provide future nurses with knowledge and skills in genomics, public health, digital requirements and automation.  Evaluate the content on prevention, population health, and social determinants within post-registration curricula, incorporating public health expertise to support its inclusion and relevance.	HEIW	Underpinning
15	Support Welsh Government and work collectively with nurse leadership and key partners to explore the feasibility and requirements for defining and implementing a 'team around the person' approach to care delivery.	HEIW, WG, NHS Organisations and Social Care	New

	Action	Delivery	Status
16	<p>Executive Directors of Nursing will lead an initiative to outline the necessary steps within nursing to facilitate the shift of care to the community aligned to the refreshed actions in A Healthier Wales.</p> <p>Work with the Strategic Programme for Primary Care (SPPC) and others to scope the requirements for the development of a community nursing role such as a Community Matron. Responding to the changing needs of the population, focussing on prevention, case management of 'at risk' populations and pre-frailty.</p> <p>Work with the SPPC to deliver the vision for primary and community nursing in Wales.</p>	HEIW, SPPC, Health Boards, Trusts and Social Care	Accelerate
17	Review access to research skills and Quality Improvement training for the nursing workforce, informed by the CNO/AHP Lead Research Action Plan set to be published in spring 2025, to enhance improvement capacity and capability.	HEIW and Welsh Government	Accelerate
18	Support innovative models of care delivery through scoping the education and skills needed to implement virtual nurse roles, ensuring they are supported, clinically and professionally, across all settings of care and develop a workforce model with Social Care, Health Boards and Trusts.	HEIW	New
19	Review and strengthen the current prescribing pathway and ongoing professional development for nurses in the context of new technology, capitalising on advancements in quality and safety to facilitate our prescriber ready registrants to become active prescribers.	HEIW	New
20	<p>Utilise the Digital Capability Framework to identify and address areas for digital skills development for the nursing workforce.</p> <p>Work with others, to scope and develop a digital competency passport for nurses, based on the Digital Capability Framework for healthcare in Wales.</p>	HEIW, DHCW and Health Boards	Accelerate

## Section 4.3 Supporting the nursing workforce

It is essential this plan recognises the feedback from nurses about the importance of culture, working environments, career development opportunities and continued professional development. These are all key aspects of wellbeing which was the central focus of the Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care<sup>28</sup>.

### Wellbeing

Sickness rates for nurses (and midwives) have been over 6% since 2019, rising to 7.2% in 2022/23. Anxiety and stress account for 29% of absences, the highest contributor to sickness rates. Nurses' health and wellbeing are affected by the demands of their workplace, and this affects the quality and safety of the care they provide<sup>43</sup>.

It is essential therefore to address the culture, systems, structures, and policies to improve the working environments and reduce risks and stresses that lead to burnout, fatigue, and poor physical and mental health among the nursing workforce<sup>44</sup>. Nurses are also influenced by the wider determinants of health, including the cost-of-living crisis and the multiple roles they may play in their own lives which may limit their opportunity to take healthy choices for their own mental and physical well-being.

The responsibility for nurses' wellbeing is shared between individual nurses and those who shape the environment in which they practice and work. Individual nurses' responsibility for their own wellbeing is enhanced with support from the system, leaders and managers, and through a culture where wellbeing is prioritised<sup>44</sup>.

To provide support for staff wellbeing HEIW has published [Staff Health and Wellbeing - A Best Practice Guide for NHS Wales](#), alongside a range of supportive resources.

### Preceptorship, clinical supervision and mentoring

During the consultation nurses called for a more positive working environment with opportunities for clinical supervision to support learning and development. The Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) for Wales has published a national position statement<sup>45</sup> [Nursing Preceptorship and Restorative Clinical Supervision](#).

This includes preceptorship to support individuals through the transition phase from student to registered nurse, and a model of restorative supervision supporting registered nurses throughout their career pathway.

There is collective and individual responsibility for ensuring preceptorship and restorative clinical supervision is embedded and runs seamlessly throughout the workplace, fostering a culture which values and promotes a positive work experience and supports continual learning and improvement<sup>46</sup>.

In addition to preceptorship, legacy mentoring offers essential support for early-career nurses and those in new roles. Experienced nurses act as legacy mentors, providing coaching, mentoring, and pastoral guidance alongside passing down skills and inspiring new nurses.

During our engagement, nurses expressed interest in returning post-retirement to share their expertise and knowledge. With 18.5% of the Welsh nursing and midwifery workforce aged over 55 years and many nearing retirement, expanding legacy mentor roles could support younger and early-career nurses and help address the high attrition rate amongst this group.

### Career frameworks

There are many diverse roles and pathways to take within the nursing profession. A structured career framework is essential for guiding nurses through various stages of their professional journey in health and social care. It offers a clear pathway for progression from entry-level positions to more specialised, advanced and consultant roles, ensuring nurses can visualise and achieve their long-term career goals.

By providing a structured roadmap, these frameworks help in supporting retention by fostering career satisfaction and reducing burnout, as nurses are more likely to stay in roles where they see potential for growth<sup>46</sup>. The integration of career frameworks helps to align workforce capabilities with population health needs.

### Portfolio careers

A survey conducted by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in 2021<sup>47</sup> revealed significant trends toward a shift in how nurses approach their careers, including a move towards portfolio working. Nurses are looking for more control over their work schedules, environments, and career trajectories.

A portfolio career offers the flexibility to pursue different roles, such as clinical practice, education, leadership, or research, often leading to greater job satisfaction<sup>48</sup>. This trend towards portfolio careers reflects a broader movement within the workforce, where professionals seek varied and flexible work arrangements to better balance their professional and personal lives while addressing economic challenges.

### Continuous professional development (CPD)

There is a lack of equity in supporting professional development both within the profession and in comparison, with other professions. The CPD Strategy being developed by HEIW, provides a set of principles to improve consistency and standardisation for CPD activity, recognising that this is a core professional development requirement.

### Healthcare Support Workers

The Cavendish Review 10 Years on<sup>49</sup>, highlighted the importance of CPD opportunities for healthcare support workers (HCSW). HCSWs make up around 34% of the nursing workforce in Wales, with more needed to provide career progression and educational opportunities for this important and large part of the nursing team.

A key finding from the Review identified that support workers feel the NHS is not getting the best from them and that they could contribute more if they had greater access to learning and development. The review recommended several actions to strengthen the training and education of HCSWs. In Wales, this will be addressed through the development of a career framework, which will identify educational opportunities and career progression pathways for Agenda for Change bands 2 - 9.

HEIW has developed a resource page with information for [Healthcare Support Workers](#) on learning opportunities and career development including how to progress onto a pre-registration nursing programme.

In addition, HEIW in collaboration with Agored Cymru has developed a number of leadership units and qualifications at level 2 and 3 [Unit Search Results \(agored.cymru\)](#) providing opportunities for leadership development for HCSWs.

## Welsh language

The people of Wales engage with health and care services when they are at their most vulnerable. Therefore, ensuring they can do so in their preferred or native language, is an integral part of health and care to achieve better clinical outcomes. HEIW has recently launched a new training resource to support workforce planning for the Welsh language available [here](#).

HEIW will continue to contribute to 'An Active Offer' providing a service in Welsh without someone having to ask for it. Creating a culture that provides a proactive language offer so that people can access care, as equal partners, through the medium of Welsh.

## Leadership

Effective leadership is the cornerstone of a resilient and responsive nursing workforce and will underpin effective workforce transformation. In an era marked by rapid changes in healthcare delivery, an ageing population, and increasing complexity of care, strong nursing leadership is more critical than ever.

This section explores the essential role of leadership within the nursing profession, focusing on strategies for developing nurse leaders, fostering leadership skills at all levels, and building a culture of collaborative practice and identifies the key actions to achieve this.

A new generation of nurse leaders is needed, who recognise the importance of diversity and can use and build on the increasing evidence base supporting the link between social determinants of health and health status<sup>50</sup>.

Nurse leaders at every level and across all settings can strengthen the profession's contribution to meet the needs of underserved individuals, and communities to prioritise reductions in health inequalities<sup>51</sup>. Having nurses in positions of influence and power leads to more people centred and integrated approaches to healthcare which will require nurse leaders to be involved in high-level planning and design to strengthen health systems<sup>16</sup>.

The evidence linking compassionate leadership, wellbeing of the workforce and quality of care is well known and underpins all the leadership development programmes and resources in NHS Wales.

The consultation highlighted that nurses want their leaders and managers to be visible, kind, and compassionate, working alongside them with a common purpose. Visible and compassionate leadership was agreed as key for staff morale and addressing real issues, setting high workplace standards, fostering teamwork, and improving the work environment.

There is a need to ensure that compassionate leadership development is available to nurses at all levels. HEIW has developed [Gwella](#) a leadership portal for leaders and managers at all levels within NHS Wales and social care. HEIW offer several compassionate leadership programmes, both multiprofessional such as the [Advanced Clinical Leadership Programme](#) and nursing specific such as [The Florence Nightingale Foundation Leadership and Transformation Scholarship](#).

HEIW also provide opportunities through the [Welsh Clinical Leadership Training Fellowship](#). These leadership opportunities align to the Chief Nursing Officer's ambition to invest and develop nurse leaders to build a talent pipeline at all levels, with the initial focus on senior levels.

## Succession planning and talent management

HEIW has established an NHS Wales Succession Planning and Talent Management Community of Practice, aligned to NHS Wales [National Succession Planning Strategy](#), which sets out the ambition to deliver a pipeline of talent of NHS staff at local and national levels.

This network is responsible for co-created tools, resources and guides that support local organisations in talent management and succession planning processes with a focus on increasing diversity. The Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) for Health and Social Care in Wales<sup>52</sup> highlights the barriers to ethnic minority staff progressing into leadership and lack of representation in leadership.

More needs to be done to create more ethnically diverse leadership pipelines to ensure we see diversity at the most senior levels.

## Management, mentoring and coaching

More investment is required in leadership and management training, creating specific pathways for career progression across nursing with effective, consistent succession planning in place.

This needs to be supported by opportunities for mentoring and coaching which offers several benefits for nurses: contributing to their professional growth, job satisfaction, and overall healthcare quality. HEIW are developing a Management Competency Framework for operational managers, due for publication in 2025 and are developing a 6-month Compassionate Leadership Programme for [Emerging Leaders](#).

University College Dublin are researching the impact of collective leadership on team performance and healthcare safety and have developed several resources for use within teams that can be found [here](#).

## Compassionate people processes

Disciplinary processes impact nurses' careers and lives, and they should receive compassionate treatment and support from colleagues and managers. Greater awareness of these processes is crucial, with a focus on retaining nurses, and effective supervision to support nurses during disciplinary procedures<sup>53</sup>.

Through HEIW's [National Improving Employee Investigations Programme](#) we are working with a group of NHS organisations to embed compassionate approaches. The NMC have the regulatory authority to investigate and, if needed, act where serious concerns are raised about a nurse, midwife or nursing associate's fitness to practise.

If there are concerns about a nurse, midwife or nursing associate's fitness to practise, the NMC encourage people to speak first to the employer about their concerns to see if these can be resolved at a local level. The NMC note an increase in the number of concerns raised this year by employers, alongside a disproportionate number of referrals about men and/or black professionals<sup>54</sup>.

## NMC Revalidation and The NMC Code

The NMC have announced a review of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) [The Code](#), this is timely as The Code was published in 2018 and needs to be updated to reflect the multigenerational workforce and changing population needs.

The NMC Code is the foundation for the professional practice of the nursing workforce.



### Actions: Supporting our workforce

	Action	Delivery	Status
21	Publish a future focused Career Framework illustrating the flexibility of progression routes and diversity of opportunities from healthcare support worker level to consultant nurse level.  Review and scope the consultant nurse workforce to inform national and local workforce planning to support service transformation and improve patient outcomes.	HEIW, Health Boards, Trusts and Social Care	New
22	Develop a culture of continuous learning for nurses through the adoption of HEIWs CPD Strategy.	HEIW, Health Boards and Trusts and Social Care	Underpinning
23	Promote the availability of Welsh language training courses provided by HEIW to all nurses in line with the More than Just Words action plan and existing statutory requirements.	HEIW	Accelerate
24	Implement the national approach to succession planning for the top three tiers (Chief Executive, Executive Director and Deputy Director level) of nurse leadership, with targeted leadership development interventions as needed.	HEIW	New
25	Launch a pilot NHS Wales Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Future Senior Leader Talent Pool to support and develop Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic leaders, promoting diversity in senior management roles on a multi professional basis.	HEIW	New
26	Implement an all-Wales scheme for mentoring and coaching across all levels of nursing to support professional and career development.	HEIW	Accelerate
27	Implement a train the trainer approach for compassionate leadership and compassionate people practices within nursing to develop a compassionate culture.	HEIW and Health Boards	New

	Action	Delivery	Status
28	Introduce essential leadership and management programmes for Senior Nurses and Matrons to develop required skills and behaviours in line with relevant codes of practice and competence frameworks.	HEIW	New
29	Target and market existing leadership programmes to advanced, consultant and aspiring nurse leaders across all settings.	HEIW and Health Boards and Trusts	Accelerate
30	Continue to target and promote wellbeing resources to nurses that are available at a local and national level.	HEIW	Underpinning
31	Build on the Chief Nursing Officer's policy position of Restorative Clinical Supervision through further development of the Professional Nurse Advocate role in Wales.	HEIW, SPPC, Health Boards and Trusts	Underpinning
32	Work with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) on the review and refresh of The Code and Revalidation for nurses.	NMC & HEIW	Underpinning

## Section 5: Benefits

Implementation of the actions within the plan will bring benefits across different stakeholder groups:

Benefits to patients/citizens	Measure
Supported by a nursing workforce who work as part of the multi-professional team to provide person-centred care and through public health approaches influences the family, the life course and the community.	PROMS/PREMS data.
Interventions based on public health approaches to promote and improve individual, community and population health and wellbeing and evidence of nursing contribution to national policy and programmes which are influencing social determinants of health and national public health programmes.	Public health/population data. E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Breastfeeding rates</li> <li>❖ Vaccination uptake</li> <li>❖ Safeguarding KPIs</li> <li>❖ Falls data</li> <li>❖ Secondary prevention data.</li> </ul>
Providing a wider range of and extending the access to health services in the community.	PROMS/PREMS data.

Benefits to the nursing workforce	Measure
Increased nursing workforce capacity and capability.	Increased workforce numbers. Reduced vacancies. Reduced agency usage.
Clear career pathways and progression routes.	Implementation of the career framework.
Increased wellbeing, motivation and job satisfaction.	Staff survey results. Reduced turnover/sickness rates.
Increased flexible working opportunities.	Staff survey results. Improved retention.
Access to restorative supervision and preceptorship.	Implementation of supervision and preceptorship within Health Boards/Trusts.

Benefits to the nursing workforce	Measure
Improved access to leadership development opportunities.	Increased number of nurses accessing leadership opportunities. Increased numbers of nurses in leadership positions.

Benefits to employing organisations	Measure
A nursing workforce with enhanced clinical, education, research, digital and leadership skills.	Increased numbers of staff in these roles.
Improved attraction, recruitment and retention in nursing.	Increased workforce numbers. Reduced vacancy rates. Increased fill rates for nurse education.
Delivering the quadruple aim – high quality, improved outcomes and experience, better value health care and an engaged and motivated workforce.	PROMS/PREMS data. Reduced turnover/sickness rates. Staff survey results.



## Section 6: Implementation

Implementation of the plan requires an assessment of priorities, resourcing and phasing. In a financially constrained environment, it is essential that we optimise the use of existing resources and focus any investment requirements on new work that will add most value. However, moving towards a sustainable nursing workforce has clear financial benefits and therefore the funding requirements of a more rational and coherent plan should be considered an investment rather than a cost.

To inform the implementation planning process the actions have been categorised into new, accelerate, underpinning – to reflect that not all these actions will require the establishment of additional workstreams and resources. Many of the actions are for HEIW to lead at national level with support of partners.

Many of these actions can be progressed by building on work and resources already in place, or through the core functions of HEIW. These are likely to have limited resource implications. Some of the “new” actions will require additional investment.

These “new” actions could be further refined depending on resources available/extent of ambition and in each case will be subject to a business case approach to confirm the benefits to be delivered and to demonstrate that the most cost-effective option is progressed.

Many of these are non-recurrent requirements and could be phased at different times during the 5-year period that has been identified, according to priorities. Those directly linked with education and training will be considered as part of the existing Education and Training Planning process. Investment to be considered as part of the education training plan cycle.

Resources to support the implementation process will include project management capacity and clinical leadership sessions. Other teams across HEIW will provide the necessary input and support on the cross-cutting actions within the plan, as well as the financial, communications, and digital inputs.

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## Appendix one

### Strategic and policy context

The future direction of nursing in Wales is influenced by the strategic direction set out in several policy documents produced by the Welsh Government, the Nursing and Midwifery Council and Professional Bodies.

### Policy

In 2015 Welsh Government developed a legislative framework that focusses on the needs of future generations in Wales [The Well-being of Future Generations | GOV. WALES](#). The Act sets out the ambition for a resilient, sustainable, healthier, more equal Wales with a thriving Welsh Language.

The [Nurse Staffing Levels \(Wales\) Act 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) was passed by the Senedd in 2016. Wales was the first European country to introduce legislation related to nurse staffing.

Section 25B of the legislation requires health boards to use a prescribed calculation methodology and to take all reasonable steps to maintain their calculated nurse staffing levels and applies to all adult acute medical, adult acute surgical and paediatrics inpatient wards, Section 25A creates an overarching duty to have regard for providing appropriate staffing in all areas where nursing services are provided or commissioned.

Following a transitional period, the All-Wales Nurse Staffing Programme is now hosted within the NHS Executive and is delivering on a refreshed programme of work, partly informed by the recommendations from the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee's post-legislative scrutiny session of the Act.

The most substantive piece of work within that programme plan is the development of operational guidance to standardise the application of a triangulated calculation methodology for staffing in areas that come under section 25A of the Act.

In 2018 the Welsh Government published the [Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care in Wales Final Report](#). The review was established to explore how Wales should respond to changing needs, expectations and new forms of treatment and care. The review articulated this vision should be underpinned by a quadruple aim to deliver clear outcomes, improved health and wellbeing, a cared for workforce, and better value for money.

Following on from this Welsh Government produced a long-term plan for the improvement of health and social care in Wales [A healthier Wales: long term plan for health and social care | GOV.WALES](#).

This plan's ambition is for care to be delivered closer to home. Its' quadruple aim is to improve population health and wellbeing, develop better quality and more accessible health and care services, higher value health and social care and a motivated and sustainable health and social care workforce.

The actions for [A Healthier Wales - Action refresh 2024-25](#) have been updated following the publication of NHS in 10+ years: An examination of the projected impact of Long-Term Conditions and Risk Factors in Wales describing the challenges the NHS in Wales is likely to face over the next 10 to 25 years.

The report made it clear that the current demographic, economic and societal challenges facing our health and care system in Wales will continue to place unsustainable demands on our services.

In 2020 HEIW and Social Care Wales launched its workforce strategy [A Healthier Wales](#) through its seven themes it sets out the ambition to have a sustainable, engaged healthy workforce with the competence to meet the needs of the local population. One of the key priorities within the workforce strategy is to develop a nursing workforce plan.

The introduction of [Health and Social Care \(Quality and Engagement\) \(Wales\) Act 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) in April 2020 strengthened the existing Duty of Quality on NHS bodies. The important duties of quality and candour are vital to create a culture of openness and transparency.

The [National Workforce Implementation Plan](#) has a number of actions which will directly impact the nursing workforce including the development of a nurse retention plan, development and implementation of compassionate roster management and increased flexible working options.

In September 2023 Welsh Government published the [Speaking up Safely: A Framework for the NHS in Wales \(gov.wales\)](#), the Framework sets out the responsibilities of organisations, their executive teams and boards, along with those of managers and individual members of staff (and volunteers) in creating a culture in which 'Speaking Up', alongside timely and appropriate response to any concerns raised, is supported within a safe environment.

## Professional

In May 2018, the Nursing and Midwifery Council published the Future Nurse: Standards of proficiency for registered nurses [future-nurse-proficiencies.pdf \(nmc.org.uk\)](#).

These standards specify the knowledge and skills that registered nurses must demonstrate while emphasising that registrants are accountable for their own actions and must be able to work autonomously, or as an equal partner with a range of other professionals, and in interdisciplinary teams.

These standards apply to current registered nurses and must be included and met as part of any planning or development of the nursing workforce.

In 2021 the International Council of Nurses published their report [IND 2021 Report ENG.pdf \(icn.ch\)](#). Which presents a vision for future healthcare and illustrates how putting nurses in positions of influence and power will lead to more people-centred and integrated approaches to healthcare and more positive outcomes for people and communities.

In 2021 The European Nursing Research Foundation produced a policy brief aimed at [empowering nurses through digitalising the healthcare sector](#). This highlighted the opportunities that nursing research, and the nursing profession can successfully integrate innovative solutions and artificial intelligence (AI) into their discipline to offer better connected systems and cost-effective solutions to boost personalised healthcare.

In 2022 the Chief Nursing Officer Principles were published to set the strategic direction for the Nursing and Midwifery professions in Wales.

The specific areas of work are supported by and/or led by the Office of the Chief Nursing Officer at Welsh Government to aid delivery of A Healthier Wales (2018) and to enable delivery of the Programme for Government within this government term.

The ambition is to grow and transform our nursing workforce promoting multidisciplinary, multi-professional teams collaborating to improve outcomes through innovative ways of working, supported by technology.

The 5 overarching priorities are:

1. Leading the Professions.
2. Workforce.
3. Making the Professions Attractive.
4. Improving Health and Social Care Outcomes.
5. Professional Equity and Healthcare Equality.

In 2022 the RCN published [Retaining Nurses in the Profession: What matters? | Publications | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](#). This report examined the literature and spoke to nurses in Wales on the key challenges relating to retention.

The report provided a range of good practice case studies from across NHS Wales to improve retention rates amongst the nursing workforce.

The complexity of the nursing workforce in Wales and the strategic drivers reinforce the need for a plan that is ambitious and provides a platform to enable a whole system approach to the development of solutions for the nursing workforce.

### Phase one

#### Supply and demand modelling for the nursing workforce

A system dynamics model was developed to explore high-level scenarios for the nursing workforce. HEIW facilitated workshops with key stakeholders to develop the baseline methodology.

#### Optimising the education and training pipeline

HEIW awarded contracts to further education institutions to deliver the Level 4 Higher Education Certificate (HECert) for Healthcare Support Workers (HCSWs). This qualification allows HCSWs to enter directly into year two of a nursing degree. Of the 342 students who completed the HECert, 67% are expected to progress to a field-specific nursing programme.

#### Overseas nurse student cohorts

HEIW launched a UK-first initiative offering funded training places for international students to become registered nurses, aimed at boosting pre-registration nursing programme fill rates. These students commit to working in Wales for at least two years after qualifying. The first two cohorts, totalling 447 students, began training in Autumn 2023 and Spring 2024.

#### Placements

HEIW has enhanced placement quality and infrastructure to better support student nurses. The number of general practices offering placements grew from 18 to 140, while care home placements increased by 450. Innovation and engagement efforts also created 216 new audited practice learning environments to accommodate student demand.

#### Applications to the Learning Disability (LD) Nursing Field

LD nursing faces challenges in filling commissioned places, prompting targeted efforts to boost its profile and enrolment. Initiatives included a two-day LD immersion for new nursing students, short taster placements in LD settings, and a transfer process for students from other nursing fields.

#### Embedding good practice and increasing nurse retention

HEIW developed an NHS Wales Retention Plan with a self-assessment tool, appointing a national retention lead and funding retention leads in each organisation. Following the launch of the plan several initiatives have commenced including the establishment of a Community of Practice and development of an [NHS Wales Retention Hub](#) and dashboard.

### International recruitment

A Memorandum of Understanding was agreed between Welsh Government and the Keralan Government to supply Wales with more nurses from Kerala. Three in country recruitment events were held during 2023/24 resulting in 161 Internationally Educated Nurses (IEN) being onboarded in August 2024 and a further 184 are in process. A mobile app to provide pastoral care to IENs is in the final stages of development.

#### Developing the nursing support workforce

A resource to bring together all the qualifications available to support the education and training needs of the nursing support workforce is now available [Healthcare Support Workers - HEIW \(nhs.wales\)](#), which includes a new a level 3 compassionate leadership learning unit.