



Survey on Staffing Levels in the Healthcare Sector

1. Your Name:
2. Your Email ID:
3. Name of the Organization: Royal College of Nursing
4. Country in which the organization is based: United Kingdom
5. Does your country have official (national or regional) recommendations on staff/user ratios in the health care sector? *(Choose one of the following)*
 - Yes **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
 - No
 - Not Sure

If you answered “Yes” to the above, question, please move to question 4. Else, you can skip to question 14.

6. Are the recommendations on staffing levels guidelines or requirements? (i.e. are they binding?) *(Choose one of the following)*
 - They are meant to be guidelines and are not binding **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Scotland)**
 - They are binding **(Wales – legislation) (Scotland – once legislation is enacted)**
7. In which year were the first set of recommendations on healthcare staffing levels issued in your country?

In lieu of legislation, in some parts of the UK national bodies produced tools and guidance to aid workforce planning for nursing and midwifery. This happened in 2013 by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in acute hospitals (England) and Delivering Care – a framework for nursing and midwifery workforce planning 2014 (Northern Ireland)

With initial development beginning in 2004, a suite of Scotland wide nursing and midwifery workload and workforce planning tools have been developed. Scottish government guidance mandated from 2014 that all NHS Boards should use available tools to inform nursing and midwifery workforce planning. The 2019 Act – which has not yet been implemented – will require boards to follow the Common Staffing Method which pulls together information from various sources, including staffing tools, local context and quality outcomes. During the COVID-19 pandemic real time staffing methods were developed in selected settings. Some settings have workload tools that were meant to be run on a daily basis, including during covid, (community nursing teams, clinical nurse specialists working in hospital and community settings and for paediatric inpatient wards). A daily safety huddle tool was also developed for Care Homes during the summer of 2020 which recorded staffing gaps in that sector.

8. Who sets these recommendations? *(Choose one of the following)*

- The National Parliament (**Wales**)
 - Regional Governments
 - Local Government
 - Health Ministry (**Northern Ireland**)
 - Other : The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (**England**), Healthcare Improvement Scotland (**Scotland**)
9. Which of the following stakeholders formally participate in the decision making process about recommendations for staffing levels in the health care sector? *(Select all that apply)*
- Health Ministry
 - Professional bodies
 - Local/Regional Employers
 - Trade Unions
 - All of the above (**England**) (**Northern Ireland**) (**Wales**) (**Scotland**)
 - Other
10. Which of the following professions in the healthcare sector are covered by the recommendations on staffing levels? *(Select all that apply)*
- Nurses (**England**) (**Northern Ireland**)(**Wales**) (**Scotland**)
 - Doctors (**Scotland – for emergency medicine workload tool only**)
 - Healthcare Assistants (**Scotland**)
 - Other (**Midwives, Scotland**)
11. Do the recommendations vary based on the following factors? *(Select all that apply)*
- Work timing (day shift or night shift) (**England**) (**Northern Ireland**) (**Wales**) (**Scotland**)
 - Severity of patient conditions (**England**) (**Northern Ireland**)(**Wales**) (**Scotland**)
 - Site of service delivery (in a hospital or at home) (**England**) (**Northern Ireland**) (**Wales**) (**Scotland**)
 - Location of the employer (**England**) (**Northern Ireland**) (**Wales**)
 - Nature of the organization (Public, Private or Non-Profit) (**England**)
 - Other
12. Which of the following stakeholders are involved in monitoring whether the recommendations are being followed? *(Select all the apply)*
- Health Ministry - **Department of Health (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
 - Regional/Local Government bodies
 - Employer Organizations (**England**) (**Wales**) (**Scotland**)
 - Trade Unions (**England**) (**Scotland**)
 - Other: *because they are not binding, there is no strict monitoring ongoing universally* (**England**)
13. What happens if staffing falls below required/recommended levels? *(Select all the apply)*
- There are no consequences (**England**) (**Northern Ireland**) (**Wales**) (**Scotland, currently**)
 - The employer gets a show cause notice
 - The employer is expected to pay a penalty
 - Other: *Staff can complete an incident report but usually work short-staffed* (**England**)
Strengthened rules around recording and escalation of risks to be introduced once the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 is implemented (**Scotland**)

14. Has there been a significant change in your country's staffing levels in the healthcare sector since the recommendations were issued? *(Choose one of the following)*

- Yes, the staff/user ratios have improved significantly. **(Wales)**
- The staff/user ratios have in fact worsened.
- No significant change:
 - Government is not enforcing these and there are inadequate staffing levels, in England 50,00 nurses short **(England)**
 - Nurse staffing levels and workforce pressures continue to increase across the system **(Northern Ireland)**
 - Legislation has been enacted designed to put safe staffing levels on a statutory footing, however the Act has not been implemented. Workforce pressures and increased nursing vacancies are being experienced across the NHS and care home sectors **(Scotland)**
- Not Sure
- Not Applicable

15. Please describe in as much detail as possible, the existing recommendations on healthcare staffing levels in your country.

In an adult acute hospital 1: 8 nurse patient ratio is recommended by NICE. It is intended that it applies in inpatient wards for people aged 18 and over in acute hospitals. It aims to ensure that patients receive the nursing care they need, regardless of the ward to which they are allocated, the time of the day, or the day of the week. **(England)**

There is a complex picture in Northern Ireland (which is available [here](#)) **(Northern Ireland)**

Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016ⁱ **(Wales)**

The key provisions of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 are:

- Making trusts and health boards responsible for putting sufficient staff in place so that nurses can care for patients.
- Trusts also need to calculate and maintain nurse staffing levels in adult acute, medical, surgical wards and paediatric wards.

(Scotland) Only ratio is in ICU.

NHS Scotland workload measurement and workforce planning tools are available for 98% of nursing and midwifery service areas:

- Adult inpatient.
- Mental Health and Learning Disability.
- Neonatal.
- SCAMPS (Paediatric).
- Community Nursing.
- Community Children's and Specialist Nursing.
- Clinical Nurse Specialists.
- Small Wards.
- Perioperative.
- Maternity.
- Professional Judgement.
- Emergency Department/Emergency Medicine - tool to take account of the workload attributed to nursing and medical staff

Additional information available [here](#)

16. Have there been any collective agreements in your country that address the issue of staff/user ratios in the healthcare sector? *(Choose one of the following)*

- Yes
 - *The Welsh Government implemented the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 and extended Section 25B of the Act in 2021 to apply to paediatric inpatient wards. The Welsh Government made a commitment to recruit more nurses, however nurses are leaving the profession and there is no national strategy for nursing retention. (Wales)*
 - *2019 Act does not introduce ratios, but does seek to put safe staffing levels on a statutory footing. Not yet implemented, but commitment from Scottish Government to do so by 2024 (Scotland)*
- No:
 - *There is a drive to recruit 50,000 nurses by 2024 however, nurses are leaving the profession and the focus on recruitment is based on recruiting international nurses (England)*
 - *The Delivering Care framework sets out normative staffing ranges but these are not staff/patient ratios (Northern Ireland)*
- Not Sure

17. Is your trade union lobbying for the introduction/revision of recommendations on healthcare staffing levels? *(Choose one of the following)*

- Yes **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
- No
- Other

18. Which of the following measures (if any) have been taken in your country in the last 5 years to attract and retain more workers in the healthcare sector? *(Select all that apply)*

- Higher Pay
- Better Working Conditions
- Increased Training Provisions **(Northern Ireland) (Wales)**
- Campaigning to improve status of care work
- Reduced visa-related barriers for trained healthcare workers from outside the EU
- Recruitment drives for trained workers from within the EU
- Measures to ensure that older workers remain healthier longer - (extra leave as of a certain age etc.)
- None of the above
- All of the above (England) (Scotland)

19. Please describe in as much detail as possible, the measures taken in your country to improve staffing levels in the healthcare sector.

England: Some employers have done much work to improve staff retention, but the lack of inconsistencies means that overall, staffing levels are low. The focus on staff wellbeing and mental health has been helpful in promoting staff retention. Some employers have childcare facilities at workplaces and the cost of childcare is deducted before tax. Some employees provide free parking which also helps to support with costs.

Scotland: Inconsistencies in retention strategies between different Health Boards in Scotland. The Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 seeks to establish legally enforced staffing levels and strengthen rules around escalation of concerns around staffing levels.

Wales: The Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act was introduced in 2016. The Act was the first of its kind in Europe. Since the implementation of the Act, specifically Section 25B that requires health boards to calculate and take all reasonable steps to maintain nurse staffing levels (in adult acute medical and surgical wards and

paediatric inpatient services) we have seen:

- There's an additional 139.74 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) registered nurses and 597 additional FTE healthcare support workers in November 2020 compared to March 2018 (before Section 25B came into force)¹.
- On wards covered by Section 25B, there have been fewer patient falls, pressure ulcers and complaints about nursing where staffing levels have been considered a contributing factor.
- Additional evidence shows that in preparation for the extension of Section 25B to paediatric wards in October 2021 all health boards (where this would apply) recruited more paediatric nurses and proposed the need for additional funding and/or resources to the health board.

More information can be found [here](#)

Northern Ireland: Increase in pre-registration nursing places (300 per year over three years), increased post-registration education budget to develop more specialist nurses, funding for the Delivering Care policy framework outlined above, moves towards safe staffing legislation, and a new nursing and midwifery retention strategy.

20. Is reliable data available on staff/user ratios in the healthcare sector in your country? *(Choose one of the following)*
- Yes
 - No **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
 - Maybe
21. In practice, are staff/user ratios different in public/private settings? *(Choose one of the following)*
- Yes, public sector employers tend to have a higher staff/user ratio
 - Yes, private sector employers tend to have a higher staff/user ratio
 - There are no significant differences it really depends on the organisation e.g. care home or private hospital **(England)**
 - Less private hospital provision in Scotland, but staffing levels are challenging in most settings **(Scotland)**
 - This data does not exist **(Northern Ireland) (Wales)**
22. How would you rate the staffing levels for nurses in your country? *(Choose one of the following)*
- Severe Shortage of Staff **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
 - Moderate Shortage of Staff
 - Just enough staff to take care of the usual healthcare needs of the population
 - Adequate Staff to deal with health crises such as pandemics
 - More than Adequate Staff
23. How would you rate the staffing levels for doctors in your country? *(Choose one of the following)*
- Severe Shortage of Staff
 - Moderate Shortage of Staff
 - Just enough staff to take care of the usual healthcare needs of the population
 - Adequate Staff to deal with health crises such as pandemics

¹ Welsh Government, *Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 – Statutory summary of nurse staffing level reports 2018-2021*. Available at: [nurse-staffing-levels-wales-act-2016-statutory-summary-of-nurse-staffing-level-reports-2018-2021.pdf, accessed 6 June 2022](#).

- More than Adequate Staff
- N/A – **the RCN does not take a formal view on the staffing levels for doctors.**

24. How would you rate the staffing levels for healthcare assistants in your country? *(Choose one of the following)*

- Severe Shortage of Staff **(Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
- Moderate Shortage of Staff **(England)**
- Just enough staff to take care of the usual healthcare needs of the population
- Adequate Staff to deal with health crises such as pandemics
- More than Adequate Staff

25. Please describe in as much detail as possible, the severity of healthcare staff shortages in your country. Is the problem more acute in some professions than in others?

England: Our data from a [member survey](#) demonstrated that 3 in 4 of shifts across all settings are short of at least one registered nurse. Over 80% of nurses felt that in their professional judgement that they did not have enough staff to provide safe and effective care.

Scotland: RCN Scotland has produced a [workforce report](#) which looks in details at the trends around staffing levels in health and social care in Scotland. Severity more acute in some specialisms e.g. mental health nursing and some areas e.g. community nursing.

Wales: The Welsh Government fails to publish national statistics for nursing vacancies in Wales. Wales is currently the only country in the UK not to publish this data. Since 2019, RCN Wales has been gathering this data from health board papers and estimating a national figure, but this is challenging as health boards do not routinely publish this data and the data would be taken from different points in the year. In 2020 it was estimated that there were 1,612 registered nurse vacancies, in 2021 there were 1,719 and in 2022 there's estimated to be over 2,860.

In 2018, there were 1,545 registered nursing staff employed by commissioned care providers in Wales. In 2019, this decreased to 1,438. In 2021, this decreased again to 1,119, with an additional 204 nurses employed by local authorities.

More information on the nursing workforce in Wales can be found [here](#)

Northern Ireland: In Northern Ireland as at June 2022, there were with 2,493 nursing (registered nurses and nursing assistants) vacancies in the HSC (NHS) and a similar vacancy rate is estimated in the independent or nursing home sector. The current HSC registered nursing vacancy rate is 10.2% (2,029 vacancies). It is important to remember that these figures only relate to posts that are actively being recruited to and exclude posts that are frozen, have been cut, or are simply vacant but not actively being recruited to, meaning that the true scale of the problem is likely to be far greater.

26. Which of the following are common issues amongst the healthcare staff in your country? *(Select all that apply)*

- High stress and Burnout
- High Staff Absenteeism
- High Staff Turnover
- High Incidence of Violence and Harassment at Workplace
- Lack of Psychological and Wellbeing Support
- All of the above **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
- None of the above
- Other

27. Which of the following are common issues faced by the healthcare sector in your country? *(Select all that apply)*

- Bed/Ward Closures **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
- High Patient Turnover **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
- Long Waiting Lists **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Wales) (Scotland)**
- Lack of Opportunity to provide adequate and personalized care to patients **(England) (Northern Ireland) (Scotland)**
- Increasing role of for-profit organizations in the provision of Healthcare Services **(England) Wales** – *increase in out of area and out of country placements/increase number of patients being cared for in England specifically those with a learning disability or severe and enduring mental ill health. Northern Ireland* – *although this is less of an issue given that it is mainly individuals choosing private care to avoid waiting lists, rather than the government commissioning services from the private sector*
- Other

28. Please describe in as much detail as possible, the impact of staff shortages on the healthcare sector in your country (if any).

UK picture: Service delivery is impacted, and standards are lowered, due to short staffing. Staff feel that they cannot give the care they would have wanted for themselves or their loved ones. Staff feel stresses and burnout due to the relentless pressures. The pay is making it the profession not attractive enough, so it is harder to recruit into the profession. Long waiting lists are going to continue as the demand continues to rise with an aging population. There is less focus on health prevention as staffing outside acute hospitals are poor and current measures do not seem to address them. Patients will unfortunately not get the best care possible; they may be put more at risk due to inadequate staffing. Litigations are likely to continue to increase as patients are harmed while using health and care settings. Nursing innovation and creativity could be damped as there is no capacity in the systems to think, create nor innovate. The morale injury impact on nurses and nursing support workers will drive people out of the profession.

In 2022, [the RCN stated](#):

“It is widely understood that having the right number of appropriately qualified, competent and experienced nurses protects both the public and the nursing profession. For many years, nursing staff working in all settings across the UK have been shouting about the research evidence base, drawing attention to the impact of growing staff shortages and rising demand on their ability to deliver care that is safe and effective. The impact of these pressures on patient safety, care outcomes, staff retention and the wellbeing of nursing staff is now beyond concerning. In 2021, the RCN published [Nursing Workforce Standards](#) which set out what is required for planning staffing levels for safe and effective care across all settings in the UK. They are intended for use by local, regional and national leaders, and by service and professional regulators, as the benchmark for workforce planning quality. We have presented our findings through the lens of the importance of these standards”

29. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

England: Bullying, harassment, and racism continue to be a problem in health and social careⁱⁱ. With an overstretched, overworked workforce these will continue to be a problem.

Scotland: See [RCN Scotland's workforce report](#)

Northern Ireland: The absence of devolved government in Northern Ireland and the lack of a working budget is exerting a devastating impact on the capacity to address these issues.

30. Please share any relevant files with us, either as links or attachments (data on staffing levels, government recommendations, surveys conducted by your organization etc.)

United Kingdom: In May 2021 we have published the first UK overarching nursing workforce standards that set out what needs to be implemented to achieve staffing for safe and effective care:

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/Nursing-Workforce-Standards>

Wales:

Nursing in Numbers 2021: [here](#)

Progress and Challenge in delivering safe and effective care 2022: How NHS Wales has implemented the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016: [here](#)

Progress and Challenge 2019: the implementation of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016: [here](#)

ⁱ [Nurse Staffing Levels \(Wales\) Act 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

ⁱⁱ [Tackling workplace bullying | Activate | Royal College of Nursing \(rcn.org.uk\)](#)