

NHS workforce – part 1

Clinical workforce in acute hospitals



Background

The way in which health and social care in Scotland is delivered is changing. The Scottish Government wants to shift the balance of care from hospital-based services to community-based services. In our [NHS in Scotland 2015 \[PDF\]](#)  report, the Auditor General concluded that the Scottish Government had not made sufficient progress towards achieving this shift.

The Auditor General recommended a coordinated, national approach to workforce planning, outlining what the changes in health and social care mean for NHS staff. A subsequent report in December 2015, [Health and social care integration \[PDF\]](#) , highlighted the risk that NHS workforces are being organised in response to budget pressures rather than strategic needs.

This audit will examine the immediate and long-term workforce issues in the NHS.

Why is this audit important?

Overall staff levels in the NHS are at the highest level ever, with 138,458 whole-time equivalent (WTE) staff employed as at March 2016. In 2015/16, staff costs

were £6.2 billion, accounting for around 55 per cent of total revenue spending. Despite these levels, the NHS in Scotland has seen increased use of temporary staffing to cover clinical vacancies. In 2015/16, spending on temporary staff was 2.8 per cent of total staff costs, which included £101 million on agency medical locums and £23.5 million on agency nursing and midwifery staff.

There are persistent vacancies among certain specialties in acute hospital care as well as specific shortages in recruitment of general practitioners. These are felt more keenly in rural and certain geographic locations. Recruitment concerns are not confined to current shortfalls; there are also concerns around failure to fill all available graduate training posts, and to retain doctors in Scotland once qualified.

While a National Workforce Plan is due, current workforce plans by NHS boards vary in quality and detail, and are required only to be completed over a three year horizon. Scotland has an ageing population and this will contribute towards an increase in the complexity of health needs in the longer term. The NHS will need to adapt its workforce to meet these changing needs.

What the audit will look at

The NHS workforce audit will be split into two parts. The first will be published in summer 2017. It will focus on the clinical workforce in acute hospitals. It will consider the current and future pressures and challenges facing the workforce, including how shifting the balance of care away from hospital-based services is likely to affect the clinical workforce in hospitals.

The overall aim of this first audit is to assess how well the clinical workforce in acute hospitals is managed to meet the demands of the Scottish population for acute services. Specific audit questions are:

- How are workforce plans aiming to address current and future demands on the workforce?
- Given the intended shift from secondary to community-based care, how is the NHS predicting the future needs of the Scottish population, and aligning its future workforce to meet this?
- What are the anticipated workforce costs associated with meeting current and future demands for healthcare?
- Are current clinical workforce issues and implementation of the 2020 Vision affecting patient care and the wellbeing of the workforce?

The second, and subsequent, audit report will focus on the primary care workforce. This will look at preparedness of the general practice and community-based workforce to meet increased demand for local care provision.

While these two audits will focus on the NHS workforce specifically, they will be informed by findings on the public sector workforce from our wider programme of work. Pertinent recent reports include [Changing models of health and social care \[PDF\]](#) , [Health and social care integration \[PDF\]](#)  and our forthcoming annual *NHS in Scotland* publication. Our report on [Social work in Scotland \[PDF\]](#)  was published in September 2016 and there are further Health and Social Care Integration reports within our future programme of work.

How we will carry out the audit

This audit will build on the findings from previous performance audit reports, as well as evidence gathered during financial audits in NHS boards. In addition, we will:

- review documents including NHS board-level workforce plans, strategic plans, internal audit reports and work carried out by other organisations such as the National Audit Office;
- analyse workforce data, including projections of future workforce outcomes, and existing surveys carried out with patients and members of the NHS workforce;
- interview a range of stakeholders, including a sample of NHS boards and bodies representing the NHS workforce, such as the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing;
- liaise with stakeholders in the Scottish Government, NHS Education for Scotland and NHS National Services Scotland among others.

What impact will the audit have?

The audit aims to inform the Scottish Parliament, the public and other stakeholders on the current progress against long-term workforce strategic objectives and the challenges to address. Where examples of good practice are found, these will be reported, alongside recommendations for improvement where relevant. The information in our report will help NHS boards to consider their progress in making long-term workforce decisions and assist national decision-makers by highlighting workforce concerns.

Timetable and contacts

We plan to publish the first part of the report in summer 2017. Audit Scotland is carrying out the work on behalf of the Auditor General for Scotland.

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