Scotland’s NHS workforce

The current picture

Prepared by Audit Scotland
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Auditor General for Scotland

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Introduction

Major challenges lie ahead for the NHS in Scotland. As I reported last year, there are growing pressures on NHS boards which are struggling to juggle service delivery and progress major reform, at the same time as managing considerable financial challenges.

Nearly 160,000 people work in Scotland’s NHS, which provides vital services for millions of us every year. Their hard work and commitment, sometimes in life-or-death circumstances, is always to be admired. However, the NHS faces challenges if the workforce is to meet the growing demands of our ageing population and adapt to new ways of working.

We know that our audit work on health and social care in Scotland has a role to play in the wider debate about what’s needed to transform these services and make them sustainable for the future.

Building on our recent findings, we’ve begun a new two-part audit to evaluate how the Scottish Government and NHS boards are tackling the issues, through workforce planning and national and local initiatives.

The first report focuses on overall workforce planning and workforce pressures in hospitals and will be published in summer 2017. The second is due out in 2018/19 and will explore primary care and GP workforce issues.

In advance of our first report, this briefing provides some key information on the shape of the current NHS workforce and sets out some of the issues that we’re delving into during the course of our audit.
Key issues for the NHS workforce

NHS staff numbers are at their highest ever level, but there are key issues relating to the workforce.

**Vacancy rates** among some groups of NHS staff have been increasing, along with spending on agency staff.

**Turnover rates**, a measure of retention, and **sickness absence rates** have increased slightly over the last few years, and vary widely by NHS board.

There is a trend towards an increasingly **ageing workforce** with 38 per cent of NHS staff aged over 50, compared with 34 per cent in 2012. Nursing and midwifery have particularly high rates of older staff.
The NHS workforce

4.7%

4.7 per cent of the Scottish working age population is employed by the NHS.

138,458
Whole-time equivalent (WTE)

NHS staff, March 2016: up 5 per cent since 2012.

4.7% of the Scottish working age population is employed by the NHS.

In 2015/16 just over £6 billion (55 per cent) of NHS spending was on staff costs.

2015/16

Percentage of staff working full time

Nursing and midwifery

86.1%
86.1%

All NHS Scotland staff

66.7%

Medical

62.6%

Allied health professionals

66.4%
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**The NHS workforce**

**Age of NHS staff (March 2016)**
The largest age group among NHS staff is 50-54, around 18 per cent of staff

- 65 +: 1%
- 60-64: 6,000
- 55-59: 12,000
- 50-54: 20,000
- 45-49: 15,000
- 40-44: 12,500
- 35-39: 10,000
- 30-34: 7,500
- 25-29: 5,000
- 20-24: 2,500
- Under 20: 1,000

**Three per cent** of NHS staff are from a minority ethnic group.

Four per cent of the overall population are from a minority ethnic group.

**Fewer than one per cent** of NHS staff are recorded as having a disability.
The NHS workforce

Over three-quarters of NHS staff are female

Among medical staff the percentages of men and women are almost even

One in ten nurses is male

Two in ten allied health professionals are male

Note: Allied health professionals (AHPs) include physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, among others.
Source: ISD, Annual Population Survey and 2011 census. Excludes GPs
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Vacancies

- Consultants have the highest vacancy rate of the three staff groups.
- The vacancy rate has increased for all staff groups over the period, though consultant vacancies dropped between 2015 and 2016.
- Vacancies that have been open for three or six months have also been increasing, particularly for consultants.

Note: Data not available for most other staff groups.
Source: ISD
## Specialty vacancy rates

The table shows the overall consultant WTE in post, along with the vacancy rate and unfilled training places. It also shows the ten specialties with the highest consultancy vacancy rates, along with the unfilled training place rates, where available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>2016 WTE in post</th>
<th>2016 Vacancy rate (%)</th>
<th>2016 Percentage of training establishment that is unfilled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Practice</td>
<td>3,645.0*</td>
<td>5.0*</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants</td>
<td>5,115.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychotherapy</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Medicine</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Care Medicine</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Age Psychiatry</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodontics</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General (acute) Medicine</td>
<td>145.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Radiology</td>
<td>324.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Histopathology</td>
<td>103.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory Medicine</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Oncology</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *From the 2015 primary care survey. Our second NHS workforce audit will focus on GP issues.

Source: NHS, NES and ISD. Includes the top ten specialties where the establishment was more than ten
Consultant, allied health professionals and nursing vacancies in 2016 show that generally the more rural the area the higher the vacancy rate.

There are exceptions to this, for example NHS Ayrshire and Arran and NHS Western Isles have higher rurality levels than the Scottish average, but low vacancy rates.

Source: ISD, SG measure of rurality. Excludes special boards.
Spending on clinical and non–clinical agency staff

Total spending on agency staff (£millions), real terms

- Total staff spending increased by 7.7 per cent between 2011/12 and 2015/16, while WTE staff increased by five per cent.

- The percentage of staff spending that was on agency staff increased during that time, from 1.4 per cent to 2.8 per cent. Among the territorial boards, this ranged from 1.9 per cent at NHS Tayside to 6.8 per cent at NHS Shetland.

- The amount of spending on other non-core staff costs, like internal bank* (except for nurses) or overtime, is not available.

*Bank is the use of internal supplementary staff for single or groups of shifts.

Source: NHS board accounts
Turnover

Staff turnover is a measure of retention, and is calculated by dividing the number of leavers by the total staff establishment.

Nationally, turnover rates have increased slightly since 2012 from 6.1 to 6.4 per cent.

Source: ISD. Excludes GPs and special boards.

NHS Shetland had the highest turnover rate (11.5%).

NHS Ayrshire and Arran had the lowest turnover rate (6%).

Scottish turnover rate 6.4%.
The NHS Scotland sickness absence target is four per cent. In 2015/16 no territorial board met this target.

The national sickness absence rate in 2015/16 was 5.2 per cent, an increase from 4.6 per cent in 2011/12.

Source: ISD. Excludes GPs and special boards
Ageing workforce

This chart shows the percentage of staff over 50 years old, which gives an indication of the numbers likely to retire over the next few years.

The proportion of older staff has been growing across each of the staff groups.
Our work

Our work on the workforce is part of a wider programme of work on the NHS and social care.

Future publication dates are indicative.

Our transforming health and social care page has more information about our work in health and social care.

If you have any queries about our NHS workforce audit, contact Richard Robinson E: rrobinson@audit-scotland.gov.uk