

## News release

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### Scotland's NHS needs better workforce planning

**Spending on staff in Scotland's NHS is increasing and overall staff numbers are at their highest level ever but there are urgent workforce challenges, and the Scottish Government and health boards have not planned effectively for the long term.**

In the first part of a two-stage audit on workforce planning in the NHS in Scotland, Audit Scotland focuses on clinical staff in hospitals and other secondary care settings. It reports that the Scottish Government has not yet adequately estimated what impact increasing and changing demand for NHS services could have on the workforce or skills required to meet this need.

As well as determining the right mix of skills needed to meet future demand, the NHS faces recruitment challenges in the current workforce. Vacancies for some consultant and nursing positions remain high and difficult to fill. Increasing retirements could escalate vacancy levels in parts of the NHS where there are higher proportions of older staff, such as the general nursing workforce.

Major health reform is under way, in particular shifting services towards more community and home-based care. The long-term impact of health and social care integration on the NHS workforce remains unclear, and dedicated funding for NHS reform does not clearly show the associated workforce costs.

Overall, patient feedback about the NHS and its staff is positive. However, complaints are rising and staff continue to raise concerns about their workloads. NHS boards are spending more on agency cover to help meet workload requirements, and 13 of the 14 territorial boards overspent against their 2015/16 pay budgets.

The report says responsibility for NHS workforce planning across national, regional and local levels is confused, and there is a risk of more fragmentation as integration authorities develop their own arrangements and new specialist centres are established.

The Scottish Government intended to publish a single workforce plan for health and social care. This will now occur in three stages and the first publication, in June 2017, is a framework to consider future challenges, rather than a detailed plan.

Caroline Gardner, Auditor General for Scotland, said: "Thousands of people work hard in Scotland's NHS to deliver vital public services every day, but there are signs that the health service is under stress and that staff face increasing workload pressures.

"The Scottish Government and NHS boards recognise the challenges, but urgently need to improve their understanding of future demand, staff projections and associated costs, and set out in detail how they plan to create a workforce that can meet the long-term health needs of the population."

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#### Notes to editors

1. NHS Scotland is made up of 22 NHS boards. Of these, 14 territorial boards provide frontline healthcare services across the country. Overall staff levels in the NHS in Scotland are at the highest level ever, with 139,431 whole-time equivalent (WTE) staff employed as at March 2017. In 2016/17,

staff costs across all NHS boards were £6.5 billion, accounting for around 57 per cent of total revenue, or day-to-day, spending. There has been a 11 per cent real-terms increase - that is, allowing for the effects of inflation - in staff costs, between 2011/12 and 2016/17. Agency costs have increased in real terms by 107 per cent in six years, from £83 million in 2011/12 to £171 million in 2016/17.

2. This report is the first in a two-part audit on the NHS workforce. It focuses on the overall planning arrangements looking at how well placed the NHS workforce is to meet the current and future demands of the Scottish population. The scope covers NHS staff employed by NHS boards, including clinical staff working in hospitals. The second report, to be published in 2018/19, will look more closely at the community-based NHS workforce, including those employed by general practices.

3. In February 2017, we presented [data on the NHS workforce in Scotland](#) highlighting key challenges facing the workforce. These included an ageing workforce, increasing agency staff costs and persistent vacancies in certain positions and specialties. Our dedicated e-hub on our health and social care work also has [further information](#) about our previous reports.

4. Nurses and midwives are the largest staffing group in the NHS. Over a third of the nursing and midwifery workforce is over 50 and the number of newly qualified nurses in Scotland available to enter the workforce to replace them fell by 15 per cent and then a further seven per cent in 2014/15 and 2015/16. Exhibits 13 and 14 have more detail, including projection of the potential future nursing and midwifery staff posts against actual staff.

5. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)

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