‘Data is a big priority for us’

Summary and findings from the Welsh royal colleges and professional bodies advisory group spring workshop with Health Education and Improvement Wales on NHS Wales workforce data and intelligence

Key messages

> Workforce and digital should be a core part of how we design and deliver health and care services.
> Converting activity and performance data into workforce demand data is a challenge.
> Partnership working is crucial: collaboration with stakeholders will improve workforce data quality.
> The new workforce observatory will support horizon scanning, data modelling and strategic planning.
> NHS Wales vacancy data for the directly employed workforce will be published online from June 2023.

Overview

As Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) approaches the end of phase one of the joint health and care workforce strategy, the organisation is considering how best to develop plans for a workforce observatory, build a relationship with the new NHS executive for Wales, and improve the quality and quantity of workforce data that it collects. This first joint workshop was a useful introduction to the structures and strategic direction of HEIW and an opportunity for royal colleges and professional bodies to ask questions and learn more about their plans to improve scenario planning and demand forecasting.

Background

On 31 January 2023, the Welsh royal colleges and professional (RCAP) bodies advisory group met with representatives of HEIW in a joint workshop to discuss the collection and analysis of workforce data and intelligence. Around 40 people attended the online event. We heard from HEIW representatives including Alex Howells, HEIW chief executive; Julie Rogers, HEIW deputy chief executive and director of workforce and organisational development (OD); Ryan Cunningham, HEIW head of workforce data and analytics; and Clem Price, HEIW head of strategic workforce planning.

The guest speaker was Ian Owen, Welsh government head of workforce and OD strategy and planning, who updated the group on the government’s commitment to publish NHS Wales vacancy data for the directly employed workforce by June 2023.

On 1 October 2018, the Welsh government established HEIW by bringing together three key organisations for health: the Wales Deanery, Workforce Education and Development Services (WEDS) and the Wales...
Centre for Pharmacy Professional Education (WCPPE). As the organisation’s 5-year anniversary approaches, more than 30 RCAP bodies have come together to form an expert advisory group that represents tens of thousands of health and care professionals in Wales. This RCAP group and HEIW have agreed to hold twice-yearly workshops to discuss shared priorities.

**Setting out the structure and strategic direction of HEIW**

During this, our first ever joint workshop, we invited HEIW to provide us with an overview of the structure and strategic direction of the national workforce body for NHS Wales. We wanted to hear about what they do, who leads this work and how they design their forward work programme, including annual milestones.

‘Our vision is to develop a skilled and sustainable workforce that improves both patient care and population health. It’s not just about education and training; it’s about service delivery too. We want to work with all our partners to plan, develop, educate and train the current and future workforce.’ – HEIW

HEIW speakers were clear that as the employers, NHS Wales health boards and trusts remain responsible for local workforce planning. HEIW’s aim is to provide a strategic and specialist overview and develop once-for-Wales solutions – without trying to duplicate what employer organisations already do – blending clinical and operational expertise with educational and digital skills and bridging the gap between clinical education and service provision. Around 550 people work for HEIW but almost half of those work on a sessional basis, often as the clinical lead for a team or project.

Between 80–90% of the HEIW budget is earmarked for the education and training of health and care professionals. Their other responsibilities include leadership development, careers and widening access support, workforce development and transformation, and workforce strategy, planning and intelligence.

We asked HEIW how they avoid silo working when workforce transformation (implementing and developing different ways of working) and workforce planning sit under two different executive directors. We asked how they reconciled the two and ensured consistency of approach. We heard that HEIW uses a matrix system to call on relevant multiprofessional expertise, and prides itself on sharing information across the organisation, communicating and engaging with other teams where appropriate.

**Key milestones**

HEIW balances the academic cycle with the needs of service providers in NHS Wales. The organisation publishes its education and training plan (ETP) in July; this includes commissioning plans and training numbers for the year ahead, which then feed into the HEIW 3-year integrated medium-term plan (IMTP) that is published the following March.

‘Workforce and digital are no longer just enabling issues; they are a core part of how we design and deliver services, not an after-thought. We must be able to evidence that we are taking on board the ideas, innovation and best practice that all partners can bring to us.’ – HEIW
This requires a great deal of engagement with all partners, especially NHS colleagues; the ETP itself is in part based on health board and trusts’ IMTPs from the previous year. HEIW noted that their own IMTP horizon scanning and project planning sessions take place every autumn in October and November. Royal colleges and professional bodies have expressed their desire to be part of the IMTP and ETP processes.

**Delivering the 2020 health and social care workforce strategy**

In 2020, HEIW published a joint health and care workforce strategy with Social Care Wales. This is a 10-year programme of work with seven themes and 32 actions, underpinned by three golden threads. As phase one of the strategy comes to an end in 2023, we heard that HEIW considers good progress has been made.

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<th>Seven themes</th>
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<td>&gt; An engaged, motivated and healthy workforce</td>
<td>&gt; Wellbeing</td>
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<td>&gt; Inclusion</td>
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<td>&gt; Building a digitally ready workforce</td>
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The 3-year refresh is likely to focus on improving retention, embedding compassionate leadership and further developing strategic partnerships with health boards and trusts. The strategy refresh and phase two actions will be launched during summer 2023, for action from early autumn 2023.

**Strategic workforce planning**

The strategic mental health workforce plan for health and social care is the first of its kind in Wales. As this plan is implemented, the process has helped HEIW to develop an approach and methodology than can be shared with other parts of the system. Other strategic workforce plans are now underway in pharmacy, dentistry and nursing.

Also in development are workforce plans for diagnostics, primary care and genomics.
In our discussions, we touched upon the importance of investment in estates and facilities when developing and increasing training capacity for the future. We also asked HEIW whether they could see a role for themselves in local workforce planning. They told us that they see their role as supporting and enabling local workforce planning teams by equipping them with tools and techniques, growing their capacity and ability through expertise and help from the national body – but they were clear that workforce planning should happen locally based on population need. However, it’s possible that they could be commissioned by a health board or trust to research a particular specialty or evidence space, perhaps through the workforce observatory in the future.

**Refreshing HEIW’s strategic priorities**

**Emerging themes**

- Culture, respect and autonomy for staff
- Designing work and roles for wellbeing
- Coaching, mentoring and wellbeing support for leaders
- Retention and succession planning
- Widening access and recognition of prior learning
- Digital literacy
- Career pathways, flexible working and protected development time
- Inclusion and diversity
- Positive narrative around working in health and care
- Pay and reward

**The Welsh government’s national workforce implementation plan**

In January 2023, the Welsh government published its [national workforce implementation plan](#) (as promised in the April 2022 document, *Our programme for transforming and modernising planned care in Wales and reducing waiting lists*). The workforce implementation plan establishes a strategic workforce implementation board within Welsh government and sets out 78 short-term actions that aim to support the delivery of the 10-year HEIW strategy.

**Establishing a centre of excellence for workforce intelligence**

Action 28 of the [joint health and care workforce strategy](#) commits to creating a centre of excellence for workforce intelligence for health and social care in Wales. As RCAP bodies, we were especially interested to hear about what this would look like, how it would engage with external stakeholders, and how it would support workforce modelling and improve access to data.

‘Across NHS Wales, converting activity and performance data into workforce demand data is a massive challenge. If we can predict when trainees are likely to qualify and enter the workforce as consultants, this will help organisations across
Wales in their workforce planning. There’s a role for HEIW to collaborate with health boards and trusts to improve workforce data quality.’ – HEIW

We heard that HEIW is keen to build on a data-driven approach and has committed to developing new workforce supply and demand models that depend on a greater understanding of workforce behaviour and motivations. However, they acknowledge that there are gaps in workforce planning, data and digital capacity and capability across the system, restricted access to much of the data and information, and little consistency in how data are collected and used, which makes comparison very difficult. Neither do they fully understand the shape, size, and supply and behaviour of our workforce in a timely way.

However, HEIW considers itself in a good position to drive this agenda forward, with its national role, access to the electronic staff record data warehouse, understanding of training pipelines, specialist expertise, and extensive links with other organisations.

**Data gaps for supply and demand modelling**

As part of the centre of excellence for workforce intelligence, HEIW will establish an observatory – a central and comprehensive source of information and analysis about the health and care workforce in Wales that will support the work of local employers (health boards and trusts). While the centre of excellence refers to the role of HEIW in workforce planning and data intelligence, the observatory will be the space where information can be collected, analysed and shared back to the wider NHS system.

‘The workforce observatory will support horizon scanning, scenario planning, data modelling and strategic long-term workforce planning. Better workforce intelligence will enable the better design of health and care services, linked to population needs and the training pipeline.’ – HEIW

HEIW expects that the observatory will host a community of practice (a sharing portal that hosts workforce information) alongside data dashboards, guides and resources to support planning, research and horizon scanning. The observatory will set UK statistical information (eg national census, labour market...
intelligence, economic inactivity) in the context of NHS Wales policy and legislation and will host a library of current research and relevant literature that will provide the evidence base for change.

We asked HEIW about the future capacity of the observatory, whether they foresaw any challenges in recruiting people with the right skill set to collect and use the data, and how they intend to engage with external stakeholders. HEIW was keen to emphasise that this work is still in its very early stages. A programme team will be set up from June 2024, although it is expected that the core team will remain small. They envisage an incremental approach, with a strong focus on partnership working with other organisations to analyse the information they gather. They intend to learn from other observatories, including the Public Health Wales Observatory, and are likely to commission work from the wider system. The new programme team will carry out a stakeholder mapping exercise and it is likely that reference groups will be established to develop ideas, encourage wider debate and inform outputs.

‘In terms of priorities for the next year or two, data is a big priority for us. We want to make sure that we really understand the focus of the observatory. We want to look at scenario planning and demand predictions.’ – HEIW

We asked HEIW about their capacity to stay abreast of changing legislation across different government departments, both in Wales and in Westminster (e.g. the impact of crime and justice on mental health). They agreed that robust collaboration would be key to the success of the observatory’s work and would welcome RCAP bodies and external stakeholders sharing information as part of their own horizon scanning. HEIW also agreed that processes should be as transparent as possible and agreed to consider making data dashboards accessible and available to all, where appropriate, and on a case-by-case basis.

**Restarting the NHS Wales staff survey**

HEIW is keen to re-establish the annual NHS Wales staff survey. They are working with Professor Michael West and the Wales Partnership Forum to review and refine questions and will aim to publish the results through the observatory as part of an all-Wales data dashboard.

**Collecting and publishing NHS Wales vacancy rates**

Many royal colleges and professional bodies have suggested that a workforce plan without numbers is ‘not a plan but a daydream’. Members of the Welsh RCAP group were among 36 organisations that in November 2022 called on the Welsh government to publish 'projections of [NHS Wales] staff numbers needed to meet [patient] demand now and in future... based on:

> a standard definition of vacancy to be used by all NHS Wales and social care organisations
the number of vacancies per organisation published by specialty, career grade and profession
the number of full-time equivalent staff, as well as the total number of employed staff
the number of vacancies filled by agency and locum staff.

The Welsh government publishes official statistics on the numbers of directly employed staff within NHS Wales on a quarterly basis. That includes a full-time equivalent head count broken down by staff groups, specialties and grades. The national workforce reporting system provides data for general practice and the government also publishes COVID-19 sickness data on a fortnightly basis.

However, NHS Wales vacancy data have not been routinely published in over a decade; this was due to concerns in the past about the accuracy and reliability of the data that were being collected. However, the Welsh government recognises that it’s not helpful to let organisations depend on a wide variety of different sources for vacancy rates (eg freedom of information requests, board papers, IMTPs) and so the minister for health and social services has committed to publishing the data during the summer of 2023.

‘By June 2023, Welsh government will publish NHS Wales vacancy data for the directly employed workforce.’ – Welsh government, National workforce implementation plan: addressing NHS Wales workforce challenges, Jan 2023, p34

The Welsh government has worked with assistant directors of workforce and OD at every health board to identify vacancy rates in time for the June 2023 deadline; this will be reported as high-level data to begin with, but they have indicated that they are happy to consider more detailed data collection and publication at a later stage.

‘We want to be more transparent. We recognise there are gaps, especially around protected characteristics, workforce behaviours, and in primary and community care (for example, dentistry, optometry and pharmacy).’ – Welsh government

We briefly touched upon the Audit Wales NHS workforce planning review that is underway and HEIW assured us that they have been consulted about the scope, approach and timings of the work.

Conclusions and next steps

During our wider discussions, we asked HEIW what powers they can use to deliver a ‘motivated, engaged and valued health and care workforce’ when they are not the direct employer of most people in the health service. They recognised this as a risk and explained that they aim to use their position inside the system (as a member of the NHS Wales ‘family’ with a seat around the table) to exercise influence through evidence and case studies to demonstrate the impact and benefits of their work.

‘It’s the day-to-day experience of staff that makes the difference. For us, it is about influencing our NHS colleagues through case studies and providing evidence to demonstrate impact, which will grow a social movement that leads to change. Staff need to embrace culture change at all levels.’ – HEIW
In the same line of questioning, we wanted to know how HEIW clinical leads intend to work closely and in collaboration with clinical leads at the new NHS executive for Wales when it is established in April 2023. HEIW told us they are hopeful that the new arrangements will streamline many of the national infrastructure and work programmes, helping the NHS in Wales to operate more effectively with less duplication and more focus. In the meantime, HEIW will aim to ensure that workforce (like digital technology) is part of service design from the start of the process.

‘People still talk about workforce as an enabling issue, but there’s no service without a workforce. Just deciding how to design a service and then afterwards thinking about the workforce is a very traditional and outdated approach. We want to make sure that workforce issues – like digital technology – are considered as part of service design in the first place.’ – HEIW

Attendees felt that the conversations during this workshop were tremendously useful, and that future meetings have real potential to be a good forum for focused discussions about shared priorities. As HEIW celebrates 5 years in existence, we asked them how royal colleges and professional bodies can support them during the next 5 years, and how we can avoid duplication of work.

We agreed that in future, a topic-based approach would be helpful in which we can discuss:

> what are the key (headline) issues in a particular subject area?
> what are the areas of good practice that should be more widely shared?
> what data and intelligence do colleges hold in the subject area?
> what horizon scanning can we do / what opportunities can we identify?

The next workshop will take place in autumn 2023. The suggested topic for discussion is the development of HEIW’s 2024–27 IMTP. Royal colleges and professional bodies will present on:

> our key roles and responsibilities
> how RCAP bodies are governed in Wales
> the information and data we collect
> our 2023–24 work programme.

For more information, please contact:

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Annex 1: 32 actions to support the health and care workforce

These actions are taken from phase one of the joint health and care workforce strategy, which runs from 2020–2023. The strategy aims to develop 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’. More detail on how these will be achieved is available in the full strategy.

**Action 1** Introduce a Health and Wellbeing Framework across the health and social care workforce setting clear and measurable standards to help drive improvement.

**Action 2** Introduce a ‘Staff Governance’ Framework setting out expectations for both employers and employees to drive positive employee experience and improved quality.

**Action 3** Work towards fair reward and recognition across the health and social care workforce.

**Action 4** Implement a consistent approach to monitoring and measuring employee experience through health and social care staff surveys.

**Action 5** Incorporate a set of workforce wellbeing and engagement measures in the performance framework for organisations, and the broader health and social care system.

**Action 6** Establish a National Careers Service for health and social care which promotes all roles and reaches out to all parts of the community and workforce.

**Action 7** Review and develop targeted schemes for significant shortages in professional and occupational groups and hard to recruit areas including medicine, domiciliary care, social work and nursing (linked to action 31) and under-represented groups.

**Action 8** Implement a modern values-based bilingual recruitment approach for all health and social care staff.

**Action 9** Develop a multi-professional workforce plan to support implementation of the new primary and community care workforce model.

**Action 10** Develop a multi-professional workforce plan to support implementation of Together for Mental Health.

**Action 11** Translate the workforce models being developed through Regional Partnership Boards into a good practice guide for integrated working.

**Action 12** Develop a clear competence and capabilities framework for extended skills and advanced practice across professional groups.

**Action 13** Implement a values-based, common induction programme for all of our workforce who deliver health and social care in primary and community settings.

**Action 14** Work with partners to harmonise governance, regulation and registration arrangements to facilitate multi-professional working.

**Action 15** Implement a “Building a Digitally Ready Workforce Programme” focused on enhancing the digital literacy and confidence of the wider health and social care workforce in Wales.

**Action 16** Commission consistent digital aspects as part of all undergraduate curricula for health and social care professionals.

**Action 17** Implement a requirement for all digital transformation projects and programmes to include a clear organisational development plan.

**Action 18** Work with education providers to ensure education meets the needs of the health and social care system, and includes programmes delivered through the medium of Welsh.

**Action 19** Work with education providers to support the workforce to develop and/or improve Welsh language skills.

**Action 20** In partnership with higher education institutions, implement changes to the content of curricula and flexibility of provision for undergraduate programmes to meet future needs and delivery models.
**Action 21** Continue to invest in increasing the numbers of health and social care professionals who are trained in Wales, with a focus on value.

**Action 22** Widen access into health and social care careers by developing the work-based learning model.

**Action 23** Develop a clear and equitable funding and commissioning model for health and social care education including undergraduate education, apprenticeships and vocational education.

**Action 24** Develop a clear strategy for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) across professional and occupational groups.

**Action 25** Develop a strategy to frame a consistent approach to compassionate leadership in health and social care in Wales.

**Action 26** Establish an accessible range of leadership development resources and programmes for individuals and organisations.

**Action 27** Develop a talent management pipeline for leadership roles.

**Action 28** Create a centre of excellence for workforce intelligence for health and social care in Wales.

**Action 29** Build capacity and capability in workforce planning and development across health and social care, underpinned by a standardised methodology.

**Action 30** Develop workforce planning guidance for Welsh language skills identification and development in the health and social care workforce.

**Action 31** Develop workforce plans for key professional and occupational groups.

**Action 32** Commission a programme of work to understand the contribution of volunteers and carers to inform future workforce plans.
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who took part in this workshop.

This included representatives from Health Education and Improvement Wales, the Welsh government, the Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Occupational Therapists, British Dental Association, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Royal College of Nursing, British Psychological Society, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Royal College of Radiologists, Royal College of Surgeons of England, Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, British Association of Social Workers, Royal College of Anaesthetists, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Royal College of Podiatry, Royal College of GPs, Royal College of Emergency Medicine and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

Welsh royal colleges and professional (RCAP) bodies advisory group: Who are we?

In July 2022, royal colleges, faculties, specialist societies and professional bodies in Wales established a multidisciplinary external advisory group on workforce planning, service transformation and other shared priorities. Convened by the RCP, membership is made up of more than 30 membership organisations representing tens of thousands of doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, therapists, pharmacists, dentists, paramedics and social workers in Wales. The group aims to work collaboratively with the Welsh government, NHS Wales and local authorities to improve how we educate, attract, retain and redesign the health and care workforce while valuing, motivating and supporting staff to deliver high-quality patient care. Find out more.

Educating, improving, influencing

Through our work with patients and doctors, the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) is working to achieve real change across the health and social care sector in Wales. We represent 40,000 physicians and clinicians worldwide – educating, improving and influencing for better health and care. Over 1,600 members in Wales work in hospitals and the community across 30 different clinical specialties, diagnosing and treating millions of patients with a huge range of medical conditions. We campaign for improvements to healthcare, medical education and public health.

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