



Our proposals to improve the quality and safety of care

Maintaining standards and public confidence

We must continue to support the wellbeing of those working in health and care while driving improvements in standards.

The findings of the [recent review](#) into the Nursing & Midwifery Council's (NMC) culture are serious and concerning. The review found evidence of safeguarding failures and that people working in the organisation have experienced racism, discrimination and bullying. People will be asking questions about how this happened and what action is now going to be taken. The NMC has accepted all the review's recommendations and said this will be a turning point for them. We will be undertaking enhanced monitoring of the NMC to ensure improvements are implemented and sustained.

The PSA will establish an oversight and support group that will receive regular updates on the NMC's progress, scrutinise the impact of measures introduced by the NMC to improve its culture and performance, and provide insight and advice on further actions required. The group will include Chief Nursing Officers from the four UK nations, representatives from trade unions, policy officials from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Devolved Administrations, and relevant experts, who will be identified by the PSA.

The PSA was set up following the Inquiry into failings at Bristol Royal Infirmary to ensure that professional regulation remains focused on public protection and the public interest. We protect the public by promoting high standards of competence and conduct among health and social care professionals.

It is clear that the issues facing health and social care in all four nations of the UK require urgent attention. Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Wes Streeting has described the NHS in England as 'broken' and better access to safer care was at the top of the list of concerns for the public during the run up to the UK general election. The PSA's quarterly bulletin will highlight how we can work together to create a health and social care system that promotes safety for all. We hope you find the information useful.

We are also considering the findings of the review through our assessment of the NMC’s performance for 2023/24. In our last report on the NMC in September 2023 we found a number of areas where improvements were required and it did not meet Standard 15 which relates to its fitness to practise process. The NMC has not met this Standard since its 2018/19 performance review. We have had longstanding concerns about the NMC in this area and in September 2022, escalated our concerns to the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and the Health and Social Care Committee; and have continued to update them following each subsequent performance review.



We are reviewing our own processes to see whether there is anything raised in the independent review that we could have identified earlier. We had already initiated work to review our standards earlier this year, which will include whether we should consider a regulator’s culture, leadership and governance as part of our work. The independent review appears to support us taking such an approach in the future. If you would like to find out more about this work, please get in touch with us.

We oversee 10 statutory bodies that regulate health and social care professionals, (over 1.9 million) assessing whether they operate effectively and fairly. We also accredit organisations that register health and social care practitioners not covered by statutory regulation (approximately 130,000 practitioners), known as Accredited Registers. Alongside this, we advise governments and others on improving regulatory frameworks and addressing emerging challenges, informed by our ongoing research and policy work.

Our impact

Patient Safety: Reducing risks to patients by appealing through the courts fitness to practise decisions which do not protect the public.

Public Confidence: Building trust in health and social care services by undertaking research into key areas such as sexual misconduct.

Professional Standards: Driving ongoing improvements in the regulators and Accredited Registers by monitoring and overseeing their key regulatory functions.

Advancing Healthcare Regulation: Key Considerations for Reform

Reform should be brought in without delay, but we need to work together to ensure appropriate safeguards for patients.

Reform to the regulatory framework for health and care professionals was started by the previous government. We believe modernising regulators’ powers to give them the flexibility and agility to respond to changes in the way care is delivered is imperative and can introduce more efficient ways of regulating. We strongly encourage the new government to quickly continue with advancing this critical work. However, more safeguards need to be built into the proposals.



Reform is starting with changes to the GMC’s legislation, as it takes on the regulation of Physician Associates (PAs) and Anaesthesia Associates (AAs) from December 2024. The regulation of AAs and PAs has been a contentious topic, with concerns being raised about supervision, job titles, and whether scopes of practice are clear enough. As above, these debates show the need for regulatory and workforce planning to work hand in hand.

The new legislation for regulation of AAs and PAs is not just about those two roles – it will act as a blueprint for reform to be rolled out to all the professional healthcare regulators. With the potential to impact more than 1.9 million health professionals, it is important to get it right – and we think it needs improving to make sure that public protection is maintained. Roles affected by the changes will include those working in the medical, nursing, midwifery, dental, pharmaceutical, allied health, optical, osteopathic and chiropractic professions.



Moreover, these reforms will grant regulators significantly increased powers to determine their regulatory approach, with the removal of parliamentary oversight of many policy areas. While changing the legislation is essential for achieving the desired flexibility, it is crucial to strike a balance between regulatory autonomy and accountability. As we move forward, we will be doing all we can to ensure that these reforms not only streamline regulation but also maintain the highest standards of public safety and accountability. This includes developing guidance for the regulators when using their new powers. We will continue to provide advice to the Government on the effects of changes to the legislation, and our oversight of the performance of the regulators during this time of significant change will help identify and address any issues early on.

What would we like to see happen?

More active engagement with patient bodies on the proposed legislation to help achieve the optimal balance for public protection. We also seek adjustments to the legislation to provide the right safeguards. If you would like to see this too or find out more about it, please get in touch with us.

Tackling the health and care workforce crisis

Regulation and workforce planning need to work hand in hand to ensure public safety, whilst enabling innovation and change.

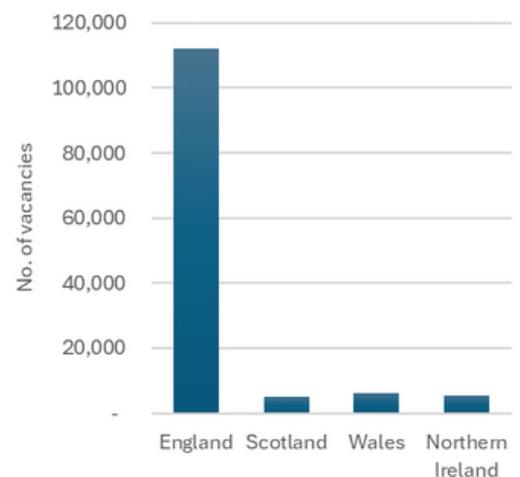
Staff vacancies within the NHS in England are over **112,000** and over **150,000** in adult social care – staff [leaving the NHS rose from 9.6%](#) in the year to September 2020 to **12.5%** in the year to September 2022.

In [Scotland](#) there are over **5,000** vacancies for medical, dental, nursing, midwifery and allied health professionals.

There are over **6,000** vacancies across the NHS in [Wales](#).

In [Northern Ireland](#) there are over **5,380** vacancies across Health and Social Care

NHS vacancies by nation



These stark figures make it clear that urgent action is needed to retain the skilled professionals currently in the system, recruit more and think innovatively about how care is delivered. To better meet the challenges it faces, the NHS will need people with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time to deliver care safely.

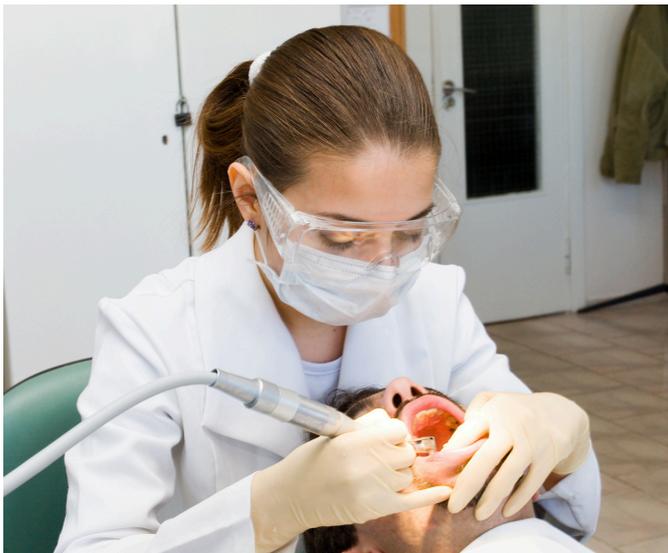


The new government's commitment to the NHS long-term workforce plan is welcome, but what is needed alongside it is a strategy for its safe delivery. Too often, proposals for workforce change are developed in isolation from the thinking about how to manage the risks associated with them. When this happens, it can put patients at risk, damage public confidence, and make future workforce change more difficult.

What would we like to see happen?

We are beginning to work with the NHS on regulatory strategies to support workforce planning already. For example, NHS England requires registration with one of our Accredited Registers for many of the new and expanded roles helping to widen access to mental health services – helping to build confidence in standards by the public, employers and colleagues alike.

For NHS managers there are a range of regulatory options that can be considered. It is important that the regulatory model recognises the significant pressures many managers will be under, whilst driving up standards and holding managers to account. We will continue to work with NHS England, NHS Confederation and others to get this right.



We would like to work with the four UK governments and any bodies involved in workforce planning in health and care to develop an overarching regulatory strategy that will support the further development of new roles and changing models of care. It could prove essential to addressing the challenges of ever-increasing demand and acute staff shortages facing health and care services UK-wide. If you would like to see this too or find out more about it, please get in touch with us.

Contact Information

If you have questions, comments, or would like to meet with a member of our team, please email engagement@professionalstandards.org.uk.

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