

Standards for safe staffing for children and young people in the Independent and Private Sector services and Children's Hospices¹

Purpose

The Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) aims to promote the development of children's nursing through evidence-based information about practice and education. This position statement has been produced by officers and members of the Association to provide the nursing workforce requirements for health care services accessed by children and young people.

The standards contained within this position statement are the minimum essential recommended for all providers of services for infants, children and young people

Background

The intensity of workload within all services and across all settings continues to increase as a result of changes in complexity of illness, advances in medicine, increased public expectations and changes in how services are configured, such as primary care out-of-hours provision². The Kings Fund highlighted that such changes have resulted in increased numbers attending emergency care departments, with more children and young people requiring assessment, observation and short stays, in acute settings^{3,4}.

The Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) has repeatedly stated that all health services accessed by children and young people must be age appropriate and delivered by suitably educated and skilled practitioners⁵.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) previously clearly defined the nursing workforce and safe standards related to the care of children and young people across all health care provision, including for example acute or mental health settings, community, social care or independent sector provision. The ABPN actively contributed to the first edition of the standards published in 2003⁶, and subsequent iterations^{7,8}. However, many of the RCN publications have over recent years been archived creating a void in the availability of evidence-informed, quality assured standards for practice guidance.

In this document, the ABPN has drawn upon more recent international comparisons in respect of paediatrics including neonates and palliative care^{9,10}, acknowledging the increasing complexity in the needs of infants, children and young people today.

Independent and private sector provision¹¹

- all providers must employ or have access to a senior children's nurse for advice and policy development, and work in collaboration with the local NHS children's services network
- all registered nurses should have Basic Paediatric Life skills and safeguarding

- children to level 3 as defined by the intercollegiate framework¹²
- children's nurse staffing levels should equate to those recommended for the equivalent NHS service such as theatre or surgical services¹³
- a registered children's nurse should be employed to care for those children admitted to adult wards and services
- a children's nurse bank should be in place to complement full-time staff so there is cover available for increased activity and acuity, sickness, maternity leave, training and annual leave
- links should be in place with a local university to provide opportunities for children's nursing students to gain experience within the independent sector

Children's Hospices^{14,15}

ABPN standards for children's specialist wards are applicable to children's hospices and those in respect of community children's nursing teams are equally applicable to the provision of palliative and end-of-life care provision by children's hospices.

The minimum baseline establishment should be increased by 27 percent to cover annual leave, sickness, study leave, parental leave and other leave¹⁶.

- all registered nurses should have Basic Paediatric Life skills
- children with life-limiting conditions approaching the end of life and being cared for at home should have access to a registered children's nurses at any time during the day or night
- links should be in place with a local university to provide opportunities for children's nursing students to gain experience within the independent sector
- a children's nurse bank should be in place to complement full-time staff so there is cover available for increased activity and acuity, sickness, maternity leave, training and annual leave

The ABPN believes

- children and young people have a right to be cared for in age-appropriate facilities and by nurses who have the right education, training, knowledge and skills to meet their needs^{17,18,19}
- staffing levels should be reviewed at least once a year²⁰
- there should be access to a senior children's nurse²¹ for advice at all times throughout the 24-hour period, as well as a named or designated safeguarding professional for advice 24 hours a day²²
- local and national workforce planning is essential, encompassing all services and sectors delivering care for children and young people²³
- **the standards contained within this position statement are the minimum essential recommended independent sector providers of services and hospices for infants, children and young people**

It is important to review local workforce priorities and responses alongside national workforce policy which can be accessed via national government websites:

Useful websites

NHS England <https://www.england.nhs.uk/>

Department of Health Northern Ireland <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk>

NHS Scotland <https://www.gov.scot/health-and-social-care/>

NHS Wales <https://www.nhs.wales>

December 2024

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References

- ¹ The term 'children and young people' is used to refer to infants (neonates), children and young people up to the age of 18, or at the point at which an individual's transition to adult health services is completed.
- ² Kings Fund & Nuffield Trust (2024) Public satisfaction with the NHS and social care in 2023 https://assets.kingsfund.org.uk/f/256914/x/48c40ea52b/public_satisfaction_nhs_social_care_2023_bsa_2024.pdf
- ³ Kings Fund (2013) Are accident and emergency attendances increasing? <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2013/04/are-accident-and-emergency-attendances-increasing?>
- ⁴ Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2017) Standards for short stay paediatric assessment units <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/search?keywords=short+stay+paediatric+assessment+units>
- ⁵ Association of British Paediatric Nurses Position Statement on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_position_statement_children_and_young_peoples_rights.pdf](#) and Background Briefing paper on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_background_briefing_children_and_young_people.pdf](#)
- ⁶ Royal College of Nursing (2003) Defining staffing levels for children and young people's services: RCN guidance for clinical professionals and service managers, 1st Edition London: RCN.
- ⁷ Royal College of Nursing (2007) Defining staffing levels for children and young people's services: RCN guidance for clinical professionals and service managers, 2nd edition, London: RCN.
- ⁸ Royal College of Nursing (2013) Defining staffing levels for children and young people's services: RCN guidance for clinical professionals and service managers, 3rd edition, London: RCN.
- ⁹ Ministry of Health, British Columbia August 2024 https://www.bcnu.org/files/mNPR_Hospital-Based_Care_Setting_Policy_Directive.pdf
- ¹⁰ <https://www.trustednursestaffing.com/nurse-patient-ratios-by-state/>
- ¹¹ Independent and private sector organisations, including hospices must ensure care provision is separate from adult services and provide suitable play and family facilities, especially where overnight stays are required.
- ¹² Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff
- ¹³ The safe staffing standards outlined in other ABPN position statements apply to all health care services whether provided by the NHS or independent sector
- ¹⁴ Independent and private sector organisations, including hospices must ensure care provision is separate from adult services and provide suitable play and family facilities, especially where overnight stays are required. The safe staffing standards outlined in other ABPN position statements apply to all health care services whether provided by the NHS or independent sector
- ¹⁵ Some children and young people accessing children's hospices are accompanied by carers. There should be a clear policy and agreement in place regarding the roles and responsibilities of the child's care team and hospice staff in care delivery during the child's stay
- ¹⁶ Royal College of Nursing (2021) Nursing workforce standards, London: RCN.
- ¹⁷ Association of British Paediatric Nurses Position Statement on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_position_statement_children_and_young_peoples_rights.pdf](#) and Background Briefing paper on Children and Young People's Rights [abpn_background_briefing_children_and_young_people.pdf](#)
- ¹⁸ ABPN Position Statement on Children's Nurse Education [abpn_position_statement_nurse_education_final_24_november_2024.pdf](#) and ABPN Background Paper on Children's Nurse Education [abpn_cn_education_background_paper_final_22nd_november_2024.pdf](#)
- ¹⁹ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/national-standards-for-neonatal-qualified-in-specialty-qis-education/>
- ²⁰ To recognise changes in service configurations, reductions in lengths of stay, clinical complexity, increasing acuity, children and young people admitted in emotional distress including those who have self-harmed
- ²¹ A senior qualified children's nurse is a nurse that holds a children's nursing qualification, and a master's degree in an appropriate health/social care related subject, with a minimum of five years' full-time experience in uninterrupted clinical practice. The expectation is that this post would be at a minimum of Band 8a dependent on the full scope and remit of the

position in which case the post may be graded higher where the remit is greater. All post holders of matron positions in children's services must hold a registered children's nursing qualification.

²² Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff

²³ Association of British Paediatric Nurses Workforce planning and nurse staffing position statement [abpn_position_statement_workforce_planning_and_nurse_staffing-final_nov_2024.docx](#) and background briefing paper [abpn_workforce_planning_and_nurse_staffing_background_briefing_paper-final_nov_2024.docx](#)