

Standards for safe staffing in Community Children's Nursing, School Nursing and Health Visiting services for children and young people¹

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.

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 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. Many of the RCN publications have over recent years been archived creating a void in the availability of evidence-informed, quality assured standards for practice guidance.

The Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) acknowledges the RCN for the standards previously published, having actively contributed to their development since the first edition was published in 2003⁶, including subsequent iterations^{7,8}. The ABPN has drawn upon more recent international comparisons in respect of paediatrics

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.

including neonates^{9,10}, acknowledging the increasing complexity in the needs of infants, children and young people today¹¹.

For community children's nursing, health visiting and school nursing services

- all registered nurses must be trained in Basic Paediatric Life Support skills and safeguarding children to level 3 as defined by the intercollegiate framework¹²
- a minimum of one practice educator to update all staff

The minimum baseline establishment should be increased by 27 percent to cover annual leave, sickness, study leave, parental leave and other leave¹³

The number of students at any one time should not exceed university, and individual clinical areas, agreed numbers¹⁴.

Community Children's Nursing¹⁵ and Children's Continuing Care Teams¹⁶ standards

- a registered children's nurse¹⁷ must lead the team
- the minimum ratio of registered nurse to unregistered¹⁸ staff should not fall below 70:30 percent¹⁹
- a minimum of 25 percent of the registered nurse component of the CCN team should have completed a recognisable community education and development programme²⁰
- a child population of 50,000, requires a minimum of 20 whole time equivalent

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 ABPN Position Statement on Workforce Planning and Nurse Staffing [abpn_position_statement_workforce_planning_and_nurse_staffing-final_nov_2024.docx](#) and ABPN Workforce Planning and Nurse Staffing Background Briefing Paper [abpn_workforce_planning_and_nurse_staffing_background_briefing_paper-final_nov_2024.docx](#)

¹² Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff

¹³ Royal College of Nursing (2021) Nursing workforce standards, London: RCN.

¹⁴ Nursing and Midwifery Council (2019) Education and training standards framework for nursing and midwifery education <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards-for-education-and-training/standards-framework-for-nursing-and-midwifery-education/>

¹⁵ Community children's nursing teams largely comprise of registered children's nurses who have undertaken additional education and training such as registered specialist community practitioner (SCPHN) and/or specialist clinical qualifications such as oncology, palliative care and renal nursing. Current undergraduate education standards emphasise the need for future nurses to be able to work across settings including the community, with registered children's nurses today having a foundation in the knowledge and skills to work in the community

¹⁶ Children's continuing care teams are in effect a 'virtual ward', ensuring the appropriate skill-mix of registered to unregistered staff to cover the specific care arrangements for children and young people. Health care assistants/support workers employed within the team enable maximum efficiency in delivering care of a wide geographical area to many children and families in their own homes, schools or respite (short break) care settings

¹⁷ who has completed a demonstrable portfolio of relevant clinical expertise and academic accreditation of knowledge, skills and competence acquisition

¹⁸ Delegation of clinical tasks and care needs must be in line with recommended practice, clinical governance and in accordance with the NMC code see Nursing and Midwifery Council (2018) The code: professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/code/>

¹⁹ For children's continuing and community care teams a lower minimum ratio of registered to unregistered staff (10-90 percent) may be deemed appropriate

²⁰ QNI & QNIS (2018) Voluntary Standards for Community Children's Nurses to support CCN education and practice <https://www.qnis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/QNI-and-QNIS-voluntary-standards-for-CCN-Final.pdf>

(WTE) community children's nurses^{21, 22}

The minimum above requires adjustment to reflect specific case mix, dependency of children and young people, range of service provided and available skill-mix^{23, 24, 25}

Health Visiting services^{26, 27}

Recommendations include:

- A maximum caseload of 400 children per full-time health visitor^{28, 29, 30}

School Nursing services^{31, 32,}

Recommendations include:

- a named school nurse responsible for coordinating care across primary and secondary schools
- a minimum of one qualified school nurse for each secondary school and its cluster of primary schools³³

²¹ to provide a holistic and comprehensive community children's nursing service in addition to any individual child's specific continuing care investment see Royal College of Nursing (2009) A child's right to care at home, London: RCN;

Royal College of Nursing (2009) Preparing nurses to care for children at home and community settings, London: RCN and 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

²² and potential expansion to meet demand arising from increasing technological dependency and complexity needs of children and young people

²³ Skill-mix within teams includes a range of practitioners from assistant practitioners to play specialists, registered nurses and therapists based on local need.

²⁴ Community children's nursing workforce establishments and working patterns must be such that palliation of symptoms and 24- hour end of life care can be provided whenever and wherever required see Maruzza Foundation (2013) Charter of the Rights for the Dying Child [CartaDiTrieste200x240 ENG REV 15 APR 2016 02.pdf](https://www.fondazionemaruzza.org/)

([maruzza.org](https://www.fondazionemaruzza.org/))<https://www.fondazionemaruzza.org/>; NHS Scotland (2019) The Paediatric End of Life Care Network (PELiCaN) [National Managed Clinical Network https://www.nn.nhs.scot/pelican/](https://www.nn.nhs.scot/pelican/) and Hope House Children's Hospice (2023) *Children in Wales Requiring Palliative Care: Trends in Prevalence and Complexity* <https://www.hopehouse.org.uk/trends-report>

²⁵ Calculating the dependency of any patient in the community is complex. Children and young people often live with their families and have carers to assist with care. The RCN has outlined examples of Community Children's Services and the management of complexity, including the use of a caseload dependency complexity matrix and 'caseload dependency continuum' of local clinical needs – across the four domains of community children's nursing: Acute/short term conditions, Children with long term conditions, Children with complex needs/conditions and Children with life limiting or life-threatening conditions see Royal College of Nursing (2020) Futureproofing community children's nursing, London: RCN

²⁶ Health visitors are registered nurses who have completed further education and training to become specialist community public health nurses <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/standards-for-post-registration/standards-of-proficiency-for-specialist-community-public-health-nurses2/>

²⁷ teams have developed to include different professional roles and skills, with registered children's nurses and nursery nurses key members of the team

²⁸ Unite/CPHVA (2009) Unite/CPHVA Statement: What size caseload should a health visitor have? Available at <http://archive.unitetheunion.org> Cowley et al (2013) Why Health visiting? A review of the literature about key health visitor interventions, processes and outcomes for children and families <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/nursing/newsevents/news/2013/Health-Visitors.aspx> .

²⁹ caseloads should be lower depending on the number of vulnerable families has on the caseload, deprivation indices, geography of the patch and the team support available, including access to administration support

³⁰ The Institute of Health Visiting recommends an average of one health visitor to 250 children to deliver comprehensive health improvement and has highlighted the need for an appropriate workload tool to be developed see <https://ihv.org.uk/>

³¹ School nurses are registered nurses who have completed further education and training to become specialist community public health nurses <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/standards-for-post-registration/standards-of-proficiency-for-specialist-community-public-health-nurses2/>

³² The skill-mix of a school nursing team includes a number of registered nurses, nursery nurses and health care support workers to provide a year-round service

³³ The actual number of school nurses will vary dependent upon the size and complexity of the school population, the number of vulnerable children, deprivation indices and geography of the patch

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^{34, 35, 36}
- staffing levels should be reviewed at least once a year³⁷
- **the standards contained within this position statement are the minimum essential recommended for all providers of services for infants, children and young people**
- there should be access to a senior registered children's nurse, health visitor or school nurse³⁸, as well as a named or designated safeguarding professional for advice 24 hours a day³⁹
- local and national workforce planning is essential, encompassing all services and sectors delivering care for children and young people⁴⁰

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>

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³⁴ 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](#)

³⁵ 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](#)

³⁶ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/national-standards-for-neonatal-qualified-in-specialty-qis-education/>

³⁷ 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

³⁸ 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 matrons positions in children's services must hold a registered children's nursing qualification.

³⁹ Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff

⁴⁰ 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](#)