

Standards for safe staffing in Operating theatres and recovery for children and young people¹

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 However, many of the RCN publications have over recent years been archived creating a void in the availability of evidence-informed, quality assured standards for practice guidance.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^{9,10}, acknowledging the increasing complexity in the needs of infants (neonates), children and young people requiring critical, high dependency or special care today.

Within operating theatres and recovery areas

- all registered nurses and Operating Department Practitioners must be trained in paediatric Basic Life Support and safeguarding children to level 3 as defined by the intercollegiate framework¹¹

- at least one band 7 supernumerary supervisory ward sister/charge nurse
- a minimum of one practice educator to update all staff
- various support roles including¹²:
 - a receptionist +/- administrative support for the department sister/charge nurse

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 on a shift should not exceed university, and individual clinical areas, agreed numbers¹⁴.

Operating theatres and recovery¹⁵

- All registered nurses and operating department technicians must possess basic paediatric airway and circulatory management skills¹⁶.
- a minimum of one registered children's nurse on duty in recovery areas.

For child specific lists¹⁷

- Two registered nurses available to ensure one nurse per patient in the immediate post-operative period.
- All registered and unregistered nursing and support staff must have the knowledge, skills and competencies related to
 - effective communication with children, young people and their parents
 - safeguarding children to level 3 as defined by the intercollegiate framework¹⁸
 - pain assessment and management
 - assessment of physiological observations and recognition of the sick child¹⁹
 - assessment of fluid balance and management, including the administration of intravenous infusions
 - the administration of analgesia, anti-emetics and other drugs by all routes, as well as the use of all associated equipment according to local protocols^{20,21}

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^{22,23,24}
- staffing levels should be reviewed at least once a year²⁵
- there should be access to a senior children's nurse²⁶ for advice at all times-throughout the 24-hour period, as well as a named or designated safeguarding professional for advice 24 hours a day²⁷
- local and national workforce planning is essential, encompassing all services and sectors delivering care for children and young people²⁸
- **the standards contained within this position statement are the minimum essential recommended for all providers of services 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> and <https://heiw.nhs.wales/files/once-for-wales/documents/all-wales-sssa-guidelines-for-roles-and-requirements/>

December 2024

Copyright ©2024 Association of British Paediatric Nurses. All rights reserved.

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

¹² Support roles should be used to ensure that registered nurses are used effectively.

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

¹⁴ Nursing and Midwifery Council (2018) Realising Professionalism: Standards for education and training. NMC

¹⁵ All nursing staff in the operating theatre must have the appropriate child specific skills to be able to support surgeons and anaesthetists. Many hospitals have developed local competency frameworks following the National Confidential

Enquiry into peri-operative deaths National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death (2011) Are we there yet? A review of organisational and clinical aspects of children's surgery, London: NCEPOD.

https://www.ncepod.org.uk/2011report1/downloads/SIC_fullreport.pdf

¹⁶ Paediatric Critical Care Society (2021) Standards for the care of the Critically ill or injured child 6th Edition

<https://pccsociety.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/PCCS-Standards-2021.pdf>

¹⁷ Following general, epidural or spinal anaesthesia, children should be recovered in a specifically designed unit

¹⁸ Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-007366>

¹⁹ Royal College of Nursing (2017) Standards for Assessing, Measuring and Monitoring Vital Signs in Infants, Children and Young People <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-005942>

-
- ²⁰ Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland (2013) Immediate post anaesthesia recovery, London: AAGBI. Available at www.aagbi.org <https://anaesthetists.org/Home/Resources-publications/Guidelines/Immediate-post-anaesthesia-recovery>
- ²¹ Royal College of Nursing (2017) Competences: an education and training competence framework for administering medicines intravenously to children and young people <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/pub-006302>
- ²² 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](#)
- ²³ 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](#)
- ²⁴ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/national-standards-for-neonatal-qualified-in-specialty-qis-education/>
- ²⁵ 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
- ²⁶ 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.
- ²⁷ Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff
- ²⁸ 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](#)