

Standards for safe staffing in Outpatient departments, day care and day surgery 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, including 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 However, many of the RCN publications have over recent years been archived creating a void in the availability of evidence-informed, quality assured standards for practice guidance.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^{9,10}, acknowledging the increasing complexity in the needs of children and young people accessing health care services today.

Within outpatient departments, day care and day surgery units

- all registered nurses must be trained Basic Paediatric Life Support and safeguarding children to level 3 as defined by the intercollegiate framework¹¹
- a band 7 supernumerary supervisory ward sister/charge nurse

- at least one nurse as appropriate per shift with Advanced Paediatric Life Support (APLS)/European Paediatric Advanced Life Support (EPALS) skills
- a minimum of one practice educator to update all staff
- various support roles including¹²:
 - a ward receptionist +/- administrative support for the ward sister/charge nurse
 - at least one health play specialist
 - one housekeeper +/- one hostess as appropriate

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.

Outpatient departments^{15,16}

- a minimum of one registered children's nurse available at all times to assist, supervise, support and chaperone children
- where e-health technologies¹⁷ are used, staff must have received specific education and training in their use
- 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
 - recognition of the sick child¹⁹.

Day Care (Medical) standards²⁰

- a minimum of two registered children's nurses on each shift
- a minimum of 70:30 per cent registered to unregistered²¹ staff (although the precise ratio will vary throughout clinical areas²²)
- 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 framework²³
 - pain assessment and management
 - recognition of the sick child²⁴.

Factors affecting skill-mix in day care areas include:

- the degree of integration with children's services
- whether the service is nurse or physician led, if nurse-led the service should be led by advanced children's nurse practitioners with the appropriate level of knowledge and skill
- complement of staff available, including clinician assistants, play

specialists, clinic assistants/health care support workers

Day Surgery standards^{25,26}

- a minimum of two registered children's nurses must be available at all times
- a minimum of 70:30 per cent registered to unregistered²⁷ staff (although the precise ratio will vary throughout clinical areas²⁸)
- staffing levels and skill-mix will depend on case mix, acuity, workload and whether other children's services are provided within the organisation²⁹
- 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 framework³⁰
 - pain assessment and management
 - recognition of the sick child³¹.

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^{32,33,34}
- staffing levels should be reviewed at least once a year³⁵
- there should be access to a senior children's nurse³⁶ for advice at all times throughout the 24-hour period, as well as a named or designated safeguarding professional for advice 24 hours a day³⁷
- local and national workforce planning is essential, encompassing all services and sectors delivering care for children and young people³⁸
- **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>

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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 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 Outpatient departments providing a service for children and young people must be integrated with respective inpatient services, ambulatory care provision and community care.
- ¹⁶ Outpatient clinics run by specialist children's nurses or therapists improve the quality of care, communication and access to advice and support for children, young people and their families.
- ¹⁷ The effective use of telephone contact, use of Apps and email communication is beneficial
- 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 The standards and recommendations apply regardless of size and configuration
- ²¹ Unregistered staff must have completed a course of training specific to the setting, and in the care of infants, children and young people and have undergone a period of competence assessment before carrying out care and delegated tasks
- ²² For example, it is expected that there will be a higher proportion of registered nurses in areas such as intensive care, specialist areas and in many cases general children's units
- ²³ 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>
- ²⁴ 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>
- ²⁵ Day surgery is defined in England and Ireland as patients admitted and discharged on the same day of intended surgery see Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland (2019) Day case surgery, London. AAGBI and Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland (2011) Day case and short stay surgery <https://associationofanaesthetists-publications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2044.2011.06651.x>
- ²⁶ The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland states that term infants over 1 month of age and ex-premature infants of a higher age limit are suitable for day surgery
- ²⁷ Unregistered staff must have completed a course of training specific to the setting, and in the care of infants, children and young people and have undergone a period of competence assessment before carrying out care and delegated tasks
- ²⁸ For example, it is expected that there will be a higher proportion of registered nurses in areas such as intensive care, specialist areas and in many cases general children's units
- ²⁹ Support workers and health play specialists have a key role within day surgery provision
- ³⁰ 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>
- ³¹ 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>

³² 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](#)

³³ 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](#)

³⁴ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/national-standards-for-neonatal-qualified-in-specialty-qis-education/>

³⁵ 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

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ Royal College of Nursing (2019) Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and competencies for health care staff

³⁸ 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](#)