

9 March 2026

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The [Council of Deans of Health Wales](http://councilofdeans.org.uk) represents the nine universities across Wales that provide nursing, midwifery and allied health professional (AHP) education and research. Our members are essential to delivering the future NHS and care workforce in Wales but face a range of significant challenges we wish to work with you on.

With the Senedd election approaching, the Council is writing to every major party to ask them:

- i. To write back to us with their policies and thoughts on healthcare education and research in Wales so we can share with our members and more widely.
- ii. Take note of our members' key policy priorities below.

We stand ready to work with all parties in getting Welsh healthcare education on a sustainable footing, delivering for Wales and acting as a trusted partner to whatever government is formed at Cardiff Bay.

We ask you to support the following priorities:

### **1. Develop a competitive funding model for healthcare education**

Welsh universities are facing acute financial pressures that threaten the viability of healthcare programmes essential to the NHS. Nursing, midwifery and AHP programmes must be safeguarded with additional support and clear messaging from government to vice-chancellors on education priorities to ensure a sustainable NHS Wales workforce.

Health and care students also struggle financially, with the rising cost of living, and limited ability to work during their placements. The NHS Wales bursary is inadequate compared to other student finance schemes, and the reinstatement of targeted maintenance grants in England risks pulling Welsh students over the border. More competitive financial support is therefore essential to attract and retain students.

There is also a risk of Wales falling behind England in supporting continuous professional development. Currently, English students are unable to use their Lifelong Learning Loan for micro-credentials outside England. As micro-credentials become more established, particularly for Level 7 advanced practice, this gap could make specialist provision in Wales [The voice of the UK's strategic academic leaders in healthcare education and research](#)

unviable, undermining Wales' ability to compete and retain talent.

## **2. Strengthen student recruitment, retention and workforce planning**

Wales' future healthcare workforce is at risk without urgent action to boost student recruitment and retention in nursing, midwifery and some of the small and vulnerable allied health professions. A national campaign is needed to showcase the breadth of career and development opportunities in these fields, supported by better guidance for prospective students. We strongly support innovative routes into healthcare, including the new Registered Nursing Associate role in Wales. Exploring models like degree apprenticeships in health and social care further widen access to higher education and strengthen the workforce pipeline.

Workforce planning must be more strategic. The current three-year Education and Training Plan creates a 'boom and bust' cycle, disrupting recruitment and training pipelines. Additionally, university financial planning cycles are not aligned with the Integrated Medium Term Plan (IMTP) timelines, further complicating strategic coordination. A shift to a five-year model would enable long-term planning and better alignment with university financial cycles.

The current commissioning model is also heavily focused on meeting the needs of the NHS, which limits our ability to support a wider shift towards care in the community. To enable this shift, Wales will need a more agile and better integrated commissioning approach that supports growth across health, social care, and community-based settings.

Graduate employability is a growing concern, with negative media coverage around job shortages potentially deterring future applicants. Despite the commissioning process, some health boards have no roles available for newly qualified graduates, pushing many to relocate to England, where a Graduate Guarantee Scheme offers more security. Wales must remain competitive, ensuring graduates can better transition into employment within the Welsh NHS.

## **3. Prioritise academic careers and Welsh language development**

Funding pressures have significantly reduced the size of the academic workforce within Wales' universities, creating a critical risk to future capacity. Rebuilding this workforce will be challenging when student recruitment improves, given the widening salary differential between clinical roles in the NHS and academic posts in healthcare education.

A sustainable healthcare academic workforce is fundamental to producing homegrown professionals for NHS Wales. Without it, the pipeline of nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals cannot be maintained. We urge Government to work proactively with universities and NHS partners to implement solutions that secure this workforce for the long term, including:

- Developing clear and attractive career frameworks for healthcare educators, with progression routes and recognition of clinical expertise.
- Introducing targeted incentives to encourage experienced clinicians to transition into education roles.
- Expanding joint NHS–university employment models for clinical academics, enabling

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staff to combine teaching, research, and clinical practice while maintaining competitive remuneration.

Despite commitments to bilingual education, there remains a shortage of Welsh-speaking academics, confident in teaching and assessment. We strongly support the ambition to increase the number of Welsh speakers in Wales to at least 1 million by 2050 however, targeted investment in Welsh language development and support is needed to realise this. This is a key route to better patient care *for all* in Wales.

#### 4. Enhance placement experiences

We are deeply concerned about the current pressures in Welsh hospitals, especially the reports of corridor care highlighted by the [Royal College of Nursing](#). These conditions not only raise patient safety issues but also impact students on placement, risking inadequate supervision, demoralisation, and increased attrition. Our members are keen to explore innovative placement models to diversify and improve student experiences. Parties must commit to protect the safety and wellbeing of patients and students across healthcare.

#### Next steps

Delivering on these commitments requires partnership working between the health and education sectors, driven by cross-departmental leadership and shared responsibility. Universities must be actively involved at every stage of healthcare workforce planning.

We stand ready to work collaboratively with all parties to deliver an NHS workforce fit for the future, strengthen Wales' research base, and ensure opportunities for every learner.

We invite you to share your party's plans for healthcare education and research. Together, we can secure a sustainable future for Wales' health and wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Elizabeth Mason

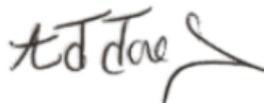
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