

Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy - Delivering for our People

**Third Action Plan
2025-26 to 2027-28**

Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy: Delivering for our People

Third action plan (to March 2028)

Introduction

The Department of Health's ambitions for the development of the health and social care workforce are outlined in the *'Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026: Delivering for our People'* which was published in May 2018.

Since publication of the Strategy, the Department, HSC employers and health and social care stakeholders have invested significant time and resource in stabilising and growing our workforce. This has included the development of initiatives to:

- enhance the attraction of HSC as an employer of choice;
- improve the retention of staff within HSC;
- undertake a comprehensive programme of strategic workforce planning;
- increase the number of commissioned training places across healthcare professions;
- introduce more effective processes for recruitment;
- complement our locally trained workforce with our highly valued international recruits;
- develop and introduce processes to reduce agency and medical locum dependency; and
- support health and social care employers in their provision of staff health and wellbeing services.

Significant progress has been achieved against the actions and outputs outlined in the Strategy's action plans to date with greater stability and growth of the HSC workforce being achieved. Compared to the end of March 2018 there has been a 19.5% increase in whole time equivalent (WTE) staff directly employed across the HSC. That amounts to 11,063 more whole time equivalent staff in post across the HSC in Northern Ireland at December 2025 (67,866) compared to March 2018 (56,803). This includes a 32% (+1,342 WTE) increase in medical and dental staff, a 21.6% (+3,258 WTE) increase in registered nursing and midwifery staff and a 27.2% (+2,213 WTE) increase in professional and technical staff in post.

While acknowledging this progress, significant workforce challenges remain with much more work required to ensure we meet our workforce needs and the needs of our workforce. To address these challenges, the Department has undertaken a comprehensive series of

engagements with stakeholders to identify priority areas for inclusion in this third action plan of the Strategy.

The result of this collaborative engagement is the third action plan outlined below which identifies actions for delivery and presents the Strategy’s objectives and themes around the following four pillars:

<u>Pillar 1</u>	<u>Pillar 2</u>	<u>Pillar 3</u>	<u>Pillar 4</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attraction • Recruitment • Retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Planning • Training and Development • Agency Reduction • Safe Staffing • Multi-Disciplinary Working including creation of new roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Wellbeing • Communication and engagement • Recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and analytics

The third action plan outlines a series of 22 strategic actions for progression from April 2025. To support delivery of these actions a total of 54 specific outputs are outlined in the action plan with a lead organisation(s) assigned to each that will have principal responsibility for their progression.

This is an ambitious range of strategic actions for progression over the next three years which reflect the breadth and content of feedback received from stakeholders, providing the mechanisms, strategic context and flexibility within which the objectives of the Strategy can be progressed.

Given the impact of the pandemic response, the associated delays in implementation in the early years of the Strategy, and momentum in delivery achieved in recent years, it is proposed the life of the Strategy will be extended with this third action plan covering the period to March 2028. This aligns with the Minister of Health’s priorities as outlined in *‘Health and Social Care NI: A three year plan to stabilise, reform and deliver’* and *‘The Health and Social Care NI Reset Plan’* and will ensure work to develop the health and social care workforce continues into the early stages of the next Northern Ireland Assembly mandate.

While this programme of work is scheduled for delivery to March 2028, specific focus will be placed on the immediate progression of the following areas of work:

- Working with Department for the Economy to develop and pilot a public sector apprenticeship programme for at least one health and social care healthcare role (Action 3.3);
- Implementation of the agreed work plan arising from the recommendations of the Review of HSC recruitment, undertaking the detailed design work on the future HSC recruitment model across all staffing groups including on how any proposed changes may be implemented in line with the Equip Programme (Action 3.4);
- Establish a regional multidisciplinary retention framework (Action 3.7);
- Development of a refreshed Departmental strategic workforce planning programme (Action 3.9);
- Continued development and implementation of proposals to reduce agency dependency across HSC (Action 3.10);
- Development of legislation and consideration of the resources required to ensure safe and effective staffing within health and social care settings (Action 3.11);
- Implementation of recommendations of the Review of HSC Occupational Health Services (Action 3.15); and
- Development of a programme of work that addresses the need to develop the breadth and quality of available workforce information (Action 3.22)

It is recognised that the full implementation of this third action plan will require additional funding over the next three years at a time when we face a very challenging financial position. Given these pressures, a funding assessment is presented for each output. Securing the funding required to support full delivery of the priorities outlined in the third action plan will not be easy or straightforward but the Department is committed to exploring every opportunity going forward to secure the required additional funding.

Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026: Delivering for our People – Third Action Plan

Objective 1: The reconfigured health and social care system has the optimum number of people in place to deliver treatment and care, and promote health and wellbeing to everyone in Northern Ireland, with the best possible combination of skills and expertise

Theme 1 – Attraction, Recruitment and Retention

What have we achieved so far?

- An HSC Employer Brand has been developed (Be Proud, Be Part of It) together with an associated HSC Employer Brand toolkit
- A number of focussed campaigns have been developed to date to showcase careers in [Social Care](#), [Social Work](#) and [Pharmacy](#)
- The Department of Health are currently liaising with the Department for the Economy to explore opportunities to develop a demonstrator public sector apprenticeship programme for a healthcare profession
- Implementation Boards have been established across a range of areas to progress recommendations arising from workforce reviews
- A high-level review of the HSC recruitment model and process was completed in September 2022 with a series of recommendations identified to achieve a shorter time to recruit and an improved experience for candidates and recruiting managers. Work is ongoing to progress the recommendations contained within the review report
- Streamlined approaches to the recruitment of Health and Social Work students are now in place for (i) nursing and midwifery graduates and (ii) social work graduates
- Complementing the investment in our locally trained workforce, the Department of Health has supported recruitment of international nurses across the HSC
- A [Nursing and Midwifery Retention Report and Implementation Framework](#) has been developed, together with a number of other initiatives to encourage retention of staff, including a new package of retirement flexibilities that it is hoped these will help retain experienced staff for longer within the HSC

Action	Outputs	Lead organisation(s)	Funding assessment
3.1 - Continue to develop an HSC wide approach to the promotion of health and social care careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnering with the Department of Economy and the Department of Education, the HSC will develop a regional programme to promote health and social care careers, by December 2028 subject to funding Establish a dedicated HSC wide resource to coordinate and execute recruitment events and outreach, emphasising HSC's diverse and inclusive values in recruitment messaging by December 2028 subject to funding Conduct regular reviews to assess campaign impact and resource needs 	HSC organisations	requires additional funding
3.2 - Develop a range of targeted campaigns to showcase health and social care professions for areas with acute staffing needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete an assessment of professions and service areas with greatest need of attraction and recruitment campaigns including an assessment of reasons currently impacting on attraction and recruitment, by March 2027 Develop and roll out strategic, targeted campaigns to attract candidates for high-need roles, incorporating career development pathways in campaign messaging to enhance role appeal, ongoing to March 2028 subject to funding Assess workforce needs regularly to adjust campaign priorities and address any emerging gaps 	Chief Professional Officers (DoH) and HSC organisations	can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation
3.3 - Develop alternative training and recruitment pathway into a career in health and social care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with Department for the Economy develop and pilot a public sector apprenticeship programme for at least one health and social care healthcare role, by June 2026 Explore opportunities to enhanced utilisation of existing apprenticeship programmes relevant to health and social care including non-healthcare roles, ongoing from April 2026 	Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH) / Chief Professional Officers (DoH) / HSC organisations	can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a career pathway framework tailored to support staff, considering future population health needs and focussed on retention through structured career advancement opportunities, by March 2027 		
3.4 - Establish processes and procedures to ensure safe recruitment practice is managed in as short a time as possible engaging the candidate throughout the journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of the agreed work plan arising from the recommendations of the Review of HSC recruitment, undertaking the detailed design work on the future HSC recruitment model across all staffing groups including on how any proposed changes may be implemented in line with the Equip Programme, by March 2027 Continue to develop streamlined approaches to the recruitment of health and social care students across all staffing groups, ongoing from April 2026 	<p>Business Services Organisation / HSC organisations</p> <p>Chief Professional Officers (DoH) / Business Services Organisation</p>	<p>requires additional funding</p> <p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
3.5 - Explore opportunities to recruit health and social care professions from other jurisdictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scope potential for a regional international recruitment programme through a needs assessment to identify professions best suited for international recruitment, ongoing from April 2026 Ensure adequate support networks are in place to assist HSC colleagues across professions that are recruited internationally, ongoing from April 2026 	<p>Business Services Organisation / Chief Professional Officers (DoH) / Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)</p> <p>Business Services Organisation / HSC organisations</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
3.6 - Explore and establish non-salary incentive programmes as a means of recruiting and retaining staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with Trade Union colleagues, the Department and HSC employers will identify priority non-salary incentives for development and incorporate these into a HSC non-salary incentive framework, by March 2027 Develop a retention-focused benefits program to highlight and promote the non-monetary advantages of HSC employment, by March 2027 	<p>Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH) / HSC organisations</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake public consultation on changes to the current support arrangements for some healthcare students on DoH commissioned programmes including potential for the introduction of a Return on Service obligation by December 2026 	Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)	can be fully implemented within existing resource
3.7 - Develop an overarching retention framework that addresses the unique challenges faced by different professional groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a regional multidisciplinary retention framework, by March 2027, informed by workforce input that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) considers workforce demographics, offers flexibility to meet the needs of HSC workforce, and supports career progression. (ii) recognises and outlines tailored initiatives that may be required for specific staff groups and professions 	Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH) / HSC organisations / Chief Professional Officers (DoH)	can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation

Theme 2 – Sufficient availability of high-quality training and development

What have we achieved so far?

- There has been an increase in training places commissioned by the Department of Health over recent years, including:
 - the commissioning of a record high number of nursing and midwifery training places in 2022/23 (1,325); and
 - an increase in both pre-and post-registration medical training places in 2023/24 including (i) an annual intake of 306 medical students, with 70 of the these at the new Graduate Entry Medical School at the University of Ulster from 2021/22 (ii) an increase in medical specialty training places to 1,729 in 2023/24, and (iii) an increase in GP training places to 121 from 2022/23
- Proposals for further expansion of education and training places have been submitted to Minister for Health for consideration, however, affordability of such expansion remains an issue with the Department continuing to face challenging budgetary pressures

<p>3.8 - Commissioning of pre- and post-registration training programmes that are aligned to and meet current and future health and social care requirements for multi-disciplinary service delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a prioritised and costed commissioning plan for pre- and post-registration training places informed by the Department's assessment of required education and training places that is derived from the Departmental strategic workforce planning programme, by March 2027 • Undertake a review of medical training places, commencing by March 2027 • Scope and cost the infrastructure required to deliver safe, effective and quality practice education to support potentially expanded pre- and post-registration training programmes across all professions, ongoing from April 2026 • Explore the feasibility of developing region-specific training initiatives to better align training locations with local workforce needs, ongoing from April 2026 	<p>Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH) / Chief Professional Officers (DoH)</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
--	---	---	--

Theme 3 – Effective workforce planning

<p>What have we achieved so far?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A programme of workforce reviews for the purposes of strategic workforce planning is ongoing covering medical specialties and programme of care workforce reviews. Implementation plans have been embedded in the final stage of workforce reviews. Scoping is ongoing on options available to the Department regarding development of a robust methodology to support development of workforce model to estimate future workforce requirements at uni-professional level • A Regional Agency Steering Group has been established to progress a programme of work to reduce agency dependency in the HSC. A new Nursing and Midwifery Agency Framework became operational from 15 May 2023 and has resulted in cessation of ‘off-contract’ nursing and midwifery agency use across the HSC from August 2023. Work is also progressing on the development of new (i) Medical and Dental and (ii) Non-Medical Agency Frameworks, however, it is acknowledged that the reduction of agency/locum use in the Medical & Dental profession will require a multi-faceted approach that extends beyond the development of a new framework. A project plan for this work is currently being developed • The Minister of Health launched a 12-week consultation on the ‘Introduction of Safe and Effective Staffing Legislation’, which closed in October 2024. Responses to this consultation are currently being considered to inform next steps in the process of developing the legislation required to ensure safe and effective staffing within health and social care settings

<p>3.9 – Develop a strategic workforce planning programme to provide a system wide view of workforce requirements across a reformed health and social care system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a refreshed Departmental strategic workforce planning programme that incorporates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A refreshed Regional Workforce Planning Framework that clearly outlines organisational responsibilities for workforce planning by March 2027 - A workforce model to estimate future workforce requirements at uni-professional level, by March 2027 subject to funding - A scoping exercise to identify vulnerable services to inform a refreshed rolling programme of service level and medical specialty reviews, by June 2026 - A refreshed rolling programme of service level and medical workforce reviews that focus on (i) identifying the numbers of 	<p>Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH) / Chief Professional Officers (DoH) / SPPG / DHSC / HSC organisations</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
---	---	---	--

	<p>staff required to deliver these services going forward and informed by population and workforce demographics; and (ii) identify challenges in developing the workforce in these services, all by March 2028</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all workforce planning and workforce reviews follow the six-step methodology for workforce planning, ongoing from April 2026 • Establish structures to oversee the implementation of recommendations arising from these workforce reviews, ongoing from April 2026 • Develop cohesive governance structure to coordinate workforce planning across local and regional levels, by December 2026 	<p>Policy leads (DoH) / SPPG</p> <p>Healthcare Policy Group (DoH)</p>	<p>can be fully implemented within existing resources</p>
<p>3.10 – Development and implementation of proposals to reduce agency dependency across HSC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a new procurement framework for Medical & Dental, by September 2026 • Develop and implement a new procurement framework for Non-Medical (Admin), by September 2026 • Implement of a range of agreed actions that will be taken to support reduced use of and expenditure on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nursing & Midwifery, ongoing from April 2026 - Medical & Dental locums, ongoing from April 2026 • Develop an action plan for reform of the HSC Bank, ongoing from April 2026 	<p>Business Services Organisation / Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH) / Chief Professional Officers (DoH) / HSC organisations</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
<p>3.11 – Development of legislation and consideration of the resources required to ensure safe and effective staffing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department will oversee delivery in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OLC drafting of Safe and Effective Staffing Bill - Consultation on Safe and Effective Staffing Bill - Submission of Executive Paper on introduction of Bill (Stage 3) - Bill passage through NI Assembly to gain Royal Assent, all by March 2027 subject to NI Assembly approval 	<p>Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>

within health and social care settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider resources needed to ensure implementation of Safe and Effective Staffing Bill, ongoing from March 2027 subject to funding Develop mechanisms to support the alignment of workforce planning with requirements outlined in safe staffing legislation to ensure practical workforce configurations reflect the legislative framework, ongoing from March 2027 subject to funding 	Chief Professional Officer (DoH)	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p> <p>requires additional resource</p>
--	--	----------------------------------	--

Theme 4 – Multi-disciplinary and inter-professional working and training

<p>What have we achieved so far?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory regulation of Anaesthesia Associates and Physician Associates by the General Medical Council commenced in December 2024 The Chief Nursing Officer and Chief Allied Health Professional Officer are currently progressing work to enable local Higher Education Institutions to deliver and over-arching post-graduate qualification for advanced practice in nursing, midwifery and allied health professions 			
--	--	--	--

3.12 – Planning for and introducing new roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop new roles, including advanced and associate practice roles, as identified in ongoing development of service delivery models and multidisciplinary service level strategic workforce reviews, ongoing from April 2026 subject to funding 	Chief Professional Officers (DoH) / Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)	requires additional resource
---	---	--	------------------------------

<p>3.13 – Ensure health and social care reform aligns with and incorporates actions outlined in the Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collaboratively with Departmental and HSC colleagues to ensure the themes of workforce development outlined in the Workforce Strategy are incorporated into programmes of work to reform health and social care, ongoing from April 2026 	<p>Policy leads (DoH) / SPPG / Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)</p>	<p>can be fully implemented within existing resources</p>
---	---	---	---

Objective 2: Health and Social Care is a fulfilling and rewarding place to work, and our people feel valued and supported

Theme 5 – Building on, consolidating and promoting health and wellbeing

<p>What have we achieved so far?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Strengthening our Core: A Regional Framework for HSC Staff Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace’ was launched in September 2024. Over 1,000 members of staff from across health and social care were engaged in the development of this framework which has primary focus on prevention and early intervention, creating a culture which promotes health and wellbeing and places a particular emphasis on constructing a healthy working environment • Work undertaken by HSC employers through a dedicated regional ‘Equality, Diversity and Inclusion’ workstream include the development of five-year (2024 -2029) draft Equality and Disability Action Plans. These plans contain actions to support service users and staff • A review of HSC Occupational Health Services (OHS) was commissioned by the Department of Health and HSC Human Resource Directors. The review reported in June 2023 and the Department of Health and HSC Employers have prioritised a series of the reviews recommendations which are currently being implemented. These include agreement on a preferred service model for HSC Occupational Health Services; a review of the workforce required to deliver these services; development of a business case for the new service model; and a review of service level agreements to provide Occupational Health Services to primary care and community practitioners • The NI Medical Dental and Training Agency have re-established the occupational health medical specialty training programme from August 2024 with scoping working currently being undertaken to develop a locally provided multi-disciplinary post-registration occupational health training programme for nursing and Allied Health Professions
--

<p>3.14 – Provision of services informed by Strengthening Our Core: A Regional Framework for HSC Staff Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace to improve staff health, wellbeing and safety at work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a refreshed HSC wide work programme to assist employers in the delivery of effective staff health and wellbeing services utilising Strengthening Our Core: A Regional Framework for HSC Staff Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace, ongoing from April 2026 • Establish a robust measurement framework to better assess well-being, ongoing from April 2026 • Undertake assessment of funding required to deliver staff wellbeing initiatives identified through utilisation of Strengthening Our Core: A Regional Framework for HSC Staff Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace, ongoing from April 2026 	<p>HSC organisations / Public Health Agency / Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
<p>3.15 – Commissioning and establishment of sustainable Occupational Health Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of recommendations of the Review of HSC Occupational Health Services including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Agreement of preferred HSC OHS model, by June 2026 (ii) Completion of an OHS Workforce Review, by December 2026 (iii) Development of business case for funding required for a sustainable OHS, by December 2026 (iv) Review of Service Level Agreements to provide HSC OHS to primary care, by December 2026 (v) Expansion of the OH medicine training programme, ongoing from April 2026 subject to funding (vi) Development of post-registration OHS training for nursing and AHPs, ongoing from April 2026 subject to funding • Work with the Public Sector Collaborative Forum on OHS to explore opportunities for collaboration across the NI public sector, ongoing from April 2026 	<p>HSC organisations / Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p> <p>can be fully implemented within existing resource</p>

Theme 6 – Improved workforce communication and engagement

What have we achieved so far?

- Joint Negotiating and Consultation Forums are in place within each HSC organisation
- A review of staff appraisal and engagement practices has been completed

<p>3.16 – Ensure information flows freely across organisations and that employees are kept abreast of developments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Joint Negotiating and Consultation Forums within each HSC organisation meet on a regular basis, ongoing from April 2026 • Develop a HSC workforce communications strategy that prioritises consistent, meaningful engagement at all levels, is two-way and includes feedback mechanisms, by March 2027 	<p>HSC organisations / Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)</p>	<p>can be fully implemented within existing resource</p> <p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
--	--	---	---

Theme 7 – Recognising the contribution of the workforce

What have we achieved so far?

- An audit of existing recognition initiatives has been completed. A draft Regional Recognition Framework has been developed with a view to sharing for wider consultation during 2025/26

3.17 – Design and implementation of a co-produced policy on recognition initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a formal HSC staff recognition framework to standardise recognition efforts and showcase best practices, by March 2027 	HSC organisations / Workforce Policy Directorate (DoH)	can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation
---	--	--	---

Theme 8 – Work-life balance

What have we achieved so far?

- A policy is now in place and HSC organisations will monitor flexible working applications going forward

3.18 - Adopt section 33 Agenda for Change Handbook arrangements across the HSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HSC organisations will monitor flexible working applications on an ongoing basis, ongoing from April 2026 • Explore feasibility of including work-life balance assessments in organisational evaluations and highlight successful practices, ongoing from April 2026 	HSC organisations	can be fully implemented within existing resource
--	---	-------------------	---

Theme 9 – Making it easier for the workforce to do their jobs

What have we achieved so far?

- The Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) is now the employer of doctors in training across the HSC
- A number of new technologies and systems are currently being developed across the HSC including Encompass (a programme creating a single digital care record for every citizen in Northern Ireland who receives health and social care) which is currently being rolled out across the HSC, and EQUIP (the replacement of key HR and Finance systems). HSC staff have been engaged as appropriate within each of these projects
- A new Learning Management System 'Learn HSCNI' is now live across all HSC Organisations

3.19 – Undertake HSC staff survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and report on a survey of HSC staff, by March 2026 subject to funding 	HSC organisations / Business Services Organisation	requires additional resource
3.20 – Promote and embed appropriate culture and behaviours within all areas of the HSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to align and support a collective leadership culture within the HSC through the full implementation of the HSC Collective Leadership Strategy, ongoing from April 2026 • Develop and support sustainable initiatives to build a diverse and inclusive workforce where all colleagues are valued, listened to and through active involvement can contribute to decision making, ongoing from April 2026 subject to funding • Improve patient safety and the quality of services by developing an open, just and learning culture where staff at all levels, feel empowered and supported to speak openly without fearing blame, ongoing from April 2026 	HSC organisations	can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation

<p>3.21 - Develop workforce engagement projects for the introduction of new technologies and systems, including ehealth initiatives which are designed to support the workforce in doing their jobs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop comprehensive workforce engagement plans as part of design and implementation of new technologies and systems, ongoing from April 2026 • Scope feasibility of establishing a regional workforce innovation team to explore new technologies, including AI, with end-user feedback as a key component, ongoing from April 2026 subject to funding 	<p>Digital Health and Care NI (DHCNI)</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
---	---	---	--

Objective 3 – The Department and health and social care providers are able to monitor workforce trends and issues effectively, and be able to take proactive action to address these before problems become acute

Theme 10 – Improving workforce business intelligence

<p>What have we achieved so far?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of projects have commenced to address known data gaps. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the production of a baseline dataset of the HSC medical workforce by grade and specialty - development of a District Nurse workforce report - a project to address existing gaps in the availability of Social Work workforce data - a project on Social Care workforce data and - a project scoping the feasibility of developing a staff vacancy measure based on available posts that are not filled 			
---	--	--	--

<p>3.22 – Continue to develop health and social care workforce information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop programme of work that addresses the need to develop the breadth and quality of workforce information available to support effective workforce planning and monitoring of workforce trends, ongoing from April 2026 subject to funding 	<p>DHCNI / IAD (DoH) / HSC organisations</p>	<p>can be partially implemented but will also require additional funding to ensure full implementation</p>
--	--	--	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define a suite of metrics including vacancy, turnover, sickness absence, workforce demographic data and develop standardised data collection across HSC Trusts to enable regional analysis of data and trends to inform better workforce planning, by March 2027 • Explore feasibility of comparative analyses of workforce information with other jurisdictions, by March 2027 • Develop predictive analytical capabilities for workforce trends to better support workforce planning, by March 2027 • Prepare for opportunities arising from the EQUIP programme to deliver enhanced, regionally consistent and interactive workforce analyses that supports informed planning and decision-making across regions and professions, ongoing from April 2026 		
--	---	--	--

Oversight and Accountability

Oversight and accountability for the Workforce Strategy continues to be provided by a Programme Board. The Workforce Strategy Programme Board is supported in this function by the Workforce Strategy Reference Group, which includes representation from relevant employers, trade unions and other key stakeholders, this group provides advice and assurance to the Programme Board on progress of the strategy.

Day to day co-ordination of the Strategy will be led by the Workforce Strategy Unit, located within the Workforce Policy Directorate in the Department. This Unit will work closely with the stakeholders identified as lead organisations for each action within this third action plan. Dedicated working groups, with appropriate representation from across the health and social system will be established to support delivery. For each output, these groups will agree detailed delivery plans, clear responsibilities, and defined implementation timeframes.

There is also a need for consistent focus on the implementation of this action plan. Progress against each identified output will be monitored and reported on a regular basis. Bi-annual progress reports will be produced and published on the Department of Health website, ensuring transparency and enabling stakeholders to track delivery over time.

Funding

This third action plan sets out an ambitious and challenging programme of actions and outputs to be progressed to the end of March 2028. Many of these commitments can be advanced without the need for additional funding. In several cases, the initial steps involve undertaking scoping work to determine the most appropriate mechanisms for delivery, including the development of costed implementation plans. For other actions such as the commissioning of pre-registration and post-graduate training, the Department will continue to provide ongoing funding, however, it is recognised significant additional funding will be required to grow our workforce to the required levels identified by our strategic workforce planning.

It is recognised that significant, additional, multi-year funding will be required to deliver the full series of actions and outputs identified. The Department is committed to exploring all options available to fund this third action plan, including the release of resources from service efficiencies and by seeking additional funding from the Executive.

While this may affect the pace of delivery, the Department believes it is right to be ambitious. Working in partnership with colleagues across health and social care, we remain fully committed to implementing this third action plan at the earliest opportunity.

