

Welsh Government

Summary of Responses and Next Steps

NHS Staffing Statistics User Survey

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Introduction

Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS) within the Welsh Government carried out a user survey to seek feedback from users on a proposal to cease publication of the twice-yearly Statistical Release “NHS Staff Vacancies”. The latest version of the publication is at the link below:
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/110830/?lang=en>

In addition to the proposal to discontinue “NHS Staff Vacancies”, respondents were asked to comment on the other NHS staffing outputs:-

The annual Statistical Release “Staff Directly Employed by the NHS”
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/1103291/?lang=en>

and the quarterly Statistical Release “Sickness absence in the NHS”
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/1108301/?lang=en> ”

The user survey, which ran between 30 August 2011 and 11 October 2011, received 23 responses in total. 18 respondents completed the online questionnaire. 8 responses were from users in the NHS, 5 were from professional bodies, and the remainder were from Welsh Government and other organisations or individuals.

We would like to thank all those who took the time to respond to this user survey. This report summarises all the responses received, as well as giving some direct quotes where relevant.

There are two Annexes to this report:

Annex A provides tables of data, showing the responses to the survey;

Annex B provides all comments that were submitted in the user survey (from respondents who had agreed to publication).

Background

Information on NHS staffing is important for effective management of resources in the NHS and for planning by the Welsh Government.

In order to support this, the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services collect, analyse and disseminate data on many aspects of NHS staffing in Wales, and promote its use as part of the evidence base in the development and monitoring of policy. Data on staffing is useful to help plan and monitor services, and benchmark the performance of NHS organisations.

The current publications

Knowledge and Analytical Services collect and publish the following information on NHS staffing:

- Staff directly employed by the NHS (annual)
- NHS Staff Vacancies (every six months)
- Sickness absence in the NHS (quarterly)

These statistics published by the Welsh Government can be accessed online:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/health/?lang=en>

There are additional NHS staffing statistics available in the annual Health Statistics Wales publication (Chapter 14 and Additional Tables)

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/health2011/?lang=en>

Meeting user needs efficiently

In a time of constrained resources, it is important to be sure that the current range of statistical outputs meets the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public. We need to take account of user views on the value of the outputs we publish in order to use the available statistical resources most effectively.

In particular, if users identify that some of the information that is currently published is not useful, we need to consider whether it should be collected centrally at all. If we can stop collecting data for which there is no need, some resources would be freed up to address other statistical priorities. We would also hope that it would reduce some of the burden on data providers.

NHS Staff Vacancies

The data collection and publication for NHS Staff Vacancies was set up in 2001 to monitor the large number of posts that were vacant for three months or more (1,400 at 31 March 2001 and a peak of over 1,700 at 31 March 2002).

NHS organisations in Wales provide information every six months on the number of NHS staff posts that have been vacant for three months or more. The information is published in a six-monthly statistical release which is used by the Welsh Government and the NHS to monitor trends in NHS staff posts vacant for three months or more.

Relevance of the publication

The number of posts vacant for three months or more has declined substantially to less than 100 in recent years. While this data collection was useful ten years ago to highlight problems in recruitments, NHS workforce information managers in Wales have told us that the NHS staff vacancies publication is not very useful to them, and doesn't reflect the current staffing and recruitment situation in the NHS. One of the Health Boards commented that currently, posts becoming vacant are not being filled through external recruitment, except for certain critical clinical positions. The Health Board therefore considers that it is misleading to report any vacancies and has not contributed to recent data collections.

Analysis of the web hits for this statistical release suggests that it is not as widely used as other health statistics releases. We also rarely receive any queries or requests in relation to this data.

Other sources of data

All of the NHS organisations in Wales use the NHS Electronic Staff Record to store and manage information about their staff. If the information on long-term NHS staff vacancies were no longer collected and centrally published by the Welsh Government, individual NHS organisations would still have access to their own management information and would continue to use it for planning purposes as they do at present in preference to the published figures.

We were also made aware of alternative management information for medical vacancies that is shared by the NHS with the Welsh Government for planning purposes.

The position in England

There is a similar situation regarding publication of NHS staff vacancies in England. Their annual statistics have not been published in 2011 pending the Fundamental Review of NHS data collections. See the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care website for more information:

<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/workforce>

Consultation

All of this evidence led us to believe that there was not a significant user need for this information to be collected centrally. We therefore consulted users on a proposal to stop the data collection and publication of NHS Staff Vacancies (posts vacant for three months or more). We also took the opportunity of asking users about their views on our other staffing publications.

A summary of the consultation responses follows the Next Steps section. Annex A and Annex B give a detailed analysis of the answers and a list of comments.

Next Steps

The responses to the consultation proposal support our view that there is no significant user need for the NHS staff vacancies publication in its present format and that most users think that the current information is not what they need. Even those users who did not support our proposal to cease publication acknowledged that there were problems of accuracy and relevance with the current data.

Action for NHS Staff Vacancies publication

We will therefore cease the publication in its present form, but investigate the potential for other sources of information that would be more useful. We will contact those users who said that vacancy information was important and seek their views.

Actions for other NHS staffing publications

We will continue to publish 'Staff Directly Employed by the NHS' and 'Sickness Absence in the NHS', while keeping under review options to address the additional information needs mentioned by respondents to this consultation.

Summary of Responses

There were 23 responses to the user survey:

- 8 from NHS organisations
- 5 from Professional bodies
- 2 from Welsh Government users
- 2 from Academic/Educational organisations
- 1 from Community health councils
- 5 Others

Key points:

- Between a half and two thirds of respondents (13 out of 22 or 59% of those responding to this question) agreed with the proposal to cease publication of the 'NHS Vacancies' publication.
- Three of the nine respondents who disagreed with the proposal nevertheless considered that the present publication was not helpful, one commenting that "The current system is probably somewhat inaccurate but better than nothing."
- 17 users responded to questions about two other publications, 'Staff Directly Employed by the NHS' and 'Sickness Absence in the NHS'.
- Three quarters (76%) of respondents rated 'Staff Directly Employed by the NHS' as 3 or above on a scale of 1- not very useful to 5-very useful.
- Fewer respondents found 'Sickness Absence in the NHS' useful. Nearly two thirds (65%) of respondents rated this publication as 3 or below on the same scale.

Survey results

There were 23 responses in total, 18 respondents completing the online questionnaire and 5 sending letters or emails.

<u>Organisation type</u>	<u>Number of responses</u>	<u>Percentage of responses</u>
NHS organisation	8	35%
Professional body	5	22%
Welsh Government	2	9%
Academic/Educational	2	9%
Community health councils	1	4%
Other	5	22%
Total	23	100%

Responses to Question 1: Do you agree with the proposal to stop the six-monthly data collection and publication on NHS staff vacancies (posts vacant for three months or more)?

- This question required a Yes or No answer in the on-line questionnaire
- One respondent did not answer
- 5 respondents provided textual responses in letters or emails

Chart 1: Results for Question 1



22 out of 23 respondents answered this question. In total, 13 out of 22 respondents agreed with the proposal to cease publication. Nearly three quarters of online responses (12 out of 17) were in agreement, while respondents who answered in other ways were mainly against the proposal (4 out of 5 against).

Of the nine respondents who disagreed with the proposal to cease publication, three nevertheless referred to problems with the quality of the data published. As a result, 16 out of the 22 respondents answering the question felt that the data as presently published were not good enough.

Four of the nine respondents who did not agree were employed by professional bodies representing staff groups, while seven of the 13 respondents who agreed were employed in the NHS or the Welsh Government.

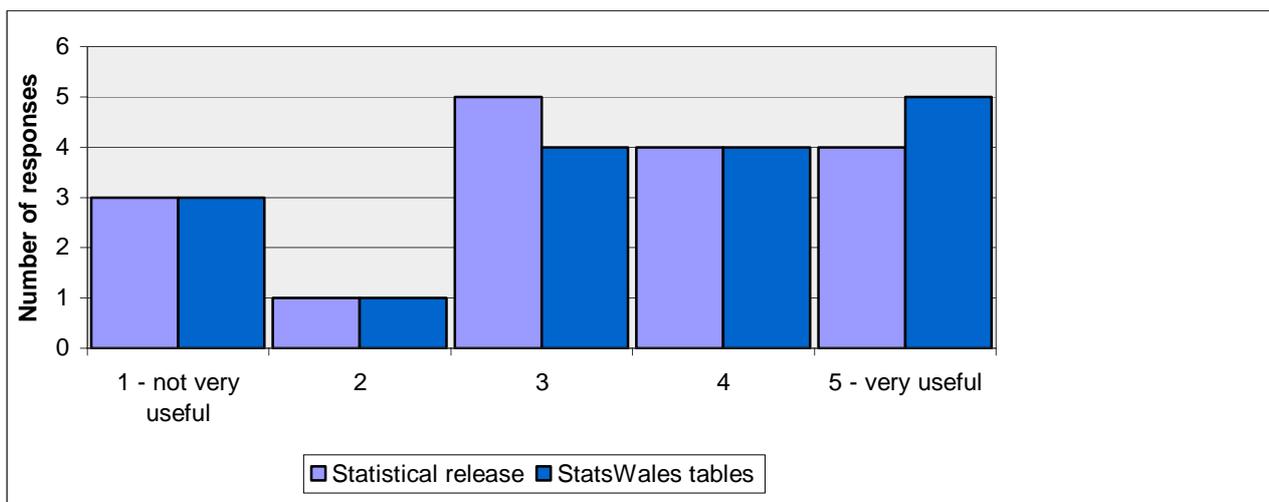
Here are some of the comments about the 'NHS Vacancies' publication. Please see Annex B for a full list of comments.

- “These statistics should not cease to be collected until an alternative strategy to collect and publish NHS workforce information has been agreed and implemented, although the information in its current format is unhelpful.”
- “It is not easy to identify what is a vacancy as we are only aware of those posts which have or are being advertised. The data is collected as required but is never used for any workforce planning or analysis. Therefore, just making it a paper exercise.”
- “NHS staffing statistics are very useful to us in tracking the number and nature of staff working in the community who influence the quality of care. However, information on vacancies is not useful in this regard, and so we would not object to the change proposed.”
- “Workforce planning in Wales (especially mid Wales) poses particular difficulties due to the distribution of the population and hospitals. If the Welsh Government intends to accurately assess the workforce requirements it will need to understand where posts are vacant. The current system is probably somewhat inaccurate but better than nothing.”

Responses to Question 2: How useful do you find (a) the annual Statistical Release entitled 'Staff Directly Employed by the NHS' and (b) the accompanying StatsWales tables?

Answers were on a scale of 1 (Not very useful) to 5 (Very useful).

Chart 2: Results for Question 2



17 of the 18 respondents to the online questionnaire answered this question. Responses were mainly towards the positive end of the scale. Defining a positive response as 4 or 5, 8 respondents found the Statistical Release to be useful and 9 found the online tables to be useful. Defining a

negative response as 1 or 2, 4 respondents did not find the Statistical Release or the StatsWales tables to be useful.

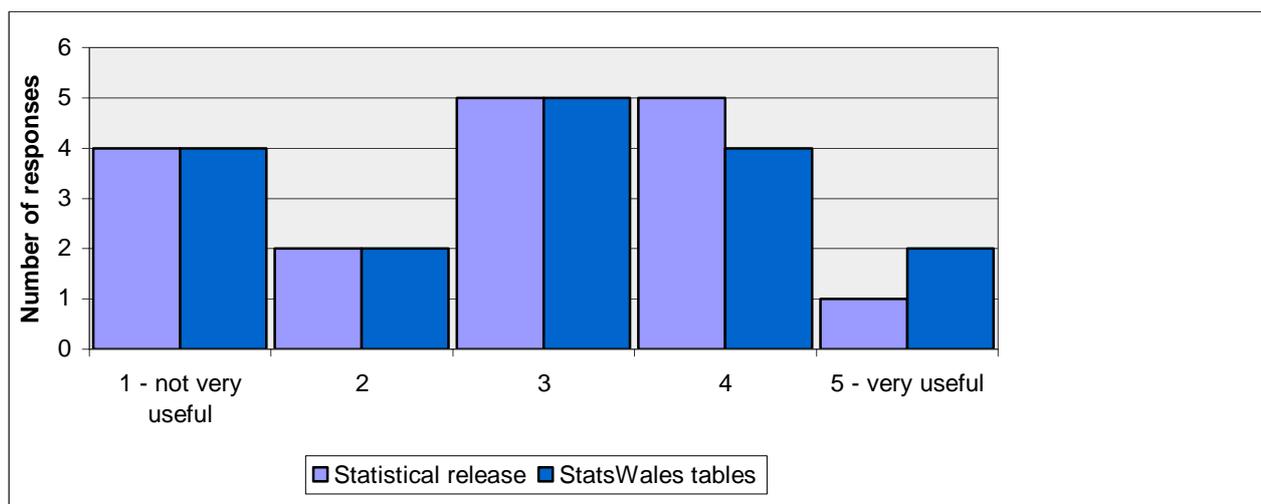
Here is a selection of comments received about 'Staff Directly Employed by the NHS'. Please see Annex B for a full list of comments.

- "These tables provide a more 'in depth' look at staffing. Professional bodies and trade unions find the data very useful."
- "Content very useful - especially taking into account data on Stats Wales - as it gives a breakdown of consultants' specialities. However, timeliness is an issue as the current release refers to information a year old."
- "This publication does not reflect the current situation in the NHS, and is therefore not very useful."

Responses to Question 3: How useful do you find (a) the annual Statistical Release entitled 'Sickness absence in the NHS' and (b) the accompanying StatsWales tables?

Answers were on a scale of 1 (Not very useful) to 5 (Very useful).

Chart 3: Results for Question 3



17 of the 18 respondents to the online questionnaire answered this question. Responses were split between those who found these outputs useful and those who did not, with the middle of the scale attracting the largest number of responses. Defining a positive response as 4 or 5, 6 respondents found the Statistical Release to be useful and the same number found the online tables to be useful. Defining a negative response as 1 or 2, 6 respondents did not find the Statistical Release or the StatsWales tables to be useful.

Here is a selection of comments received about 'Sickness absence in the NHS'. Please see Annex B for a full list of comments.

- "Very useful release in providing supporting evidence relating to the performance of Health Boards and Trusts."
- "These figures are extremely useful and provide both employers and trade unions the opportunity to watch for worrying trends if sickness absence levels rise in the NHS in Wales. It

is right that these should be available quarterly.”

- “Quarterly releases are right for sickness, may want to consider different staff groups rather than the Occupation Code staff groups”.

Responses to Question 4: Please provide any other comments about NHS staffing statistics, including other information that you would like to see us publish.

A full list of comments is included in Annex B. Information gaps mentioned were:

- average earnings
- more up to date information
- more detail about particular groups of staff
- Welsh language skills

Responses to Question 5: Can we publish your comments (we will not publish your name alongside the comments)?

17 out of the 18 respondents to the online questionnaire answered this question. 12 respondents were happy for their comments to be published. Please see Annex B for the comments from these respondents and comments extracted from replies by letter or email. 5 respondents did not want their comments to be published.

Question 1 : Do you agree with the proposal to stop the six-monthly data collection and publication on NHS staff vacancies (posts vacant for three months or more)?

	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Yes	13	59%
No	9	41%
Total	22	100%

Question 2(a) : How useful do you find the annual release titled 'Staff Directly Employed by the NHS'?

	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
1 - not very useful	3	18%
2	1	6%
3	5	29%
4	4	24%
5 - very useful	4	24%
Total	17	100%

Question 2(b) : How useful do you find the StatsWales tables that are published with the annual release titled 'Staff Directly Employed by the NHS'?

	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
1 - not very useful	3	18%
2	1	6%
3	4	24%
4	4	24%
5 - very useful	5	29%
Total	17	100%

Question 3(a) : How useful do you find the quarterly releases entitled 'Sickness absence in the NHS'?

	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
1 - not very useful	4	24%
2	2	12%
3	5	29%
4	5	29%
5 - very useful	1	6%
Total	17	100%

Question 3(b) : How useful do you find the StatsWales tables that are published with the quarterly releases entitled 'Sickness absence in the NHS'?

	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
1 - not very useful	4	24%
2	2	12%
3	5	29%
4	4	24%
5 - very useful	2	12%
Total	17	100%

The following list includes comments made by respondents who agreed to publication of their comments. Some comments have been edited for length - this is indicated by [...].

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposal to stop the six-monthly data collection and publication on NHS staff vacancies (posts vacant for three months or more)? What are your reasons for this, including any impact this change might have on your work?

- The data collection is a good tool although [it] can be overused and sometimes if vacancies cannot be filled due to poor skill mix this can reflect on the health board. It is sometimes not the fault of management that the skills are not present and posts remain vacant. Although there has been a practice in the NHS to keep vacancies in house and only open to its own health board [...]
- Agored Cymru is an awarding organisation for Wales. When we develop qualifications we are required by the regulators (Ofqual and the CQFW) to research the workforce to make a business case for new qualifications. Labour market intelligence (LMI) is a key part of this and job vacancy statistics inform the LMI.
- The Queen's Nursing Institute is a charity that aims to improve the nursing care of patients at home [...] NHS staffing statistics are very useful to us in tracking the number and nature of staff working in the community who influence the quality of care. However, information on vacancies is not useful in this regard, and so we would not object to the change proposed.
- At a time of profound challenges and service re-organisation, knowledge of the current state of recruitment and retention of staff has never been more important. These (and other) figures are helpful in assessing options for the future of the NHS in Wales.
- It is not easy to identify what is a vacancy as we are only aware of those posts which have or are being advertised. The data is collected as required but is never used for any workforce planning or analysis. Therefore, just making it a paper exercise.
- There needs to be an ability to look regularly at changes in the workforce and this also needs to be done at different times in the year. Year on year comparisons are required. If you don't collect the data - you don't know there is a problem.
- The information is old when published ie six monthly. We also have our own up to date management information if we need to look at this. Should the Welsh Government require similar information for planning purposes they can request it from us and we can supply it quickly.
- The NHS staff vacancy survey is not a very useful document. When it was first published there were a number of hard to fill vacancies in NHS Wales, this is no longer the case. Additionally, the report collects vacancies of 3 months or longer at 31 Mar & 30 Sep. The Sep date may capture some vacancies that would be filled the

following day when newly qualified staff start work.

- The NHS staff vacancies publication does not reflect the current staffing and recruitment situation in the NHS, and is therefore not very useful. Also, the small number of vacancies that exist means that this information is of little use.
- The data as currently collected and published is misleading. Because it only gives a snapshot in time it does not take account of the fact that for some vacancies there is a long lead in time e.g. consultant level posts and for others they may be subject to seasonal variation due to the timing of recruitment rounds. In addition the aim is for workforce data to be provided electronically via the ESR data warehouse rather than via manual data collection.
- This information has informed the work of HIW in several ways: in preparing statistical profiles to inform discussion at the annual Healthcare Summits which HIW facilitates [...]; as supporting evidence when carrying out specific investigations or inspections into healthcare provision; as part of a regular update of statistical information to inspectors and senior managers within HIW.
- The changes are not anticipated to impact on the work of the Board of Community Councils in Wales
- Data on medical vacancies is necessary not only for the effective delivery of care to patients in the 'here and now' but also for sustainable local and national workforce planning and in understanding and meeting the needs of those in training, i.e. tomorrow's doctors. However, far from [data quality] being used as justification to terminate the collection of this data altogether, there should be a focused effort to agree, standardise and improve data collection on this to aid workforce planning and service delivery now and in the future.
- Workforce planning in Wales (especially mid Wales) poses particular difficulties due to the distribution of the population and hospitals. If the Welsh Government intends to accurately assess the workforce requirements it will need to understand where posts are vacant. The current system is probably somewhat inaccurate but better than nothing.
- However, it is our opinion that this information is helpful and that every effort should be made to retain the data even if it is in a streamlined format
- These statistics should not cease to be collected until an alternative strategy to collect and publish NHS workforce information has been agreed and implemented, although the information in its current format is unhelpful.

Question 2 : Please provide your comments about the annual release 'Staff Directly Employed by the NHS', in particular any comments about the content and frequency of the release.

- It is useful to know how many people are employed in the public sector but does not seem to be used for analysing health trends or why morale is at a low. The statistics do not tell the story of how unmotivated people feel under pressure from management to hit targets and perform over and above the average.
- Agored Cymru is an awarding organisation for Wales. When we develop qualifications we are required by the regulators (Ofqual and the CQFW) to research the workforce to make a business case for new qualifications. LMI is a key part of this.
- Although an annual release is useful to gauge trends, there is no reason why these data should not be bi-annual if cost is an issue. This is very useful in order to benchmark and also for workforce planning purposes.
- These tables provide a more 'in depth' look at staffing. Professional bodies and trade unions find the data very useful. The information helps to follow trends and spotlight changes in the NHS workforce.
- We can access such information quickly through the central ESR data warehouse if required.
- Annual is right, we would not wish data to be published more often than this but it would help if data could be verified more often than once a year as part of the Census process. Working with NHS Wales organisations should help this. Incorrect data that is excluded from the Census tables is an issue as these staff are not counted.
- This publication does not reflect the current situation in the NHS, and is therefore not very useful.
- It is helpful to have published workforce data to refer to in responding to various [Welsh Government] correspondence and briefings. The annual release however means that sometimes we have access to more up to date information via the data warehouse that we cannot use as it is not published data.
- Content very useful - especially taking into account data on Stats Wales - as it gives a breakdown of consultants' specialities. However, timeliness is an issue as the current release refers to information a year old.

Question 3 : Please provide your comments about the quarterly releases 'Sickness absence in the NHS', in particular any comments about the content and frequency of the releases.

- The information is useful and although informative does not again address the issue of why people go on the sick. [...] The health boards are trying to be more efficient and cut costs although there is a line you cannot cross in the NHS and the quarterly reviews do not demonstrate the sickness cycle due to all these environmental factors.
- Sickness absence is useful general background, but does not impact on the work of an awarding organisation to the degree that other LMI does.
- These are useful pointers for managers, politicians and planners about the general 'health' of the NHS in Wales. Again, a bi-annual figure would suffice.
- A considerable amount of work takes place in reducing sickness absence so the more information we can receive will aid this process.
- These figures are extremely useful and provide both employers and trade unions the opportunity to watch for worrying trends if sickness absence levels rise in the NHS in Wales. It is right that these should be available quarterly.
- We can access such information quickly through the central ESR data warehouse if required
- Quarterly releases are right for sickness, may want to consider different staff groups rather than the Occupation Code staff groups.
- This publication does not reflect the current situation in the NHS, and is therefore not very useful.
- Very useful release in providing supporting evidence relating to the performance of Health Boards and Trusts. Quarterly release regular and timely - although 6-monthly might be adequate.

Question 4 : Please provide any other comments about NHS staffing statistics, including other information that you would like to see us publish.

- I feel that grading and the reviews of grading in the NHS are not reflected through statistics. [...] Statistics and published information do not reflect how unfair this process is and the effect it has on staff morale.
- The data could be improved by having more detail: for example a recent enquiry in August revealed that it was not possible to quantify the number of cleaners employed in the NHS in Wales. It would be very useful to have disaggregated data on support workers.
- We are always keen to understand the skill mix of nurses working in the community, so it is useful to see district nurses with the SPQ differentiated from other registered nurses in the community, and all nurses differentiated from health care assistants and other unregistered workers.
- It would be useful to know the number of clinical staff not employed in direct clinical roles. It would be useful to know how many vacancies are due to 'vacancy control' measures as opposed to being unable to recruit.
- Statistics provide an opportunity to scrutinise. The public needs to be able to scrutinise, see how the workforce is changing and have confidence there are low sickness and absence figures because this is being managed well by the employers in the NHS.
- Average Earnings may be of interest
- Gathering information about the NHS workforce is very important. By collecting this information it is possible to plan the existing workforce, and also look towards the future needs of the service and users. There is no easy method of monitoring skills / skill shortages in the NHS [...] There should be a national plan to ensure that the Health Boards and Trusts have a sufficient number of staff with appropriate language skills to provide bilingual services
- Would be useful to have an indicator of whether a particular vacancy is not intended to be filled. If not an indicator then some metadata stating the position of Health Boards and Trusts regarding vacancies would help.
- There are information gaps on primary care, health care support workers, age, Welsh language ability, bank and agency nurses.