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# Nurses in Maternity Care

RCN report



# Acknowledgements



# Introduction

This report, produced by the RCN Midwifery Forum Committee, is a result of a survey designed to explore the employment role-specific training and continuing professional development (CPD) of registered nurses and unregistered support workers in the maternity services in the UK.

For several years there has been a national debate about workforce configuration in the National Health Service (NHS). Maternity services are no exception, with longstanding midwife shortages compounded by budget pressures, an ageing workforce and the employment uncertainties generated by the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. In England, the *NHS Long Term Plan* (NHS, 2019) may also have implications for workload and staffing.

Across the UK, maternity services are primarily staffed by midwives. However, midwife shortages have led to rising numbers of unregistered staff such as maternity support workers assisting midwives in delivering care. In addition, the increasingly complex needs of many pregnant women have led to pressure on the skills and resources available to maternity services. Registered nurses are commonly employed in neonatal units but the protected function and title of the midwife means that registered nurses cannot, by law, deliver babies. In some maternity units, registered nurses are employed to assist in obstetric theatres, obstetric high dependency areas or to provide nursing care to postnatal women. In one trust, health care assistants (HCAs) have taken on the role of scrub assistants in obstetric theatres (Skills for Health, 2009).

Newer roles such as nursing associates and assistant practitioners are also a potentially attractive resource when staff shortages and budget pressures are intense. It is clear that the maternity workforce has changed and will continue to do so. Staff working in this service need to understand the specific care needs of the maternity population in order for care to be safe.

The RCN Midwifery Forum was concerned about the lack of detailed information around the employment of non-midwives in maternity settings. There was also concern that there was little recognition of the specific needs of registered nurses and unregistered support workers around training and CPD. In England, maternity support workers have access to the Care Certificate and in Scotland Band 4 maternity care assistants/maternity support workers receive a Certificate of Higher Education on completion of an undergraduate one-year course. However, information on role-specific preparation and CPD is patchy. To gain some understanding of the issues a survey was developed by the committee of the RCN Midwifery Forum, in order to formulate recommendations from the results.

The RCN Midwifery Forum acknowledge the work carried out by Health Education England on the *Maternity Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework* in 2018 (HEE, 2019). However, this project was not published during the lifetime of this survey and so did not inform the work.

# Survey aims and objectives

The aim of the UK-wide survey was to obtain a snapshot of the structure of, and role-specific training and CPD provision for, the non-medical, non-midwifery maternity workforce. The objectives were to:

- determine the ratio of unregistered staff to registered midwives in the maternity services
- determine the number of maternity services where nursing associates were employed
- determine the number of maternity services where registered nurses were employed in areas other than neonatal care
- determine the areas of work for registered nurses in maternity care
- gather information about the role-specific training offered to non-midwives at induction and as CPD during employment.

For the purpose of this report, and to capture all staff titles and grades, nursing associates are included; health care assistants and maternity support workers will be referred to as unregistered support workers.

The survey was sent out to all heads of midwifery/directors of midwifery throughout the UK in 2018. There were 187 potential respondents and 27 participated. This gave a response rate of 14%, which is better than is usual for this type of survey (verbal communication, RCN May 2018).

# Key findings

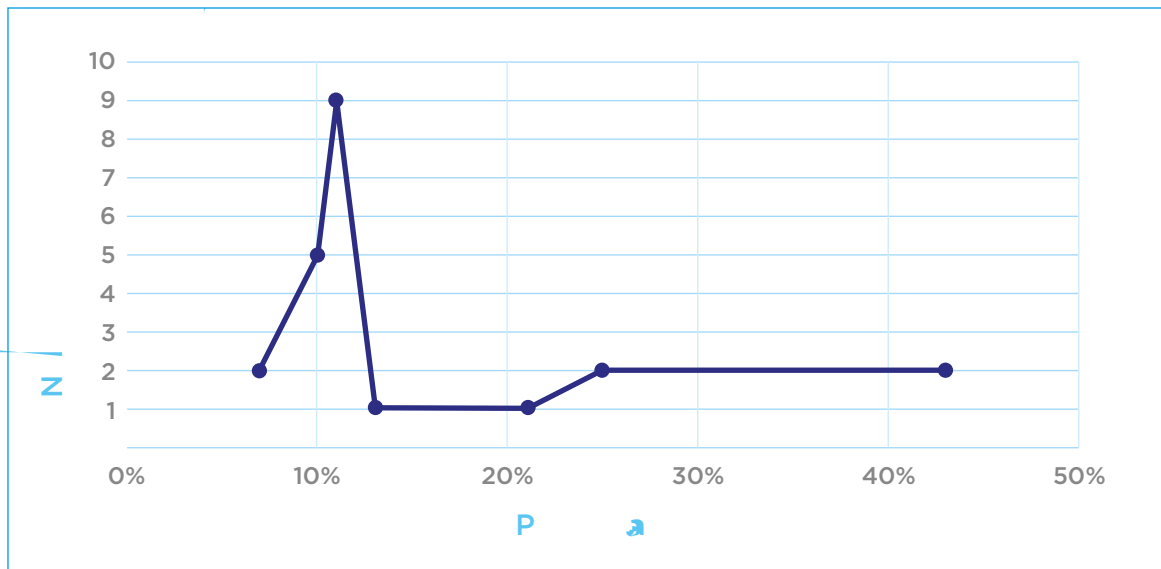
The survey uncovered a more diverse spread of workers employed in maternity services than had been expected. It also found that, while most employers offer specialty-specific training for non-midwives at induction, some did not. Similarly, some employers offered specific ongoing training or CPD whilst others did not.

Key findings were:

## 1. The ratio of unregistered staff to registered midwives in the maternity services

The proportion of unregistered support workers in the workforce varied from 7% to 43%.

Figure 1 Proportion of unregistered support workers to midwives



The survey responses indicated a wide range of figures. Both the respondents who indicated unregistered support workers as 43% of the workforce compared to midwives had fewer midwives in post than the funded establishment. For postnatal services, the RCM (2014a) support a 90%/10% split of midwives to Band 3 maternity support workers (MSWs) who deliver clinical skills. Band 2 MSWs in housekeeping roles are not included in this ratio.



4.



**6. On oin trainin /CPD for re istered nurses**

Some respondents who employed registered nurses offered ongoing CPD. The content of this ongoing CPD was largely obstetric emergencies training. However, the respondent who employed more than 20 registered nurses offered maternity HDU modules and Master’s modules. From the survey responses it appears that, where registered nurses are employed in maternity services, 57% receive ongoing maternity-specific CPD in this survey.

**Table 3 On oin trainin for re istered nurses**

Clinical area	On oin trainin /CPD provided	Content of trainin	Number employed
Obstetric theatres only	Yes	Obstetric emergency multidisciplinary training	1-5
Obstetric theatres and HDUs	Yes	Maternity HDU courses, PDG (sic), Masters modules	>20

The skills most often referred to were:

- moving and handling
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**8. Ongoing training /CPD for unregistered support workers**

Ongoing maternity-specific training was offered by 85% of respondents for unregistered support workers or nursing associates working in maternity services, meaning that 15% did not. Where ongoing training was provided it was often shared with the midwives and focused on emergencies and infant feeding. Three respondents provided specific updates for unregistered support workers.

**Table 5 Organisation and content of ongoing education and training**

<b>Organisation and content</b>	<b>Frequency of responses</b>
Shared with midwives/multidisciplinary team	13
Emergencies/PROMPT	13
Breast feeding/infant feeding	10
Safeguarding/child protection	4

The aim of the survey was to obtain a snapshot of the structure of the non-medical, non-midwifery maternity workforce. This was achieved. However, some specific and pertinent issues arise.

There was some indication in the survey that nursing associates are trained with maternity-specific competencies, which suggests they are part of the maternity workforce in that service. One respondent, who did not employ nursing associates, indicated that they employed associate specialists at Grade 4, who had had midwifery-based training, however, the relevance of the answer in the context of this survey remains unclear.

At the time of writing, the first nursing associates have graduated. However, there seems to be little support for their use in maternity although Barker (2017, p349) suggests nursing associates

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Unregistered support staff are commonly employed in maternity services. It is not possible to say if all respondents employ them as some did

# Recommendations

This survey is intended to add to the conversation on some aspects of the workforce and skill mix in maternity services. As a result of the findings the following recommendations are made:

- the opportunity should be created for a stakeholder engagement event to disseminate findings and consider aspects requiring further exploration, which may include:
  - o future training needs analysis work to explore role-specific training for non-midwifery staff (registered or unregistered) in maternity services, to clarify what should be provided.
- to look at utilising these findings in the wider work being carried out within the RCN safe and effective staffing campaign (RCN 2019). Although the RCN campaign is focused on nursing, these survey results may inform work on both midwifery and nursing staffing.

Barker K (2017) Do trainee nurse associates have a role in maternity care? *British Journal of Midwifery*, June 2017, Vol 25, No 6

Buckinghamshire New University (2019)

