



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1276
Ein cyf/Our ref EM/01553/22

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

11 May 2022

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 6 April regarding petition P-06-1276 *Extend section 25B of the Nurse Staffing Levels Act (Wales) 2016*.

I should make clear at the outset, I am afraid I believe that the premise of the petition title is flawed and lacking in important legislative context.

Firstly, the Act clearly states that an evidence-based workforce planning tool is a necessary component for applying section 25B to any particular care situation.

The statutory guidance further defines such a tool as one having been tested in Welsh clinical settings to develop an evidence-base as to its applicability. Being grounded in evidence is what has given the Act its credibility and reinforces the nurse's voice from ward to board. Any call to apply section 25B of the Act across all clinical settings neglects that fundamental tenet of the legislation, and I cannot commit this government to unrealistic legislative targets within this or any other government term.

Given the relative analogous nature of paediatric inpatients and adult medical and surgical wards, development of a Welsh Levels of Care tool for paediatric inpatients was a matter of building on the work that had come before in the adult setting and making minor adjustments before iterative testing over a 2-year period. This is what made it possible to apply section 25B of the Act to paediatrics through the *Nurse Staffing Levels (Extension of Situations) (Wales) Regulations 2021*.

However, other settings – for example mental health inpatients or community nursing - are significantly different, with their own particular multi-professional complexities (not least the multi-disciplinary nature of care in those settings) to work through in developing their own evidence-based workforce planning tools.

Secondly, even if such tools were available for every nursing situation, it is disingenuous for the petition text to suggest that extending section 25B to all of those areas would result in giving Wales “*the full team of nurses*”.

Nursing staff shortage is an issue being experienced globally. The World Health Organisation has estimated that nursing and midwifery vacancies currently represent more than 50% of the global shortage of health workers. We know that there are significant nursing vacancies in our health boards and across care sectors and settings already, and this is not an issue that would be directly addressed by any extensions of section 25B of the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016.

What the signatories of the petition appear to be declaring is their desire to see the right number of nurses and health care staff in the system to meet the care needs of their patients. That is also my desire, but a government commitment to an undeliverable legislative promise will not achieve that. What *will* help to achieve that is: good workforce planning and modelling; effective recruitment and retention strategies, including international recruitment; and standardised programmes of clinical supervision and preceptorship for our nursing and midwifery staff. These are all work areas that I see as crucially important and are all currently being developed and pursued either by Health Education Improvement Wales or by the office of the Chief Nursing Officer.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services