

South
Yorkshire



PRIMARY CARE

WORKFORCE & TRAINING HUB

Vocational Training Scheme (VTS) for Nurses New to General Practice

Nov 2024 to Nov 2025 cohort



Key points

- Between Nov 2024 and Nov 2025, **8 nurses** took part in the South Yorkshire's Vocational Training Scheme for nurses new to general practice: 2 from Barnsley, 1 from Doncaster, 3 from Sheffield and 2 from Rotherham.
- The VTS Scheme involves one year of taught sessions, placements in general practice and clinical supervision. The aim is to recruit nurses to general practice roles and **increase their skills and confidence** working in practices, so they provide the best care to local people.
- **4** of the nurses in this cohort (50%) did not already have a job in general practice at the start of the Scheme. South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board provided funding so these nurses could be recruited, trained and work in general practices on placements. **4** of the nurses in this cohort (50%) had been employed by a general practice within the past 6 months, and their salary was covered by their practice.
- **100% of nurses completed** the Scheme (8 nurses).
- **100% (8) of nurses that completed the Scheme secured a role** within South Yorkshire as a GPN or continued at their existing practice. The Scheme recruited 4 nurses that would not otherwise be working in primary care and trained 4 others who were newly employed that practices may not have the capacity to train and support to stay.

Area	Number in cohort	% who completed Scheme	% newly employed in South Yorkshire practice at beginning of Scheme	% employed in South Yorkshire practice by end of Scheme
Barnsley	2	100% (2)	50% (1)	100% (2)
Doncaster	1	100% (1)	0	100% (1)
Sheffield	3	100% (3)	66% (2)	100% (3)
Rotherham	2	100% (2)	50% (1)	100% (2)
Total	8	100% (8)	50% (4)	100% (8)

- All nurses provided feedback during and after the programme. Nurses and the practices hosting them said that the main benefits of the programme were:
 - **increasing skills** in providing nursing care in primary care
 - **increasing confidence** about working autonomously and as part of the primary care team
 - for practices, increased **availability of nurse appointments** and nurse clinics
- Nurses were particularly positive about the clinical supervision component of the Scheme, as well as taught sessions about contraception and chronic disease management.
- The Scheme achieved the Integrated Care System's objective of recruiting and training more General Practice Nurses. Nurses and practices said the Scheme met their needs too.

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For further information about the Nurse Vocational Training Scheme or this report contact emma.thompson6@nhs.net

Background

Why is the Vocational Training Scheme needed?

South Yorkshire set up the Vocational Training Scheme for nurses new to general practice because:

- **nurses need specific skills** to work in primary care, which they receive minimal training about during standard nurse undergraduate training
- the number of nurses working in general practice is falling, but demand for primary care services is increasing. We **don't have enough General Practice Nurses** to meet our population's needs due to nurses retiring and not as many nurses choosing to work in primary care as are required
- general practices are independent businesses which do not all have the funds or time to invest in training new nurses or finding training from other providers. This means that in the past nurses were **not being trained to the same consistently high standard**, which has implications for the quality of patient care

To address these issues South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board is funding nurses' salaries for one year so they can be trained to work specifically in primary care. This is essential for addressing the workforce crisis and increasing the pool of General Practice Nurses available in South Yorkshire.

This report describes the outcomes for the May 2023 to May 2024 cohort of South Yorkshire's Vocational Training Scheme for nurses new to general practice.

The information in this report is based on:

- records kept by South Yorkshire Workforce and Training Hub
- surveys completed by nurses during the Scheme
- feedback from VTS nurses upon completion of the Scheme
- feedback from practices hosting placements or employing nurses
- feedback from the education team providing taught sessions

What is the Vocational Training Scheme?

South Yorkshire's Vocational Training Scheme for nurses new to general practice encourages nurses who have just qualified and those that have worked elsewhere but are new to primary care to be trained as General Practice Nurses. The Scheme aims to:

- Increase the **number of nurses** choosing to work and stay working in general practice in South Yorkshire
- Increase the **skills and confidence** of nurses new to general practice so they can provide high quality care for local communities and help practices meet the demand for primary care
- Embed the nurses into the role of the General Practice Nurse to aid **retention**
- Provide a comprehensive **preceptorship programme** for nurses transitioning from other areas of nursing, and newly qualified nurses

The Scheme was developed collaboratively by local practices, Place Areas and the South Yorkshire Primary Care Workforce and Training Hub, taking into account public health and local population needs.

The Scheme comprises taught sessions, placements in general practice and clinical supervision sessions which offer nurses a chance to reflect on their work. The taught sessions and clinical supervision are delivered by South Yorkshire Primary Care Workforce and Training Hub's nurse educator team plus external organisations. Local practices host placement rotations which include in-house training and preceptorship. They are supported by the nurse educator and legacy nurse mentor teams.

One cohort of programme runs each autumn, to align with the university graduation timetable when nurses will be qualifying.

Nurses can apply to take part in the Scheme if:

1. They are interested in working in general practice but **do not currently have a role**. They may be newly qualifying nurses or have a role in secondary care or other sectors. The Scheme covers the salary and training of these nurses (using funds provided by South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board). These nurses are employed and hosted by Primary Care Doncaster Federation as part of the Scheme. There is high demand for places on the Scheme and there is a rigorous selection and interview process
2. They have been employed by a general practice **within the past 6 months**. The salary of these nurses is funded by the employing general practice, and they take part in training alongside the other new nurses (funded as above), so there are no additional training costs

The Scheme helps nurses to find an ongoing role in general practice. It also supports practices that have hired a new nurse to help the nurse get all the training and support they need to thrive and stay in their role.

What content is taught?

Box 1 lists the content in the Scheme's taught sessions in Year 1. The majority of the sessions are delivered in-person. In addition, group clinical supervision is delivered regularly throughout the programme. Each participating nurse has an allocated Nurse Educator to oversee their journey during the Scheme. Each nurse has access to additional support from a Legacy Nurse Mentor.

Box 1: Year 1 sessions include introductions to the following topics:

- Induction to primary care
- EMIS / SystmOne training around searches
- Phlebotomy
- Vaccination and immunisations
- Cervical Sample Taker Programme
- Hypertension
- Chronic kidney disease
- Landscape of primary care
- Roles and processes in primary care
- Health promotion
- Core model of clinical supervision
- Action learning sets
- Consultation skills and motivational interviewing
- Wound care
- Contraception & sexual health
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health
- Health inequalities / population health management
- Atrial fibrillation and anticoagulation therapy
- Chronic heart disease and heart failure
- Menopause
- Ear care
- Travel health
- Asthma
- Diabetes
- COPD & Pulmonary Rehab
- Long COVID
- Interview and negotiation skills and writing applications
- Audit and incident reporting
- Medico-legal and ethical issues in healthcare
- Leadership and teamwork

Impact on recruitment

Number of nurses taking part in the current cohort

- We received a total of 107 expressions of interest to apply for the System-funded places for this cohort. Funding allowed us to accept **4 nurses**. In other words, we were able to accept **3% of the nurses** that expressed an interest to train to work in primary care in this cohort, based on the funding provided by the System. Table 1 shows which Place Areas they were from:

Table 1: Nurses taking part in the current cohort

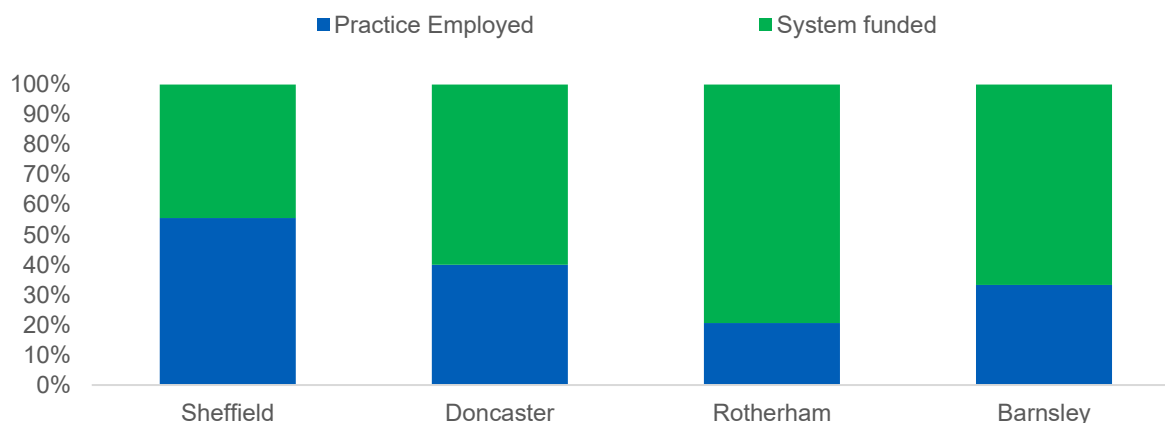
Place area	Number in cohort	% funded by the System in South Yorkshire	% newly employed and funded by a practice	% who completed programme
Barnsley	2	50% (1)	50% (1)	100% (2)
Doncaster	1	100% (1)	0	100% (1)
Sheffield	3	33% (1)	66% (2)	100% (3)
Rotherham	2	50% (1)	50% (2)	100% (2)
Total	8	50% (4)	50% (4)	100% (8)

- In addition to System-funded places, we open up the Scheme to any nurses newly employed by a South Yorkshire practice because there are no extra costs to us and this ensures that newly employed nurses are being trained to a consistent standard. 50% of nurses in this cohort (4 nurses) had started a role at a practice within the past 6 months and the practice funded their salary throughout. 50% (4 nurses) did not already have a role in primary care and the Scheme paid their salaries. These are newly qualifying nurses and nurses working in secondary care that we explicitly recruited to work in primary care.
- **100%** of the nurses that began the Scheme completed it in Oct 2024 (8 nurses). **4 of these nurses were funded by the System and 4 were employed by a practice.**

Number of nurses since the Scheme began

The current cohort joins other nurses who have benefitted from the Scheme. Since 2019, 170 nurses have started Year 1 of the Scheme. Figure 1 shows the breakdown by Place Area.

Figure 1: Total number of nurses starting Scheme from 2019 onwards



Since 2019, 100 nurses (58%) were funded by the System and 89 (89%) of these completed the Scheme. 70 nurses (42%) were newly employed by a practice and 64 (91%) of them completed.

Since 2019, 19 nurses have left before completing the Scheme (11%). 13 of these were funded by the System and 6 were employed by a practice.

This means that 11% of System-funded nurses have left before completing the Scheme. The reasons that the 13 System-funded nurses left before completing were:

- securing a General Practice Nurse job out of area, closer to where they lived
- returning to health visiting or secondary care due to pay and conditions
- moving into a nurse education role

Our programme 'leaver rate' of 11 % for System-funded nurses for the current cohort, is broadly in line with the proportion of nurses who leave their roles each year in the NHS overall. In the year ending September 2022, 11.5% of NHS nurses and health visitors from all [sectors](#) left their roles. The leaver rate for all staff at [NHS trusts](#) was 12.5%. The attrition rate for [student nurses](#) can be as high as 33%.

When nurses leave the Scheme before completing, we use any funds remaining from their salaries to finance places for the next cohort.

We use our learning from nurses that do not complete the Scheme to look out for warning signs during applications and interviews for future cohorts. As concerns about pay and conditions are a barrier, we are now providing more information about this before people join the Scheme and include more training about negotiation skills to help nurses talk with their practices about these issues.

In the last 2 cohorts every nurse has completed the programme.

Impact on retention

By the end of this cohort, 100% of nurses that completed the programme had secured or were maintaining a General Practice Nurse role in general practice in South Yorkshire (8 nurses).

The Scheme is fulfilling its aim of recruiting and retaining nurses in general practice. In this cohort alone **4 more nurses are now newly employed** in practices in South Yorkshire than would have been without the Scheme. **4 nurses** that practices had already employed are now trained and retained in their roles due to the Scheme.

As stated previously, this cohort joins a larger group of nurses completing the Scheme. Over 90% of the System-funded nurses that have completed Year 1 since 2019 went on to secure a substantive post as a General Practice Nurse in South Yorkshire by the end of the programme.

Impacts for nurses

An externally supported review of the VTS Scheme was published in early summer 2024. This report details the impact of the VTS programme for both the VTS nurses and wider Primary Care Workforce in South Yorkshire. It has been made widely available and is published on the South Yorkshire Primary Care Workforce & Training Hub [website](#).

Feedback from the nurses from this (Oct 24 to Oct 25) cohort includes the following:

“The VTS course is life changing! I learnt so much and there is so much to implement to shape and change patient’s lives” (Nurse participant)

“Vastly improved my teamworking and understanding of the latest research” (Nurse participant)

“The VTS course taught us about patient centred care and how every consultation should be unique and individualised” (Nurse participant)

Translating Knowledge into Practice

Nurses reported that they were able to **apply** the knowledge, skills and confidence they gained from the Scheme immediately in their **day-to-day work** in general practice. Examples of the services nurses provided as a result of their training include:

- baby vaccination clinics
- hypertension reviews
- phlebotomy clinics
- contraception appointments
- chronic disease management as appropriate

Reducing isolation

Nurses said that the Scheme helped them develop personally and professionally. Another key impact was building a **supportive network** or community of practice.

Working in general practice can be isolating. Taking part in regular sessions with other nurses helped the cohort build a support network to sustain them during their initial years, and to feel less alone.

Nurses especially valued the group clinical supervision sessions led by the nurse educator team.

“The clinical supervision was a step away from the constant learning – a time to sit back and talk about your fears/achievements and listen to others” (Nurse participant)

Feedback from practices

Practice representatives fed back that the Vocational Training Scheme is meeting their needs, providing nurses with the skills and confidence required to work as an autonomous practitioner and as part of the multidisciplinary team.

Practices hosting placements for nurses funded by the System said that they benefited from extra capacity at the practice and valued the nurses' new skills and perspectives. 25% practices that hosted a nurse on placement in this cohort went on to offer the nurse a substantive role in their practice. During and after the end of this cohort several other practices contacted the Scheme to see whether there were any nurses available to employ. This shows that the Scheme is well regarded by practices and that practices are benefitting from a recruitment pipeline.

Practices employing nurses taking part said that the programme helped them upskill their new staff members in a way that they did not have the time or resource to do alone. It did not cause a burden to release nurses to take part in taught sessions. Practices reported that nurses could use what they learnt immediately at the practice.

“Having the VTS programme has meant we have been able to recruit otherwise inexperienced nurses, who have had the fundamentals of practice nursing taught to them on this fantastic programme, gaining them experience across a broad range of subjects. The VTS programme has come equipped with nurse educators and legacy nurses who have enhanced the nurses' confidence in practice, offering support and direction when needed.” (Practice Manager, Woodseats Medical Centre)

Costs

NHS England and ICB provided funding for the training team to prepare and run the programme.

In addition, the System provided funding of £140,624 for this cohort of 4 nurses to cover costs equivalent to a bottom Band 5 salary plus on-costs. This equates to £35,156 per nurse that completed the Scheme and went on to take on a General Practice Nurse role in South Yorkshire.

These costs exclude the salaries of the 4 other nurses already newly employed by practices.

Areas for development

What worked well and less well

The South Yorkshire Primary Care Workforce & Training Hub has commissioned an external evaluation of the VTS programme that is available to view on the Training Hub [website](#).

In response to the continued variable and predominately negative feedback from the VTS nurses regarding the externally commissioned cervical sample taker programme, the South Yorkshire Primary Care Workforce & Training Hub has developed an NHSE approved in-house cervical sample taker programme. This cohort accessed the programme, and the feedback was excellent. The in-house programme is now embedded into the VTS programme going forward.

Planned next steps

- We are seeking consistency of **funding** from the Integrated Care Board for the delivery of this essential training programme. There is a significant demand from nurses to take part in the Scheme and from practices who want to employ nurses trained by the Scheme. We did not have any challenges with recruiting nurses to join the Scheme, delivering training and the overwhelming majority of nurses have secured substantive posts.
- The training hub is actively working with the Integrated Care Board to secure funding for the running costs of the programme post end of October 2026. It is paramount that this pipeline for training General Practice Nurses is maintained and invested in, as there is no comparable training for General Practice Nurses in the region.
- There is currently no further funding for training contracts from the ICB. Training limited numbers of nurses means practices do not have the workforce they need, which may in turn increase waiting times for patients and reduce the quality of care available

Summary

The Vocational Training Scheme for nurses new to general practice is meeting its aims:

- The Scheme is helping to **recruit and retain nurses** who might not otherwise be working in general practice. The current cohort trained 8 further nurses, bringing the **total trained by the Scheme to 153**. 4 nurses in the current cohort, and 89 since the Scheme began in 2019, were not working in primary care at the start of the Scheme – and were employed as a General Practice Nurse in South Yorkshire by the end. These nurses are new additions to our primary care workforce as a direct result of the Scheme.
- The Scheme is helping to **increase nurses' knowledge and confidence** so they can provide high quality care in general practice and meet population health needs. Nurses and their practices reported being able to directly **apply** what they learnt when providing patient care, including doing immunisations, contraception and taking cervical smears.