ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT

2025–26

Theme One: Our Staff

Theme Two: Our Partners

Theme Three: Our Work

Leading and Inspiring Nurses and Midwives to achieve and uphold excellence in professional practice

Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council

Foreword

It gives us great pleasure to present the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council's (NIPEC's) Annual Quality Report for 2025–2026. This report demonstrates our commitment to transparency, accountability and continuous improvement, and provides an overview of how we have promoted and enhanced quality across all areas of our work.

During 2025–2026, NIPEC has continued to build on the foundations of our Quality Strategy, Lead, Inspire, Improve. The strategy remains central to our approach, guiding how we work with our staff, service users and partners to deliver excellence, strengthen organisational learning and achieve positive outcomes for the nursing and midwifery workforce. Throughout this report, we highlight the dedication and collaborative efforts of our staff and stakeholders, showcasing key achievements and developments from across the year. These examples reflect our ongoing commitment to innovation, leadership, professional development and quality improvement.

As Interim Chair and Chief Executive, we remain committed to ensuring that quality is at the heart of everything we do. We will continue to lead, inspire and improve, working together with our partners to deliver on our strategic ambitions and support the delivery of NIPEC's Corporate Plan.

We hope you find this report informative and that it provides a clear picture of the impact and value of NIPEC's work during 2025–2026.

Kieran McCormick

Interim NIPEC Chair



Linda Kelly

NIPEC Chief Executive



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What is the Annual Quality Report?

The Annual Quality Report (AQR) tells the story of how an organisation is improving quality, what it has achieved during the year, and how it is learning and improving for the future.

Each year HSC organisations in Northern Ireland are asked to report against the themes and objectives set out in Q2020 and publish their AQR during World Quality week in November.

For NIPEC, this report showcases the work carried out with nurses, midwives and health and social care partners to improve professional practice, education and patient care across Northern Ireland. It highlights key achievements, quality improvement projects, collaboration with stakeholders, and the impact of NIPEC's work.

The report helps NIPEC to:

- Demonstrate its commitment to quality and continuous improvement.
- Share examples of good practice and innovation.
- Show how it is delivering on its Corporate Plan and Quality Strategy.
- Be transparent and accountable to the public, the Department of Health, and its stakeholders.
- Celebrate the achievements of staff and partners

Quality is not just one part of NIPEC's work—it is the reason for our work. This can be seen within the NIPEC Quality Strategy as we focus our priorities around themes that will enable us to deliver excellence for the professions and allow us to learn from each other. These are - Our Staff, Our Partners and Our Work. We have laid out this Annual Quality Report against our priorities incorporating the Q2020 themes to ensure consistency with other organisations.

To access the NIPEC Quality Strategy please click on the link NIPEC Quality Strategy 2024 to 2028.

About NIPEC

NIPEC helps nurses and midwives be the best they can be, so patients receive safe, effective and high-quality care. Rather than delivering healthcare directly, NIPEC works behind the scenes to:

- Support the education and training of nurses and midwives.
- Develop guidance, standards and best practice.
- Help nurses and midwives keep their skills up to date throughout their careers.
- Advise the Department of Health and health organisations on nursing and midwifery issues.
- Promote high standards of care for patients and service users.

NIPEC works in close partnership with the Chief Nursing Officer's (CNO's) Directorate in the Department of Health for Northern Ireland, with the majority of NIPEC's work programme being directly commissioned by the CNO and her team. This ensures clear, strategic alignment between NIPEC's aims, objectives and expected outcomes and the priorities of the Department of Health, as reflected in NIPEC's four-year Corporate Plan.

NIPEC's vision ***'Leading and inspiring nurses and midwives to achieve and uphold excellence in professional practice'*** articulates clearly our commitment to achieving high quality as a priority for our organisation. It was originally informed through a series of engagement events with our stakeholders, including the public, demonstrating how we value partnership working with staff, patients, clients and carers. That means that our vision has been defined by the people with whom, and for whom, we work.

NIPEC continued to lead and facilitate a wide range of regional initiatives in 2025-26 and details of these can be found in the Performance section of our Annual Report which is published on our website. Whilst this report highlights some examples of how this work links with our quality strategy, further information on the Professional work of NIPEC during 2025-26 can be accessed via our website at https://nipec.hscni.net.

Maintaining Quality within Governance arrangements

NIPEC is accountable to the Minister of Health through the Department of Health (DoH). As an Arm's Length Body (ALB), it operates within relevant legislation, policy requirements and the principles of the Health and Social Care (HSC) Framework. NIPEC is also professionally accountable to the Chief Nursing Officer on matters relating to nursing and midwifery practice.

NIPEC demonstrates its commitment to quality and accountability through a range of reporting and assurance processes, including the publication of its Annual Report and Accounts, Annual Quality Report, and participation in bi-annual Accountability Reviews with the Department of Health.

The organisation is committed to the principles of good corporate governance and continually strengthens its governance arrangements. This is achieved through regular self-assessment against the Department of Health's Governance Self-Assessment Tool, enabling NIPEC to identify opportunities for improvement and ensure alignment with recognised best practice.

Continuous improvement is supported through a focus on four key areas:

1. **Board Composition and Commitment**
2. **Board Evaluation, Development and Learning**
3. **Board Insight and Foresight**
4. **Board Engagement and Involvement**

NIPEC Council has overall responsibility for ensuring that effective governance structures and systems are in place to oversee organisational accountability, performance and quality. These arrangements provide assurance that NIPEC's work is strategically aligned and operationally focused on supporting high-quality health and social care delivery across Northern Ireland. Quality remains a standing agenda item at all Council, Business and Professional Team meetings, reinforcing its importance across every aspect of the organisation's work.

NIPEC Council

NIPEC Council comprises a Chair and eleven professional and lay members who provide strategic leadership and oversight for the organisation. The Council is responsible for ensuring that effective governance structures, systems and controls are in place to oversee organisational accountability, performance and risk management. These arrangements provide assurance that NIPEC's activities are strategically aligned and operationally focused on supporting the delivery of high-quality health and social care services across Northern Ireland.

This reporting year marked a significant period of transition for NIPEC Council with the retirement of Chair, Bronagh Scott, in December 2025. Bronagh brought a wealth of experience to the role, having qualified as a nurse in 1984 and held a number of Executive Director of Nursing positions across Northern Ireland, London and Wales. In 2015, she was appointed by the Health Minister as Nurse Adviser to the Expert Independent Panel chaired by Professor Rafael Bengoa, which examined the future configuration of Health and Social Care services in Northern Ireland. NIPEC extends its sincere appreciation to Bronagh for her exemplary leadership, commitment and valued contribution during her tenure as Chair.

As the organisation's governing body, the Council provides assurance that NIPEC remains fit for purpose and capable of delivering its statutory responsibilities and functions effectively. The Council regularly reviews and approves organisational structures, policies and performance arrangements to ensure ongoing organisational effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Engagement with key stakeholders remains a central aspect of the Council's work. Through regular dialogue and collaboration, the Council helps ensure that NIPEC's programmes of work are informed by, and responsive to, the needs of those it serves. It actively seeks feedback on organisational performance and uses this intelligence to support informed decision-making and service improvement.

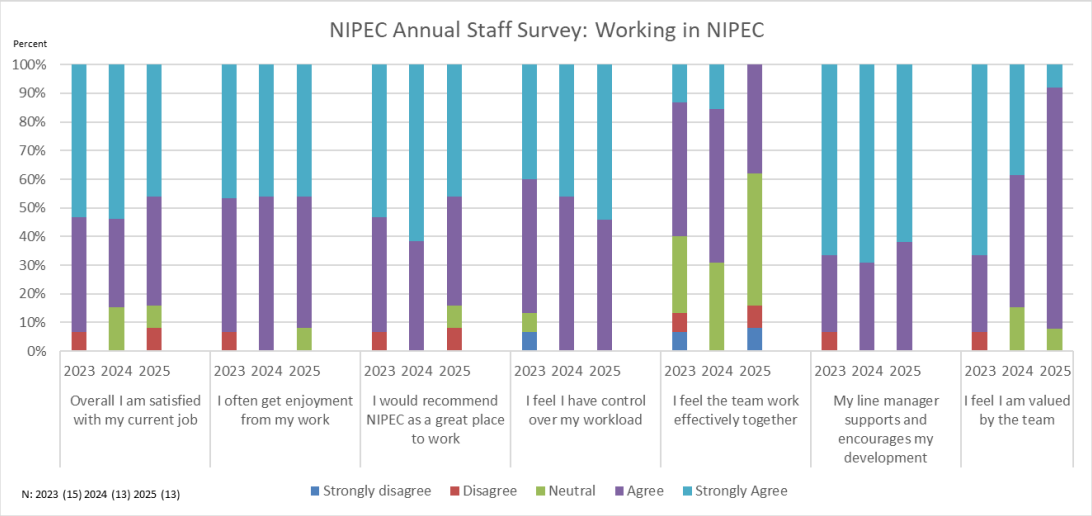
Theme One: Our Staff

NIPEC staff remain our most valuable resource. The team comprises of a Chief Executive supported by a senior team of seven Senior Professional Officers, a Head of Corporate Services and a number of administrative support staff. Central to the delivery of our corporate objectives is a strong team ethos and a culture of positivity, engagement and open communication. Valuing our staff is essential for maintaining productivity, engagement, and organisational success. When our staff feel respected, supported, and recognised for their contributions, they are more motivated to perform to the best of their abilities and take pride in their work. NIPEC strives to maintain a positive and inclusive workplace culture that fosters job satisfaction, improves morale, and encourages staff to remain committed to organisational goals. By enabling our staff to feel valued, they will more likely demonstrate initiative, collaborate effectively with colleagues, and contribute innovative ideas that can improve services and outcomes. Furthermore, investing in our staff development, wellbeing, and recognition helps reduce absenteeism and staff turnover, ensuring a stable and productive workforce. Ultimately, we aim to create an environment where, as individuals, our staff can thrive, leading to higher performance, better service delivery, and sustained organisational success.

Transforming Our Culture

Transforming the culture of an organisation involves creating a shared vision, empowering people, and fostering behaviours that reflect the organisation's values and goals. Successful cultural transformation requires strong leadership, open communication, and a commitment to continuous improvement. By encouraging collaboration, recognising achievements, and creating an environment where staff feel valued and supported, the team at NIPEC can build a positive culture that enhances performance, innovation, and employee engagement while delivering better outcomes for those they serve. Over the past 3 years we have asked our staff for feedback on their experiences of working in NIPEC as seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Annual Staff Survey



The overall picture appears very positive, with consistently high levels of agreement across most measures over the three-year period. The strongest themes seem to be staff satisfaction with their current job, enjoyment of their work, effective teamwork, and support from line managers, all of which remain at a high level across 2023–2025.

Staff also generally indicate that they would recommend NIPEC as a great place to work, suggesting a positive organisational culture and a strong level of employee engagement.

The results also suggest that NIPEC has maintained a stable and supportive working environment despite a slight reduction in survey respondents over the three years (15 responses in 2023 and 13 in both 2024 and 2025). The consistently positive scores indicate that staff feel valued and supported in their roles, which is often associated with higher motivation, commitment, and productivity.

Areas relating to workload and control over work appear comparatively less positive than the other measures, although they still seem broadly favourable. This may indicate an opportunity for NIPEC to further explore workload pressures, capacity, and staff wellbeing, ensuring employees have sufficient autonomy and resources to perform effectively.

Overall, the survey results suggest that NIPEC has successfully fostered a workplace culture where staff feel supported by their managers, work effectively as a team, enjoy

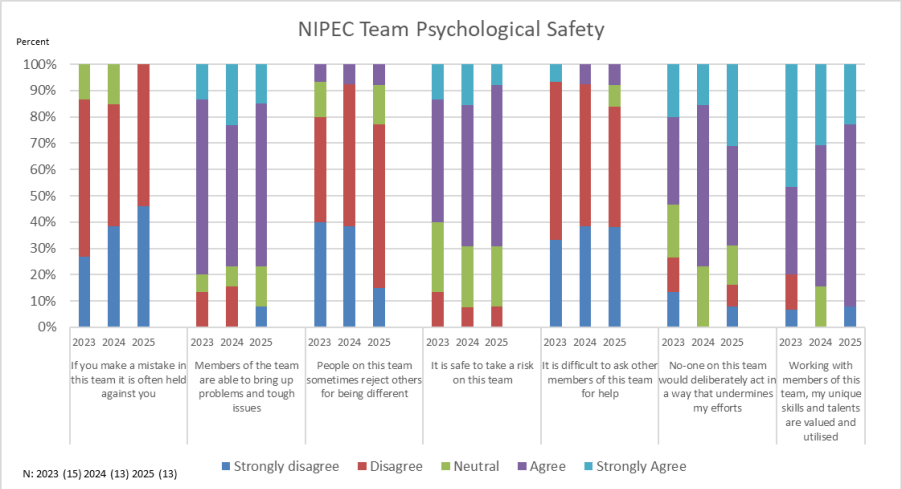
their roles, and are proud to recommend the organisation to others. These are significant strengths that contribute to staff retention, wellbeing, and organisational performance.

NIPEC puts a strong emphasis on creating psychological safety as it is essential to building a positive, inclusive, and high-performing workplace culture. Psychological safety exists when staff feel confident to speak up, share ideas, ask questions, raise concerns, and admit mistakes without fear of blame, embarrassment, or negative consequences. By fostering open communication, mutual respect, and trust at all levels of the organisation, NIPEC can ensure that all staff feel heard, valued, and empowered to contribute their perspectives. Leaders and managers play a key role in creating this environment by encouraging constructive feedback, demonstrating compassion, and promoting learning rather than blame when challenges arise. When psychological safety is embedded within the organisation, staff are more likely to collaborate effectively, innovate, support one another, and actively engage in continuous improvement, ultimately enhancing staff wellbeing, organisational effectiveness, and the quality of services delivered.

In NIPEC, promoting psychological safety also involves demonstrating empathy, valuing diverse opinions, and ensuring that every team member feels included in discussions and decision-making processes. Regular one-to-one conversations, team reflections, and opportunities for staff feedback help to create a culture where people feel comfortable expressing themselves. Recognising contributions, celebrating successes, and addressing inappropriate behaviours promptly further reinforces a safe and supportive workplace.

Our annual staff survey also includes an assessment of psychological safety, the results over the past 3 years can be seen in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Staff Psychological Safety



Based on the NIPEC Team Psychological Safety Survey, the results indicate a consistently positive culture of psychological safety across the organisation over the three-year period. Staff responses suggest that team members generally feel comfortable raising problems and difficult issues, taking risks, asking colleagues for help, and bringing their whole selves to work without fear of being judged or treated differently. These are all recognised indicators of a psychologically safe workplace.

A particularly positive finding is the strong level of agreement with statements relating to respect, inclusion and teamwork. Staff appear to feel that their unique skills and talents are valued and utilised, and there is little evidence that colleagues would deliberately undermine one another. This suggests that NIPEC has established a culture of trust, mutual respect and collaboration, where individuals feel recognised for their contributions and supported by their peers.

The survey also indicates that staff generally feel able to speak up about problems and challenges, which is a key characteristic of psychologically safe organisations. When employees feel comfortable discussing errors, concerns, and difficult issues, organisations are better positioned to learn, improve and innovate. This is particularly important in a professional organisation such as NIPEC, where continuous improvement and learning are central to success.

While the overall results are very positive, some responses suggest there may still be opportunities to strengthen psychological safety further, particularly around perceptions of mistakes and risk-taking. In many organisations, these areas tend to attract more varied responses than teamwork and support, indicating that leaders should continue encouraging open discussion, learning from mistakes, and constructive challenge without fear of blame. Maintaining this focus will help ensure staff remain confident in sharing ideas, concerns and different perspectives.

Alongside the surveys the team also engage in structured ‘What Matters’ conversations that encourage meaningful conversations about the issues, goals, and priorities that are most important to individuals to enhance their work and wellbeing. These conversations give staff the platform to identify any workplace frustrations, or ‘pebbles in our shoes’, and engage and empower the team to identify potential solutions. The team feel that regular, open conversations help to promote a positive workplace culture where people can thrive and contribute effectively. Themes are identified and an action plan is developed with updates reported to the Total Quality Management Group during the year.

Overall the findings indicate that NIPEC has developed a healthy and supportive working environment where staff feel respected, included and able to contribute openly. While these reflect positively on leadership, team relationships and organisational culture, NIPEC also recognises and acknowledges the areas highlighted by staff where further improvement is needed. The organisation has carefully considered the feedback provided, accepts responsibility for addressing the issues identified, and is committed to taking forward meaningful actions to strengthen staff experience. These findings provide both reassurance regarding current strengths and a valuable evidence base to inform continuous improvement, staff wellbeing, engagement and organisational effectiveness.

Developing Our Staff

During 2025–26, a review of the staffing structure within NIPEC was initiated following the decision of three Senior Professional Officers to take partial retirement. This provided an opportunity to consider how the organisation could strengthen its structure for the future by improving sustainability, succession planning, staff development, and the overall skills and grade mix.

The review examined both the clinical professional workforce and the wider corporate functions, drawing on staff engagement, workshops, meetings, and questionnaires to inform potential options for a revised organisational structure. A key outcome was the recruitment of two Band 7 Professional Officers, funded through the savings released by the partial retirements, to enhance capacity and address skill and grade mix challenges within the nursing and midwifery team. Implementation of the agreed changes commenced during the latter part of the year and will continue throughout 2026–27.

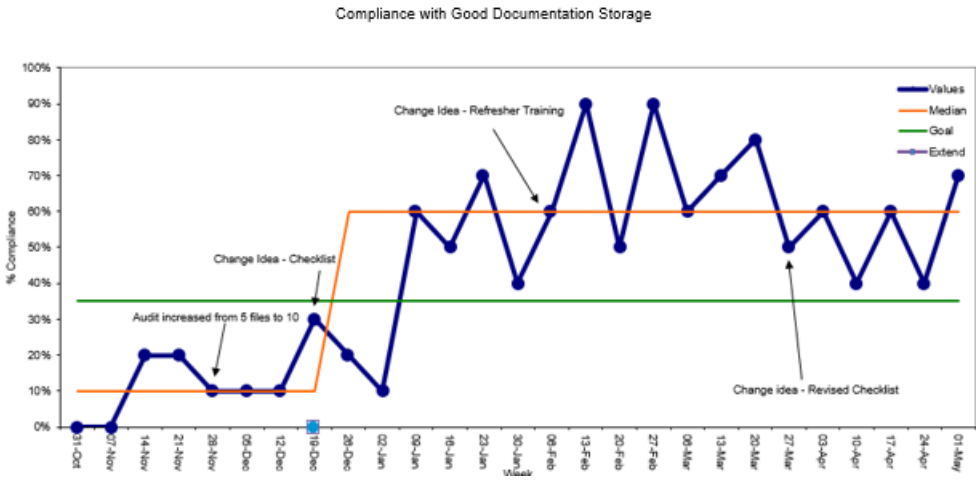
The team in NIPEC was delighted when Linda Kelly, Chief Executive, was awarded the title of Honorary Professor of Nursing Practice at Queen's University Belfast in 2025. This prestigious appointment recognises her outstanding contribution to nursing leadership, professional practice, and healthcare improvement across Northern Ireland. With more than three decades of experience in nursing and senior healthcare management, Linda has played a pivotal role in advancing patient safety, quality improvement, and workforce development throughout the health service. The honorary professorship reflects both her significant achievements within the profession and her ongoing commitment to strengthening the links between nursing practice, education, and research, helping to shape the next generation of nursing professionals.



Professor Linda Kelly

Staff development is essential for building a skilled, motivated, and effective workforce. By providing our staff with opportunities for training, learning, and professional growth, our organisation can enhance individual performance, improve service delivery, and increase overall productivity. Continuous development helps our staff adapt to changing workplace demands, new technologies, and evolving best practices, ensuring that they remain competent and confident in their roles. It also demonstrates our commitment as an organisation to our staff, which can improve job satisfaction, staff retention, and morale. Ultimately, investing in our staff development can benefit both the individual and the organisation by fostering a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and excellence. During 2025/26 two staff had the opportunity to undertake training in Quality Improvement with one completing a Level 2 programme and the other a Level 3. They worked together on a project focused on the NIPEC internal filing system to ensure we improved our compliance against the standards of good documentation storage (opening, management and disposal of e-files). The graph in figure 3 below shows an increase in the median from a baseline of 10% to 60%

Figure 3: Good Documentation Compliance

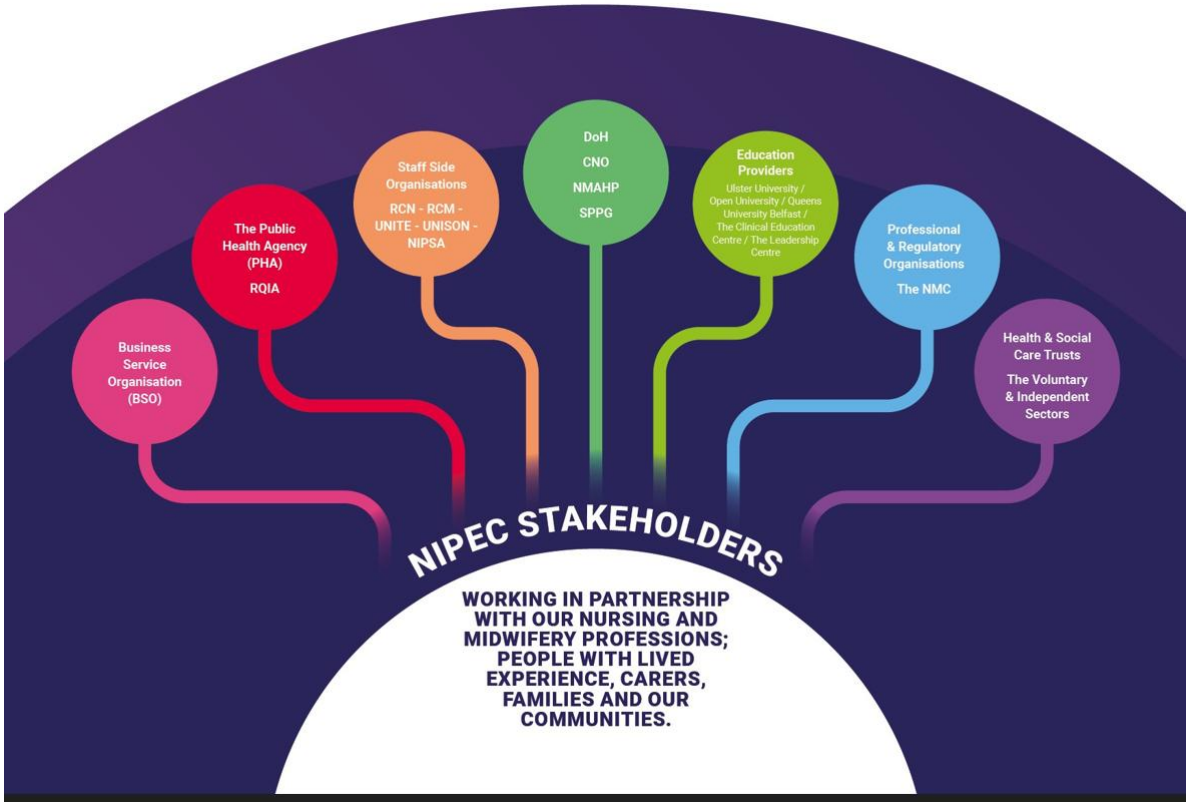


The team in NIPEC is committed to continuous improvement by regularly reviewing its practices, seeking feedback, and identifying opportunities to enhance performance and service delivery. Team members actively engage in learning and development, share knowledge and best practice, and embrace new ideas and innovative approaches to their work. By reflecting on outcomes, adapting to changing needs, and working collaboratively to solve challenges, the team strives to deliver high-quality results and achieve ongoing improvements for the organisation and its stakeholders.

Theme Two: Our Partners

NIPEC works closely with a wide range of partners across the health and social care system, education sector, professional bodies, service users, and other key stakeholders to support the delivery of high-quality nursing and midwifery services in Northern Ireland.

Figure 4: NIPEC Partners and Stakeholders

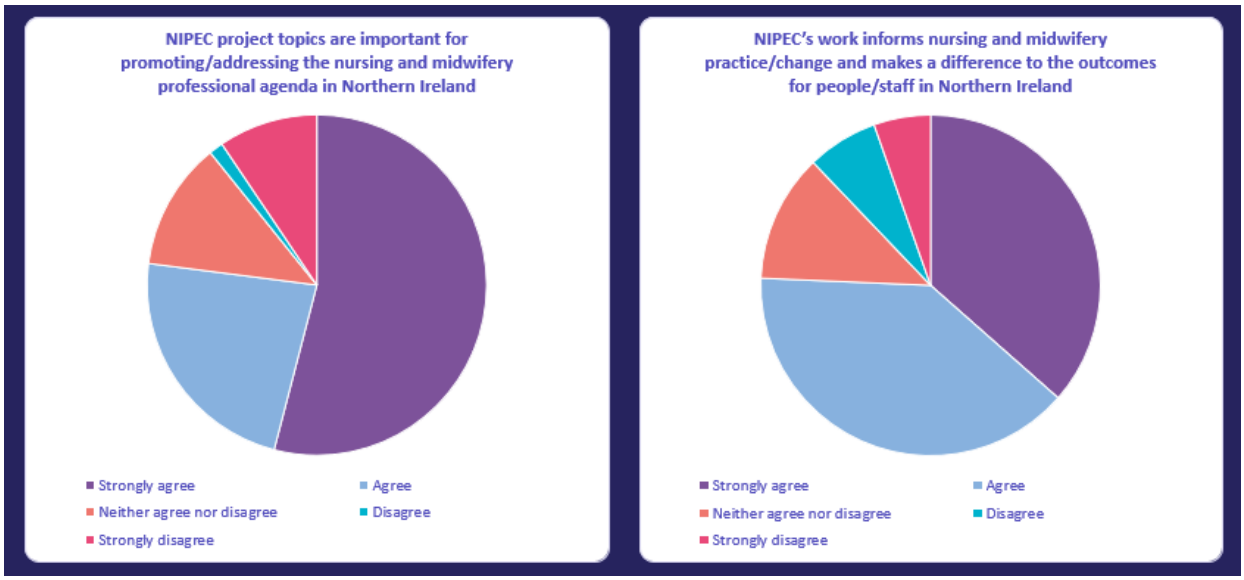


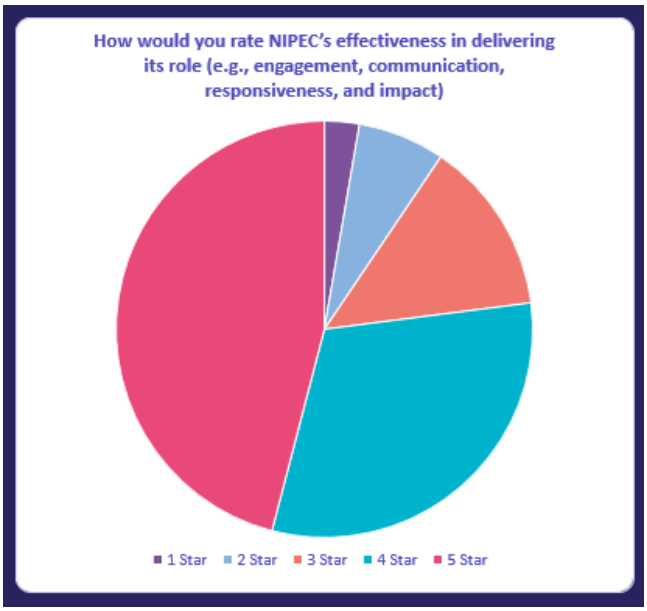
Through strong collaborative relationships, NIPEC helps to share knowledge, develop best practice, influence policy, and drive improvements in workforce development and patient care. By engaging with partners and valuing their expertise and perspectives, NIPEC ensures that its work is informed, responsive, and aligned with the needs of the population, contributing to better outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

During 2025/26 NIPEC asked its partners for some feedback with the results in figure 5 below demonstrating a strong level of confidence and satisfaction among stakeholders, with over three-quarters of respondents expressing positive views of NIPEC and its contribution.

Partners particularly value NIPEC's role in supporting nursing and midwifery development and recognise the positive impact of its work. While the findings are encouraging, respondents identified opportunities to further strengthen visibility, frontline engagement, communication, and the demonstration of impact.

Figure 5: Partners Survey Results





These results provide a positive endorsement of NIPEC's collaborative approach while highlighting key areas for continuous improvement and future development.

Strengthening the Workforce

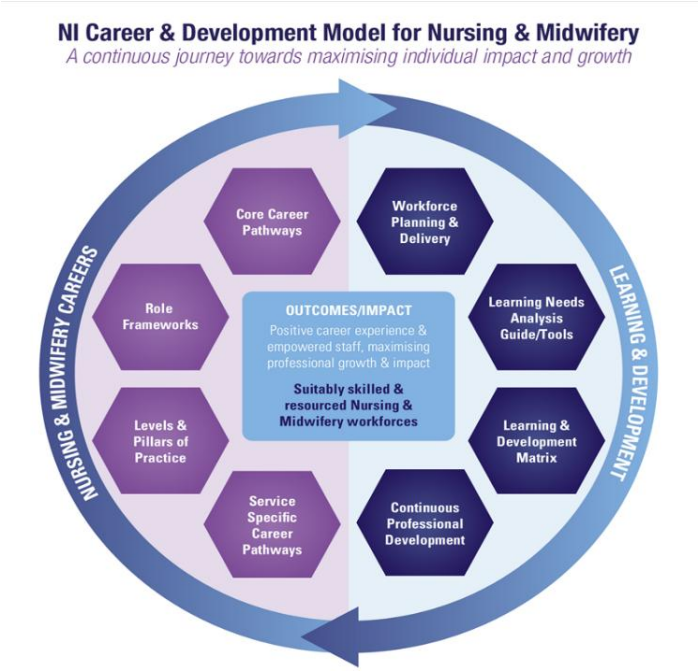
Strengthening the workforce remains a key priority for the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC). Through the development of innovative career pathways, learning and development frameworks, professional standards and workforce initiatives, NIPEC supports nurses, midwives and the wider health and social care workforce to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence required to deliver safe, effective and person-centred care.

By investing in professional development and career progression, NIPEC plays a vital role in supporting workforce sustainability, enhancing staff experience and strengthening the capacity of health and social care services to meet the evolving needs of the population. This work supports the development of a skilled, motivated and resilient workforce while contributing to improved outcomes for individuals, families and communities across Northern Ireland.

Supporting Career Development and Workforce Sustainability

The NIPEC Career and Development Model (Figure 6) provides a comprehensive regional framework designed to support career progression, professional development and retention across nursing, midwifery and support staff roles.

Figure 6: NIPEC Career and Development Model



The model offers clear, competency-based career pathways that identify the knowledge, skills, behaviours and experience required throughout an individual's career journey.

Underpinned by a comprehensive Learning and Development Framework, the model enables individuals and organisations to identify appropriate education, training and development opportunities, supporting lifelong learning and continuous professional growth. The model provides flexibility for career development across three core career pathways: clinical practice, operational management and education and research pathways, helping staff to realise their full potential while supporting service priorities and workforce needs.

Through this work, NIPEC continues to strengthen workforce sustainability by supporting recruitment, retention, succession planning and the development of future leaders across health and social care.

Advancing Nursing Career Pathways

NIPEC has played a significant leadership role in the development and implementation of career pathways for nurses and midwives across Northern Ireland. These pathways provide a structured framework that outlines the competencies, experience and qualifications required at different stages of professional practice, enabling individuals to navigate clear and achievable routes for career progression.

Career pathways support workforce planning and talent management by providing clarity for employers and staff, helping to attract, develop and retain skilled professionals within the health and social care system. They also support the delivery of high-quality, safe and person-centred care by ensuring practitioners have access to the education, development and support required to meet increasingly complex service demands.

During 2025/26, NIPEC continued to work in partnership with key stakeholders to develop career specific pathways for Cancer Nursing and Perioperative Nursing, aligned to Department of Health strategic priorities for nursing and midwifery. Both pathways received endorsement from the Chief Nursing Officer and were formally launched at the NIPEC Conference on 2 December 2025.





Launch of the Cancer and Perioperative Nursing Career Pathways in 2025/26

The launch of the Cancer and Perioperative Nursing Career Pathways represents a significant milestone in advancing professional practice across Northern Ireland. These pathways provide a clear framework for career development, support workforce sustainability and strengthen succession planning in two strategically important areas of healthcare delivery.

Importantly, they also contribute to wider workforce transformation objectives by supporting service innovation, enhancing professional capability and ensuring that patients continue to receive high-quality care from a confident, skilled and future-ready workforce.

The continued development of career pathways demonstrates NIPEC's commitment to creating a sustainable workforce, supporting professional growth and enabling health and social care services to meet the challenges of an evolving healthcare landscape.

Collective Leadership: From Framework to Practice

The Collective Leadership Framework was officially launched by the Health Minister at the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) Conference in September 2024. Designed for all Health and Social Care (HSC) staff, the framework includes a self-assessment and development tool to support individual growth and leadership development. Although initially developed for nurses and midwives, it establishes a standard of collective leadership that is relevant to all staff across the HSC system in Northern Ireland.

The framework recognises that leadership can be demonstrated by anyone, regardless of their role or position, and emphasises the shared responsibility of staff to contribute to the development, support and empowerment of their colleagues. It promotes a culture in which leadership is viewed as everyone's responsibility and where collaboration, compassion, continuous improvement and shared decision-making are fundamental to delivering high-quality, person-centred care.

A key feature of the framework is the inclusion of comprehensive implementation and monitoring guidance for HSC organisations. The guidance provides practical steps to support organisations to adopt, implement and embed collective leadership within workforce planning, recruitment and selection processes, appraisal and supervision systems, leadership development programmes and organisational governance arrangements. This supports the creation of cultures where collective leadership becomes part of everyday practice rather than a standalone initiative.

To further support implementation, NIPEC developed a Collective Leadership Assessment Tool to accompany the framework. The tool enables individuals to assess their current collective leadership capabilities, identify learning and development needs and create focused development plans. It encourages reflection, self-awareness and continuous professional growth and can be used within appraisal, supervision and professional development discussions.

During 2025/26, NIPEC continued to embed the Collective Leadership Framework across its own organisational practices and workforce initiatives. The framework has been integrated into NIPEC's recruitment and selection processes, ensuring that collective leadership values, behaviours and capabilities are reflected in the appointment of staff and leaders. This has strengthened NIPEC's commitment to fostering a culture of collaboration, inclusivity and shared responsibility.

In 2025, NIPEC enhanced the framework through the introduction of a short awareness animation and an e-learning programme, developed in partnership with the HSC Leadership Centre, both of which are available on the NIPEC and Learn HSCNI websites.



Collective Leadership Animation and E-Learning

These resources are intended to support the continued promotion, understanding and implementation of collective leadership throughout the HSC system. The e-learning programme is available to all HSC staff through the Learn HSCNI platform, providing an accessible and sustainable resource that supports leadership development at every level of the workforce and enables staff to explore the principles, behaviours and practical application of collective leadership in their day-to-day roles.

By providing a comprehensive framework, implementation guidance, assessment resources and learning opportunities, NIPEC is supporting HSC organisations and staff to develop compassionate, inclusive and collaborative leadership cultures. This work contributes to improved staff experience and wellbeing, stronger teamwork, enhanced workforce capability and the delivery of safe, effective and person-centred care across Northern Ireland's health and social care system.

The continued implementation of the Collective Leadership Framework demonstrates NIPEC's commitment to developing leadership capability at every level of the workforce, supporting workforce sustainability and enabling transformational change across health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

Integrating the Care

NIPEC integrates care by working collaboratively with a wide range of partners across health and social care, education, voluntary, community, and professional sectors. Through strong partnerships and meaningful engagement with organisations and stakeholders, NIPEC helps to ensure that services are coordinated, person-centred, and responsive to the needs of individuals and communities.

By facilitating **Communities of Practice**, NIPEC creates valuable opportunities for professionals to share knowledge, exchange experiences, promote innovation, and develop best practice across organisational boundaries.

During 2025/26 NIPEC facilitated two Communities of Practice for Senior Nurses. One was a virtual offering where the focus was on the connection between the NIPEC Quality Excellence Framework and the RQIA Being Human Framework. The second was an in-person event where Dr Andy Knox, a prominent figure in the field of population health, shared his thoughts on health outcomes, health inequalities and compassionate leadership.



Community of Practice speaker Dr Andy Knox

This collaborative approach supports the integration of care, strengthens professional networks, and enables collective action to improve health outcomes and the quality of nursing and midwifery services throughout Northern Ireland.

In December 2025, NIPEC hosted its annual conference, “Stabilise, Reform and Deliver,” bringing together more than 150 nurses and midwives from across Northern Ireland to explore key priorities for the future of health and social care. The conference showcased significant regional achievements, highlighted collaborative working across the professions, and focused on AI and its impact on healthcare.

The conference also featured contributions from the Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt, and Chief Nursing Officer Professor Maria McIlgorm, who emphasised the importance of investing in the nursing and midwifery workforce to support reform, professional development, and the delivery of safe, person-centred care across Northern Ireland. The keynote speaker was Professor Jason Leitch, CBE FRCS, Global Health Leader and Strategic Advisor. His session was titled “Keeping the faith… improvement in turmoil” and explored sustaining improvement efforts during periods of challenge including powerful stories of change.

NIPEC Conference Photos 2025: Stabilise, Reform and Deliver



Theme Three: Our Work

NIPEC fosters strong relationships ensuring its work is underpinned by engagement, partnership, and co-production, so that the views and expertise of practitioners, service users, educators, regulators, and health and care organisations inform its programmes and initiatives. NIPEC facilitates learning networks and promotes the sharing of best practice, supporting workforce development through education, professional standards, and leadership opportunities.

Measuring Improvement

Measuring improvement is an important part of NIPEC's work, ensuring that activities and initiatives deliver meaningful outcomes for nurses, midwives, service users, and partner organisations. NIPEC uses feedback, evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and performance data to assess the impact of its programmes and identify areas for further development. By regularly reviewing progress, learning from experience, and responding to emerging needs, NIPEC can demonstrate the value of its work, support evidence-based decision-making, and drive continuous improvement across the health and social care system. This commitment to evaluation helps ensure that resources are used effectively and that improvements translate into better outcomes for the workforce and the people they serve.

NIPEC's Quality Dashboard is a comprehensive management tool that provides an overview of how the organisation is performing across three key domains: Our Staff, Our Partners, and Our Work. The dashboard brings together a range of quantitative and qualitative measures to monitor progress, identify trends, and support evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.

The Our Staff section focuses on workforce wellbeing, development, and culture, including measures such as staff training against the Q2020 Attributes Framework, psychological safety, team effectiveness, and perceptions of support, recognition, and respect. These indicators help NIPEC understand staff experiences and maintain a positive, high-performing workplace culture.

The Our Partners section measures engagement and external reach through website traffic, social media activity, stakeholder feedback, and partner survey results. It provides insights into how effectively NIPEC communicates, collaborates, and influences nursing and midwifery practice across Northern Ireland, while identifying opportunities to strengthen visibility, frontline engagement, and impact.

The Our Work section assesses organisational project delivery and progress against key objectives. This enables NIPEC to monitor operational efficiency, demonstrate accountability, and ensure resources are used effectively to deliver strategic priorities. Alongside this there are a number of indicators that are monitored to assure performance and good governance, such as staff sickness, prompt payment of invoices and financial performance.

In 2025, NIPEC refreshed an **Impact Assessment Framework** that provides a structured approach for evaluating the effectiveness, influence and value of NIPEC's programmes, frameworks and professional development initiatives across nursing and midwifery in Northern Ireland. The framework supports evidence-based decision making by examining impact across five key areas: Communication and Advocacy, Accountability, Evidence of Effectiveness, Continuous Improvement, and Future Planning. Through the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from practitioners, managers and stakeholders, the framework assesses how NIPEC's work contributes to improved professional practice, workforce development and patient outcomes. It also helps identify areas of good practice, informs future strategic priorities, and ensures that NIPEC's resources and initiatives continue to meet the evolving needs of the health and social care workforce.

During 2025/26 an Impact Assessment of the Preceptorship Framework took place. This demonstrated that the Framework has had a significant positive impact on nursing and midwifery practice across the Health and Social Care Trusts, Primary Care and Independent Sector settings. The evaluation found strong stakeholder engagement and widespread adoption of the Framework, resources and templates, supporting a more consistent and structured approach to preceptorship across the region.

The majority of healthcare organisations aligned their policies and programmes with the Framework, helping them meet Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) preceptorship requirements. The evidence demonstrated that preceptorship is improving workforce confidence, competence and professional development. 84% of preceptees commenced preceptorship within their first week of employment, and most reported enhanced confidence in applying clinical knowledge and making independent decisions. HSC Executive Directors of Nursing and senior managers recognised the framework's contribution to safe and effective care, workforce confidence, recruitment and retention.



The assessment also identified areas for improvement. While governance and monitoring arrangements are established within organisations, there is variation in reporting processes and no consistent mechanism for providing assurance on preceptorship compliance through governance structures outside the employing organisations. Time pressures, staffing shortages and limited protected time for preceptors remain key barriers to effective implementation.

Overall, the evaluation concluded that the Preceptorship Framework has successfully supported safe, effective practice and workforce development. Future priorities include strengthening governance and reporting arrangements, enhancing digital engagement and stakeholder networks, promoting regional preceptorship champions, and continuing to share and embed best practice across all sectors.

Raising the Standards

The Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery (NIPEC) works to raise standards across nursing and midwifery by developing professional guidance, educational frameworks, and evidence-based resources that support safe, effective, and person-centred care.

NIPEC collaborates with the Department of Health, healthcare organisations, education providers, and practitioners to promote excellence in practice, support the implementation of Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) standards, and enhance learning and workforce development opportunities. Through initiatives such as career development frameworks, practice standards, quality improvement programmes, and professional leadership resources, NIPEC helps ensure that nurses and midwives are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to deliver high-quality care and continually improve outcomes for patients and service users.

The **NIPEC Quality Excellence Framework**, launched in 2025, contributes significantly to raising standards across health and social care by providing a structured approach to assuring, measuring and continuously improving the quality of nursing and midwifery care and practice. It promotes a culture of excellence by supporting organisations to develop strong leadership, build staff capability, and use quality improvement methods to achieve better outcomes for patients and service users. The framework encourages person-centred care, shared learning, accountability and evidence-based practice, while aligning with the principles of clinical governance and the Quintuple Aim. By enabling organisations to assess their performance, identify areas for improvement and demonstrate the impact of their work, the framework supports the delivery of safer, more effective and consistently high-quality care service. In addition, the framework supports the development of a positive culture where compassion, respect, dignity and effective communication are fundamental to practice.

By building staff capability and fostering continuous improvement, it helps teams deliver care that is responsive, safe and aligned with what matters most to patients and service users. The framework also promotes shared governance and quality management processes that enable organisations to gather feedback, learn from experiences and use this information to improve care delivery. As a result, person-centred care becomes embedded within everyday practice rather than being viewed as a separate initiative.

The NIPEC Quality Excellence Framework (QEF) also supports the delivery of the Quintuple Aim by providing a structured approach to improving quality across health and social care. The framework promotes better population health outcomes through evidence-based practice, quality improvement, and person-centred care. It enhances the experience of service users by encouraging compassionate, safe, and effective care that is responsive to individual needs. The QEF also recognises the importance of staff wellbeing and engagement, supporting a positive workplace culture where healthcare professionals are empowered to lead and participate in quality improvement activities.

Through its focus on reducing variation, improving efficiency, and embedding continuous improvement, the framework contributes to the effective use of resources and greater value within the health and social care system. By integrating these priorities, the NIPEC Quality Excellence Framework helps organisations and practitioners work towards the Quintuple Aim of improved population health, enhanced patient experience, better staff experience, improved health equity, and sustainable use of resources.

Looking Forward

This report outlines the activities undertaken by NIPEC during 2025/26 to support the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of care delivered by nurses and midwives across Northern Ireland. NIPEC will continue to play a pivotal role in driving transformation and supporting the restoration and development of Health and Social Care services. Through its ongoing work, NIPEC remains committed to empowering and inspiring nurses and midwives to achieve and sustain excellence in professional practice.

NIPEC will maintain a strategic and adaptable approach, working closely with the Chief Nursing Officer (Department of Health) and key stakeholders to identify, shape, and respond to emerging priorities. In addition, NIPEC will continue to pursue opportunities for collaboration with partners across the system, supporting the wider transformation agenda for Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.

We trust this report has provided a valuable overview of NIPEC's work and the contribution it continues to make in enhancing the quality, effectiveness, and impact of its services.

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