Cutting agency spend by 100% across key areas:
a data-driven strategy saving NHS Scotland millions

Summary

In 2023, NHS Scotland faced a critical challenge with nursing agency costs nearing £150 million. To tackle this, a Scotland-wide initiative was launched, involving all health boards and led by the Scottish government, with strong support from CEOs, executive directors of nursing, and HR. NHS Forth Valley, NHS Glasgow, and NHS Grampian played key roles in implementing a staged approach, utilising RLDatix systems to drive down agency use. This initiative has already achieved significant reductions in agency reliance and is set to expand to AHPs and medical staff across the country.

The challenge

With rising agency costs and increasing reliance on temporary staffing, NHS Scotland's financial and operational sustainability was under threat. The challenge was particularly pronounced in nursing, where agency spend was spiraling. "We needed to take urgent action," says Michael Brown, Head of HR Resourcing at NHS Forth Valley ."Our goal was to reduce agency dependency without compromising patient safety or staff well-being."

Three primary challenges emerged:

Skyrocketing agency costs: Agency spending was depleting resources, reaching unsustainable levels across the country. Boards were struggling to manage costs while ensuring safe staffing levels.

Reliance on off-framework agencies: Many health boards were reliant on off-framework agencies, which inflated costs and limited oversight of workforce planning.

Fragmented approach across health boards: Health boards were tackling the problem independently, lacking a coordinated national approach to reduce agency use.

The solution

The collaborative approach involved several key steps, leveraging RLDatix data to drive accountability and guide decision-making:

Data-driven accountability

RLDatix systems provided a clear view of staffing needs and agency use, holding boards accountable to defined workforce blueprints. **"Data was key,"** Michael says. **"It allowed us to make informed decisions and set realistic targets for reducing agency spend."**

A phased, national approach

The program was rolled out in phases:

- **Phase 1:** Eliminate reliance on off-framework agencies.

- **Phase 2:** Stop the use of Health Care Support Worker (HCSW) agencies.

- **Phase 3:** Escalate controls to reduce registered nursing agency use.

- **Phase 4:** Use workforce data and RLDatix SafeCare to ensure compliance with the Safer Staffing Act.

Executive-led collaboration

Support from CEOs and executive directors ensured the momentum of the program across all health boards. By working together, boards could adopt best practices and streamline staff bank usage.
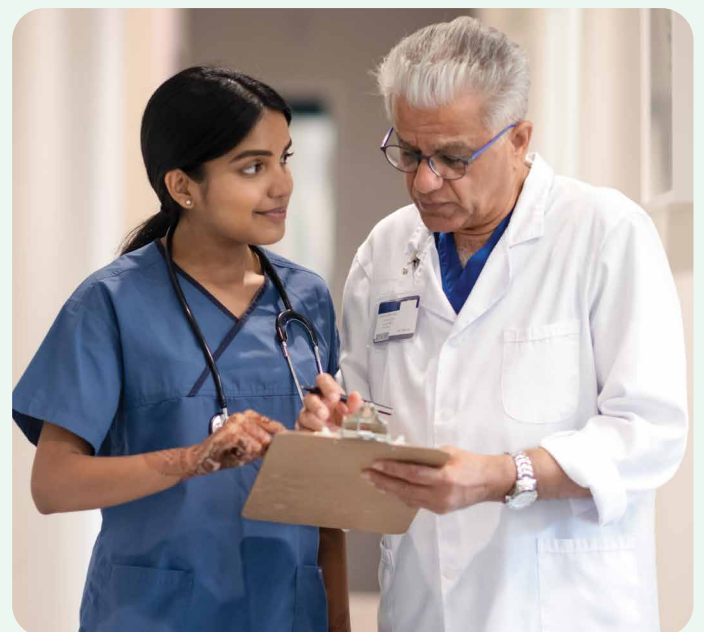
Our achievements

This collaborative effort has led to impressive results:

100% reduction in off-framework agency use: Most health boards have completely eliminated off-framework agencies.

100% Reduction in HCSW agency use: Every board has successfully phased out HCSW agencies.

> **"We've managed to achieve this without compromising patient safety," says Michael. "That's something we're incredibly proud of."**

Top tips

Use data to drive change

RLDatix provided crucial insights, enabling boards to make informed staffing decisions and reduce agency spend effectively.

Collaborate for success

A national, coordinated effort brought consistency and best practices, proving that working together yields better results than independent efforts.

Phased implementation works

A staged approach allowed boards to prepare and adjust, ensuring sustainable change. "By tackling the problem in phases, we avoided disruption and saw meaningful, lasting results," Michael explained.