Triple Impact
How developing nursing will improve health, promote gender equality and support economic growth.

Key Points and Recommendations
Preface

In September 2015 the nations of the world signed up to the ambitious goal of ensuring that everyone in the world should have access to health care – universal health coverage – and that nobody should be left behind.

This report makes the very simple point that universal health coverage cannot possibly be achieved without strengthening nursing globally. This is partly about increasing the number of nurses, but also crucially about making sure their contribution is properly understood and enabling them to work to their full potential.

The report goes on to argue that strengthening nursing will have the triple impact of improving health, promoting gender equality and supporting economic growth.

Much of what is said here will be familiar to nursing leaders, but they alone cannot bring about the changes that are needed. Politicians, non-nursing health leaders and others must work with them to create radical changes in how nurses are perceived and in what they are permitted and enabled to do.

We urge the UK government to work with the Commonwealth, Europe, the World Health Organization and others to take a leading role in raising awareness of the opportunities and potential of nursing, creating political commitment, and establishing a process for supporting the development of nursing globally.

Change will take years but a start can be made. The UK government – with its proud record of international cooperation, development and support for gender equality – has the opportunity to set the direction and lead.

Nursing and midwifery

This report does not cover the separate profession of midwifery except in as much as many nurses worldwide are also midwives. We recognise, however, the central importance of midwifery to achieving universal health coverage and the need for it too to be strengthened. The full potential of midwifery needs to be understood more widely and midwives also need to be able to work to the full extent of their knowledge and skills.

Acknowledgements

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Lord Nigel Crisp
(Chair of the APPG Review Board)

Maria Caulfield MP
Baroness Caroline Cox

Dan Poulter MP
Lord Bernie Ribeiro

Baroness Mary Watkins of Tavistock
Lord Phil Willis of Knaresborough
Key points

Triple impact

Nurses are by far the largest part of the professional health workforce and achieving universal health coverage globally will depend on them being able to use their knowledge and skills to the full. Yet they are too often undervalued and their contribution underestimated.

There is enormous innovation and creativity in nursing – with, for example, nurse-owned clinics in Africa, village ‘wise women’ in Central Asia and nurse specialists in the UK – and the potential for much more. These sorts of development are needed if countries throughout the world are to ensure that all their citizens have access to health care.

Increasing the number of nurses, and developing nursing so that nurses can achieve their potential, will also have the wider triple impact of improving health, promoting gender equality and supporting economic growth.

Figure 1 The triple impact of nursing: better health, greater gender equality and stronger economies

The unique contribution of nurses

Nurses undertake different roles in different circumstances, but they all share in the combination of knowledge, practical skills and values that makes them particularly well placed to meet the needs of the future as well as those of today. While other professions share some or all of these features, the nursing contribution is unique because of its scale and the range of roles nurses play.

Nurses have many roles: they can provide and manage personal care and treatment, work with families and communities, and play a central part in public health and controlling disease and infection. Whatever their particular role, they can be guided throughout by their professional education and knowledge and their person-centred and humanitarian values.

Nurses are often the first and sometimes the only health professional that people see and the quality of their initial assessment, care and treatment is vital. They are also part of their local community – sharing its culture, strengths and vulnerabilities – and can shape and deliver effective interventions to meet the needs of patients, families and communities.
Nurses around the world, however, have shared concerns about staffing problems, poor facilities and inadequate education, training and support. This can result in poor quality care. Moreover, nurses report that they are frequently not permitted to practise to the full extent of their competence; are unable to share their learning; and have too few opportunities to develop leadership, occupy leadership roles and influence wider policy.

Different areas of the world have different needs. Africa, for example, where nurses provide care to a very wide range of people, often with little support or resources, needs hundreds of thousands more nurses with good generalist skills – effectively specialists in general nursing – as well as tens of thousands of speciality-based nurses. The specific needs vary from place to place but the combination of knowledge, skills and values that nurses offer is needed everywhere, and needs to be developed to its full.

**Figure 2 The unique contribution of nurses**

The UK contribution

The UK can play a leading role in developing nursing globally by working with its partners in the Commonwealth, Europe and elsewhere as well as with international agencies including the World Health Organization and the World Bank. It has enormous influence globally through the work of the Department for International Development; the NHS; and the UK’s universities, non-governmental organisations, and health and life sciences industries – as well as through the great tradition of nursing, education and research fostered by the NHS, universities, nursing organisations and national agencies.

The vote to leave the European Union has, however, created a significant risk that the UK will lose many of the European nationals employed in its health and care system and will be unable to recruit more. The APPG believes that the UK needs both to find methods for securing the continuing employment of EU citizens in the health and care system, and to reassess and increase levels of nurse education to meet its own needs. It needs also to maintain its commitment not to recruit health workers from countries with major shortages.
Recommendations

This report argues that there is an urgent need globally to raise the profile of nursing and enable nurses to work to their full potential if countries are to achieve universal health coverage. Nursing can and must take the lead on these issues but cannot achieve them without the support of politicians, policy-makers and non-nursing health leaders.

The APPG recommends that the UK government, together with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Union, the World Health Organization and other international agencies, works to:

1. **Raise the profile of nursing and make it central to health policy.** Nurses have an enormous part to play in achieving universal health coverage, and nursing should be central to global policy and plans.
   
a. Convene a high-level global summit on nursing, aimed particularly at political and health leaders outside nursing, to raise awareness of the opportunities and potential of nursing, create political commitment, and establish a process for supporting development.

   This should be part of a longer-term initiative that will embrace all the following recommendations.

2. **Support plans to increase the number of nurses being educated and employed globally.** The World Health Organization global strategy on human resources for health, *Workforce 2030*, adopted by member states in 2016, proposes a framework for making the most effective use of health workers and developing country-specific investment plans to address workforce shortages.
   
a. Work with low and middle-income countries to develop and support their workforce plans through funding and partnership schemes.

   b. Reaffirm support for the WHO *Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel*, publish a report on UK progress in implementation since 2010, and provide support for education and employment of health workers in their own countries.

   c. Assess the impact of leaving the European Union on staffing in the UK health and care system, and take mitigating action including finding methods for securing the continuing employment of EU citizens in the health and care system and reviewing and increasing the number of nurses being educated in the UK to meet its needs.

3. **Develop nurse leaders and nurse leadership.** Experienced nurse leaders are needed in the right places to help nursing deliver its potential and ensure that the distinctive nursing perspective is included in policy-making and decision-making.
   
a. Establish a large-scale new programme globally to develop nurse leaders that will enable them to engage more effectively in policy-making and decision-making. The International Council of Nurses has plans for developing such a programme that could provide a template.

   b. Ensure all countries have appropriate nurse leadership posts throughout all their structures and organisations.
4. **Enable nurses to work to their full potential.** Nurses are too often not permitted or enabled to fulfil their true potential. Cultural, regulatory and legislative enablers and barriers need to be identified and removed and good practice shared and acted on.

   a. Develop new ways of sharing good practice – drawing on existing work by nursing organisations, the Commonwealth Health Hub and others – to create more coordinated and effective ways of identifying and sharing good practice globally, and ensure they are brought to the attention of policy-makers and other health leaders.

5. **Collect and disseminate evidence of the impact of nursing on access, quality and costs, and ensure it is incorporated in policy and acted upon.** There are many small-scale studies of the impact of nursing. These need to be brought together with new evaluation and research to demonstrate impact at scale.

   a. Commission research to bring together existing evidence and initiate new studies on how and where nursing improves access, quality and costs and what contribution nursing can make to universal health coverage.

   b. Ensure that existing and future research findings are widely disseminated and understood in order to influence both practice and policy.

6. **Develop nursing to have a triple impact on health, gender equality and economies.** Developing and investing in nurses – the vast majority of whom are women – will help empower them economically and as community leaders. Improving health and empowering women will in turn strengthen local economies.

   a. Adapt development policy to bring together programmes and funding to address simultaneously the three Sustainable Development Goals focusing on health, gender equality, and inclusive and sustainable economic growth (numbers 3, 5 and 8) and work with partners throughout the world to develop nursing strategies that work towards achieving all three goals.

7. **Promote partnership and mutual learning between the UK and other countries.** There are many partnerships between British organisations and their counterparts abroad that bring mutual benefit and shared learning.

   a. Expand the DFID Health Partnership Scheme and redesign it so as to engage as many nurses as possible and promote mutual learning and support between UK nurses, their organisations and their counterparts abroad; and support UK agencies including Health Education England, Wales for Africa, and the Scottish government’s international development programme to promote the engagement of NHS and other health and care organisations in global partnerships that bring mutual benefits.
Acknowledgements

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Copies of the full report can be obtained from: http://www.appg.globalhealth.org.uk/