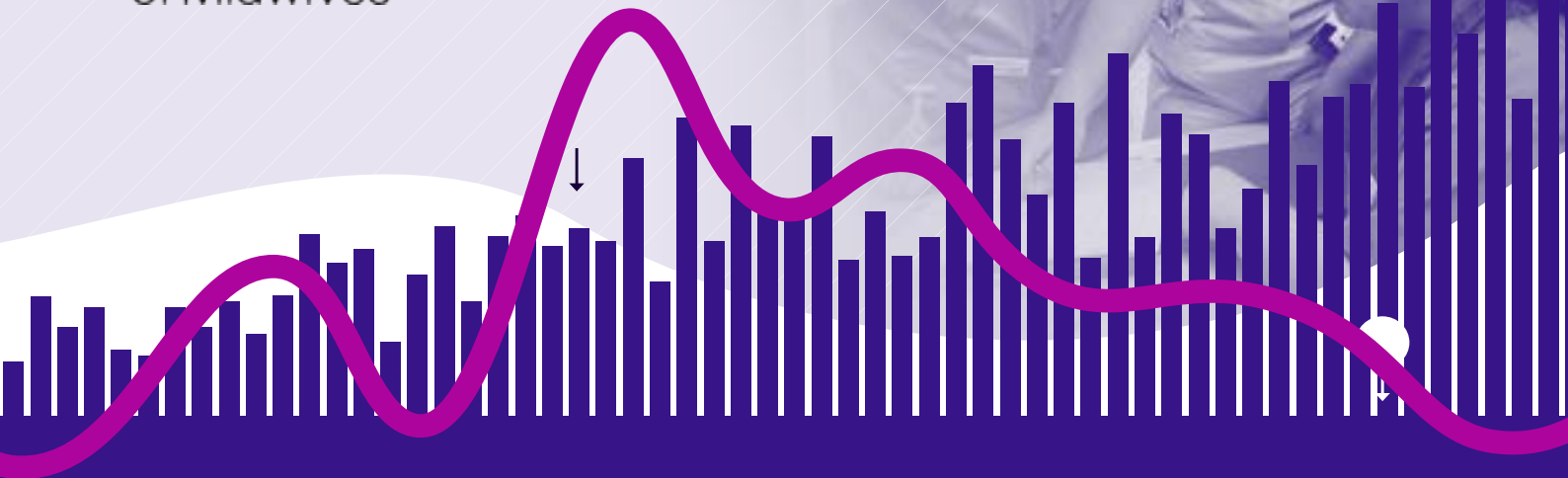


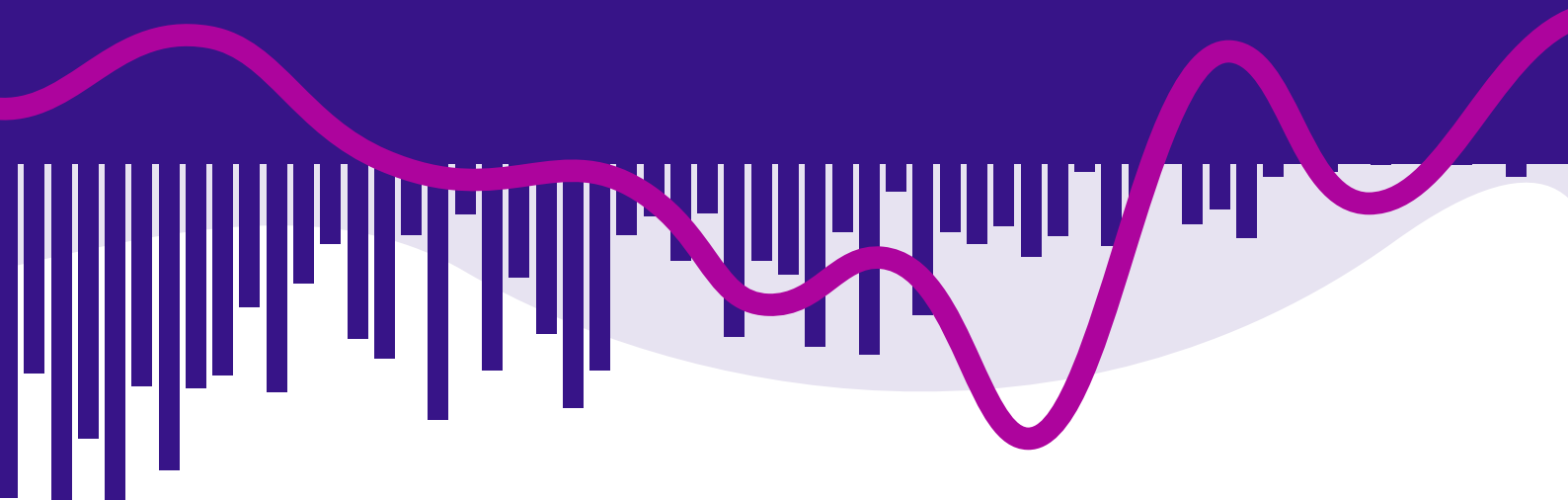


Royal College
of Midwives



getting the midwifery workforce right

1. Overview and recommendations



Why getting the midwifery workforce right matters

For many years maternity has been described as the NHS's front door for many women; it is very often the first and most impactful interaction they have with health services. In recent years, concerns about the quality, accessibility and acceptability of maternity care have escalated to concerns about the very safety of services. At the root of all of the recent independent reviews of maternity care has been the maternity workforce. Are there enough staff to deliver safe care? Are they well enough educated and developed? Are they well led and managed? Are they working in a supportive culture? Are they properly held to account?

Fundamentally we can draw a straight line between the priority given to funding maternity services, the size and shape of the workforce and safety of women and babies. It is not that we do not know what works, this series details evidence based good practice and professional judgement and consensus. It should now be used to guide both strategic decision-making making and local service delivery.

To get the midwifery workforce right, the pillars of the profession — clinical practice, education, research, leadership and management, and the different environments where midwives work — need

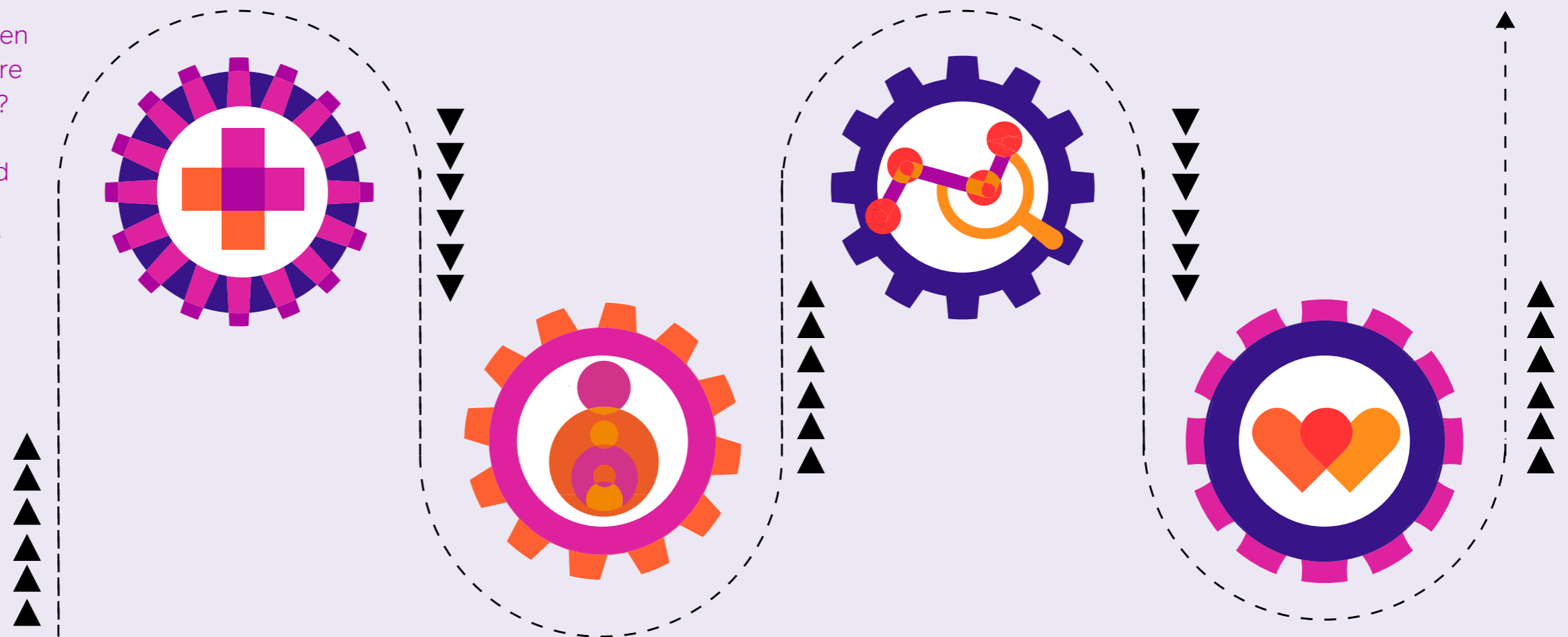
to be considered. Furthermore, the geography and demographics of the country and regional context must be considered to ensure that workforce has the capacity and competency to provide the right care with the right skills at the right time and place. Collaboration and mutual respect across roles and specialisms are essential to sustaining the profession.

Establishing and maintaining an effective midwifery workforce requires a holistic approach that encompasses strategic workforce planning, investment in education and training, recruitment and retention strategies and promoting research

and innovation. Furthermore, there should be a commitment to diversity and inclusion and fostering collaboration with interprofessional teams.

Working together, healthcare providers, education institutes and policy makers can ensure a robust and sustainable workforce that can provide competent and safe care while adapting to evolving maternity care needs and challenges.

The RCM will work proactively to support staff, leaders and policy makers in their commitment to getting the midwifery workforce right.



The role of the midwife

A midwife is a person who has successfully completed a midwifery education programme that is based on the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice (ICM 2024)¹ and the framework of the ICM Global Standards for Midwifery Education (ICM 2021)² and is recognised in the country where it is located, who has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and/or legally licensed to practice midwifery and use the title 'midwife', and who demonstrates competency in the practice of midwifery.

Midwifery is defined as "skilled, knowledgeable, respectful and compassionate care for all women, birthing people, newborn infants and their families, working across the birth continuum. Core characteristics include optimising biological, psychological, social and cultural processes of reproduction and early life; timely prevention and management of complications; consultation and referral to other services; respect for women's individual circumstances and views; and working in partnership with women to strengthen women's own capabilities to care for themselves and their families" (Renfrew et al 2014, The Lancet Series on Midwifery)³.

For over 120 years, the title 'midwife' has been protected in law⁴. During that time, while the role and the way in which care is provided may have evolved, the basic premise of being 'with woman' has not changed. Informing, advising and supporting each pregnant woman on an individual basis, as well as advocating on her behalf and being her voice are fundamental to good midwifery practice.

Midwives are a vital component of the maternity workforce and are fully accountable and autonomous in their care and support of women, birthing people, newborn infants and families. In the UK, the Nursing and Midwifery Council's (NMC's) Standards of Proficiency for Midwives (NMC 2019)⁵ specify the

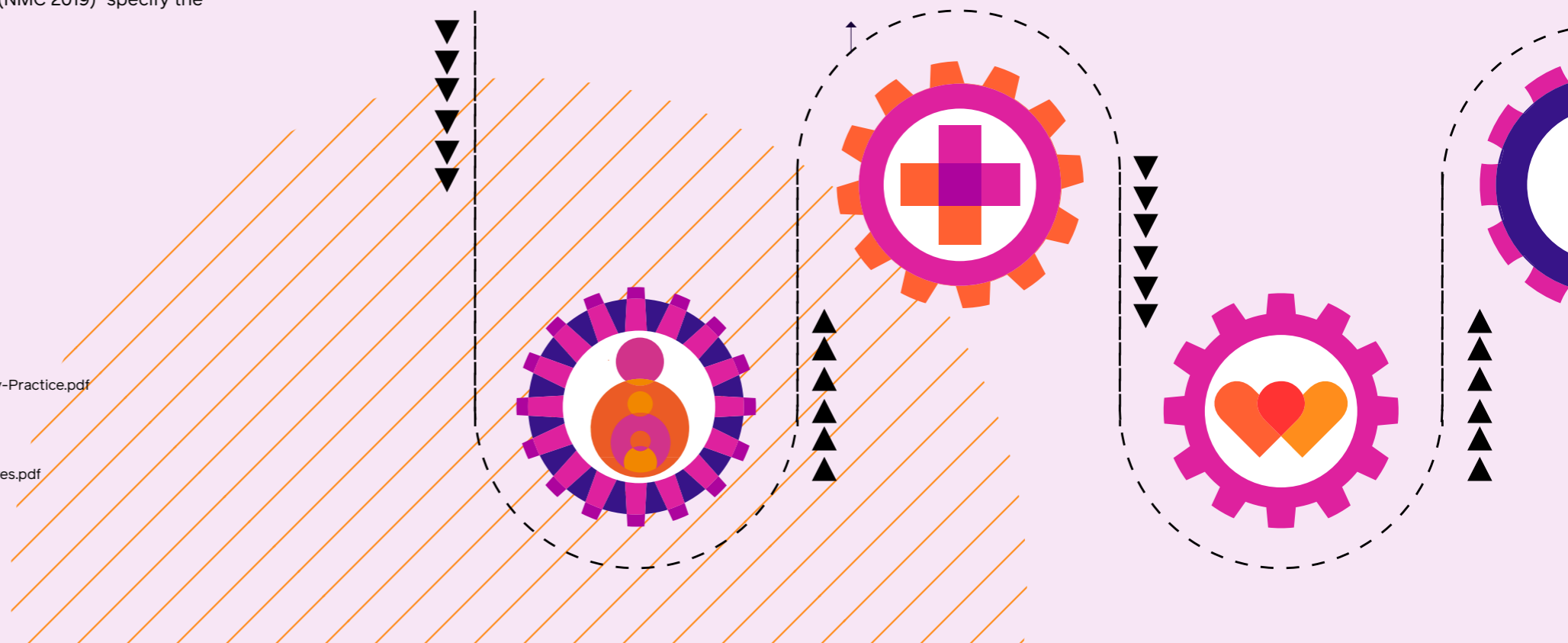
knowledge, understanding and skills that midwives must demonstrate for qualified practice. These are based around six domains:

- being an accountable, autonomous, professional midwife;
- safe and effective midwifery care;
- universal care for all women and newborn infants;
- additional care for women and newborn infants with complications;
- promoting excellence: the midwife as colleague, scholar and leader; and
- the midwife as skilled practitioner.

This is reflected in the way and environments in which midwives work. Clinical midwives may provide care in NHS hospitals, midwife-led units or clinics as well as in the local community and independent practice settings. Midwives can also work in universities and organisations that focus on education, research, consultancy, policy and quality assurance. Midwives should be encouraged and supported to share expertise and contribute across the pillars of practice, promoting workforce succession planning and career pathways for development.

Midwives should be supported and empowered to deliver safe, effective, respectful, kind, compassionate, person-centred midwifery care

1. www.internationalmidwives.org/wp-content/uploads/EN_ICM-Essential-Competencies-for-Midwifery-Practice.pdf
2. global-standards-for-midwifery-education_2021_en.pdf (internationalmidwives.org)
3. midwifery_exec_summ.pdf (thelancet.com)
4. Midwives Act 1902
5. <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/standards/standards-of-proficiency-for-midwives.pdf>

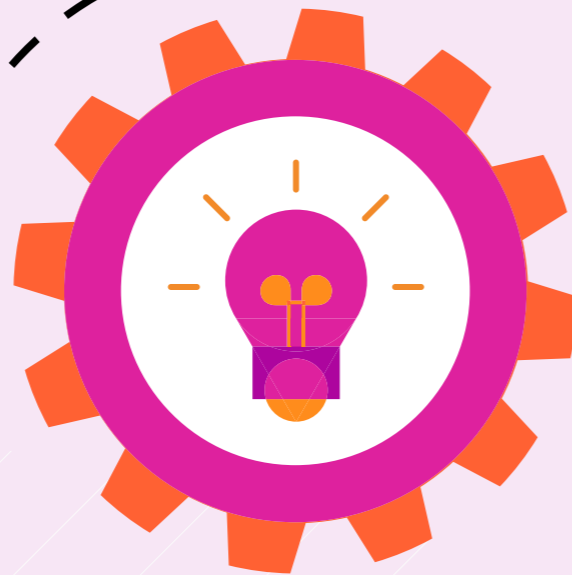


What does this series cover?

This short series will support those working within and managing maternity services to create the most appropriate workforce. Each publication can be used individually or collectively, depending on the individual needs of a service. This series reflects the differences – and similarities – in clinical settings in each of the four home nations.

Workforce planning

- The right staff in the right place at the right time – with the right skills
- Recruitment and retention
- How to define the right number of staff
- Midwifery Continuity of Carer



Skill mix

- Role development, delegation and substitution
- Advanced practice
- Role of maternity support workers/ maternity care assistants (MSWs/MCAs)
- The role of nurses and nursing associates in maternity services

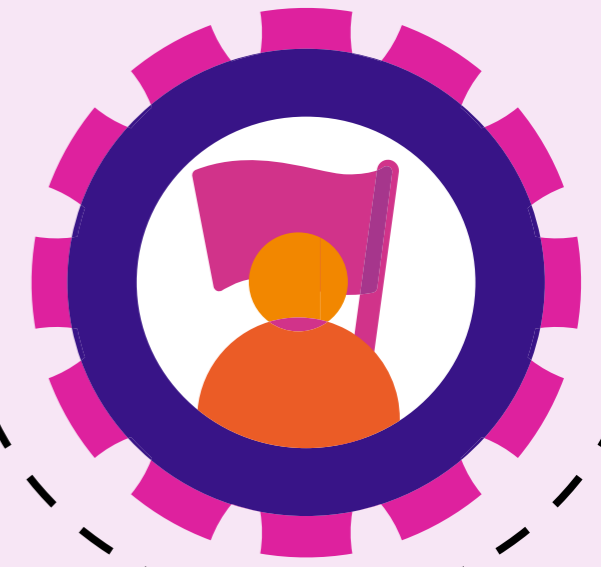


Lifelong learning and development

- Preceptorship
- Apprenticeship routes
- Supporting education and learning
- Supporting research

Strong midwifery leadership and management

- Championing midwifery leaders
- Appropriate training and support
- Consultant midwives








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