1. The Auditor General’s report on NHS workforce planning was published on 27 July 2017. This report is the first in a two-part audit on the NHS workforce. It focuses on the overall planning arrangements looking at how well placed the NHS workforce is to meet the current and future demands of the Scottish population. The scope covers NHS staff employed by NHS boards, including clinical staff working in hospitals. The second report, to be published in 2018/19, will look more closely at the community-based NHS workforce, including those employed by general practices.

2. As some health and social care resources are delegated to IAs, workforce strategies and planning within these partnerships will become increasingly important to delivering healthcare. This will be considered as part of our subsequent reports on health and social care integration, as well as being considered in our second report on the NHS workforce.

3. Key messages from the report are:

   - Between 2011/12 and 2016/17, spending on NHS staff increased by 11 per cent to £6.5 billion. Overall staff levels in the NHS are at the highest level ever, with 139,431 whole-time equivalent (WTE) staff employed as at March 2017. The recently published National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan – Part 1 acknowledges that the answer to future challenges cannot always be to grow its workforce, and that the workforce will need to work differently. In reaching current staffing levels, most NHS territorial boards overspent against their pay budget in 2016/17, with agency staff costs increasing in real terms by 107 per cent in six years, from £82.8 million in 2011/12 to £171.4 million in 2016/17. Overall, patients give positive feedback about their NHS experience and the staff they meet, although numbers of staff-related complaints are rising.

   - The Scottish Government and NHS boards have not planned their NHS workforce effectively for the long term. Responsibility for NHS workforce planning is confused, and is split between the Scottish Government, NHS boards, and three regional workforce groups. There is a risk that responsibilities will further fragment as health and social care integration authorities develop their own
workforce planning arrangements and new specialist centres for certain medical procedures are established. There are separate planning processes for recruiting doctors, nurses and other professional groups. This makes it more difficult to consider how skills across different groups can complement each other. The Scottish Government is setting up a National Workforce Planning Group to improve joint working.

- There are urgent workforce challenges facing the NHS and improving workforce planning is critical to addressing these pressures. The NHS in Scotland is undergoing major reform, in particular seeking to shift towards more community and home-based care. Dedicated funding to support NHS reform does not clearly identify associated workforce costs. Vacancies for certain consultant and nursing positions remain high and are proving difficult to fill. Upcoming retirements may increase vacancy levels in parts of the NHS where the age profile of the staff is older. This includes certain consultant specialties and locations, and the nursing workforce in general. NHS staff continue to raise concerns about their workload and there are signs that NHS services are under increasing stress.

- The Scottish Government expects demand for health and social care to rise but it has not yet adequately projected how this will impact on the skills and workforce numbers needed to meet this demand. It has not looked at long-term scenarios for future patient demand when considering recruitment decisions and future workforce costs. This is a continuing challenge for medical recruitment, where consultants can take more than ten years to train. NHS Education for Scotland (NES) is working to improve NHS workforce projections, with a new approach due in early 2018.

- The Scottish Government intended to publish a single workforce plan covering health and social care in spring 2017. It is now publishing it in three stages, with the first, covering the NHS workforce, published in June 2017. The second publication, covering the social care workforce, is due to be published in autumn 2017; and the third, covering primary care, due to be published by the end of 2017. The recently published National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan - Part 1 is a broad framework to consider future workforce planning challenges and not a detailed plan to address immediate and future issues.