Overview
The NFWI Public Affairs Department has compiled these notes to facilitate members’ discussions on the resolution that will be voted on at the 2012 AGM.

The notes outline the key issues addressed in the resolution, the current status and policy environment on the issues raised, and the main groups already working on the subject.

Please use the notes to inform your further research.

2012 Resolution Final Shortlist

Employment of More Midwives
There are chronic shortages of midwives. The NFWI calls on the Government to increase investment in the training, employment and retention of midwives in England and Wales to ensure services are adequately resourced and are able to deliver a high standard of care

(Horwich WI, Lancashire Federation)

These briefing notes are also available online at www.theWI.org.uk
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The problem

There is a shortage of midwives employed by NHS Trusts, resulting in fragmented, rushed care and extra demands on maternity services. It is hoped that by adding the voice of the WI, members can highlight an issue which touches the lives of many women and their families; building public interest and awareness, as well as the allocation of extra funding to employ more NHS midwives and Government commitment to maintain current midwifery training levels.

Maternal health services in England and Wales are facing increasing pressure with staff shortages, a continuing baby boom and increasing numbers of complications in pregnancies testing maternity services’ ability to deliver a high standard of care to women and their children.

Staff shortages

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) estimates that there is a shortfall of 4,700 midwives in England alone\(^1\). Vacancy rates in some London NHS Trusts are as high as 18\(^\%\)\(^2\).

In Wales a sudden drop in the number of midwives in 2009-10 means 10\% more midwives are needed to keep pace with demand\(^3\).

Research from the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) published in 2010 found that 42\% of first-time mothers felt there were only ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ enough midwives available to help them in hospital after the birth of their baby as opposed to ‘always’ or ‘mostly’ enough\(^4\). NCT is working to raise awareness of the impact that staff shortages have on delivery of maternity services.

Analysis of the characteristics of the midwifery workforce show that the majority of midwives are female, and most are working part time. Across the UK, the midwifery workforce is ageing; 40-45\% will reach retirement in the next ten years and a quarter of midwives are over 50 years of age\(^5\).

Rising birth rate

The RCM’s State of Maternity Services Report 2011 describes England and Wales as ‘overwhelmed’ by the rising numbers of births. Despite increases in midwife numbers in England, the workforce increase isn’t keeping up with the rising number of births. The UK is experiencing a baby boom with birth rates increasing by 22\% in England between 2001 and 2010 and by 19\% in Wales between 2002 and 2010. Official projections from the Office for National Statistics show further increases in population levels as a result of births are expected over the next ten years\(^6\).

Complications in birth

The statistics on birth rate and staff shortages only give part of the picture. Analysis shows a number of other issues are placing extra demand on maternity services. A

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\(^1\) Royal College of Midwives (2011) State of Maternity Services Report, London
\(^3\) Royal College of Midwives (2011) State of Maternity Services Report, London
rise in the number of older women giving birth, growth in the number of overweight women giving birth and a higher number of multiple births are all factors that mean birth is more complex; leading to higher risk cases that place greater demands on the workforce with the additional care and support that is required.  

**Are more midwives the answer? Can staff be deployed more effectively?**

Before entering Government David Cameron pledged to increase the number of midwives by 3,000. While the Government has not met this pledge, it has since stated that a record number of midwives are in place with “more midwives working in the NHS than ever before”. The Department of Health states it will ensure “we have an appropriately resourced and skilled workforce based on the most up-to-date evidence”. Based on the plans of Strategic Health Authorities in England (SHAs) the Government promised that the record levels of training places available in 2010 (2,493 places were provided) would be maintained for 2011/12. It is important that numbers going into training are maintained over the longer-term to ensure adequate supply for workforce demand emerges.

While it is important that figures on midwife numbers are not viewed in isolation from the increasing birth rate and the heightened workload of midwives, changing demographics come at a time of financial constraint in which the NHS as a whole is expected to contribute more than £15bn of efficiency savings by the end of 2013/14. A report published by the health think tank, The King’s Fund suggests that improving productivity through more ‘effective deployment’ of existing staff may be a more realistic goal in the current financial climate than increasing staffing levels. The King’s Fund recommends other healthcare workers could be used to free-up the time of midwives and doctors through ‘task-shifting’ and calls for further exploration into the role of maternity support workers.

**Discussion points and questions for consideration**

- This is an important current issue, which impacts on many women and their families.
- The Government has already increased the number of midwives in training yet not in sufficient numbers to meet estimated shortfalls.
- More midwives and training places may be in place, yet figures cannot be viewed in isolation from the increasing birth rate and the heightened workload of midwives.
- In a constrained spending environment, is re-organisation of the workforce the answer? Should consideration be given to the development of midwife assistant and support roles with a review of accountability mechanisms?

**Existing/ related campaigns on the issue**

- The Royal College of Midwives is running a Protect Maternity Services campaign and petitioning the Government for 5,000 more midwives.
- NCT has called for more midwives, highlighting the impact that shortages are having on maternity services. NCT has also called for a shift to ‘caseload midwifery’ where every full-time midwife cares for 28-30 women throughout pregnancy and into the early weeks following birth.

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8 Simon Burn, Health Minister, Conservative party press release, 21 February 2012
9 Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, Department of Health press release, 8 March 2011
10 The King’s Fund (2011) Staffing in Maternity Units – Getting the right people in the right place at the right time, London
• The **White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood** was launched in the UK by Sarah Brown.

**Existing resolutions on the issue**

The NFWI has a number of resolutions on maternal and child health, covering issues such as information, choice and access to pain relief.

One resolution specifically mentions midwives:

**Maternal and Child Health**

*That this meeting, while warmly supporting the action of the Minister of Health with regard to research, begs Women’s Institute members to urge Local Authorities where necessary to carry out the Minister’s recommendations for the provision of specialized obstetric advice and an improved midwifery service; also to persuade expectant mothers to make full use of existing pre-natal clinics and treatment. Furthermore, this meeting is of the opinion that the opportunity of anaesthesia should be within reach of all expectant mothers.* (Berkshire Federation, May 1935)

**Groups to contact for further information**

**Department for Health**


**Royal College of Midwives**

[http://www.rcm.org.uk](http://www.rcm.org.uk)  T: 020 7312 3535

The RCM is the ‘voice of midwifery’. It is the UK’s only trade union and professional organisation led by midwives for midwives. The majority of UK midwives are members.

**Speakers**

*The Royal College of Midwives is very happy to provide support with identifying speakers and will accommodate all requests where possible but the College has limited capacity to field requests. Please contact the Public Affairs Department at the NFWI who will provide support with co-ordinating speaker requests.***

**NCT**

[www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk)

NCT is the UK’s largest charity for parents. It provides information to support parents to decide what’s best for their family and introduces them to local networks to gain practical and emotional support.

**Speakers and briefings**

*NCT has 318 volunteer-run branches across the country. The Corporate Communications team will make a briefing for WI members available online and branches can be approached direct with any speaker requests. Please see [www.nct.org.uk/branches](http://www.nct.org.uk/branches) for information on your nearest branch. In the event the branch cannot facilitate your request please email campaigns@nct.org.uk to discuss other options with NCT’s UK Office.*