

January 2025

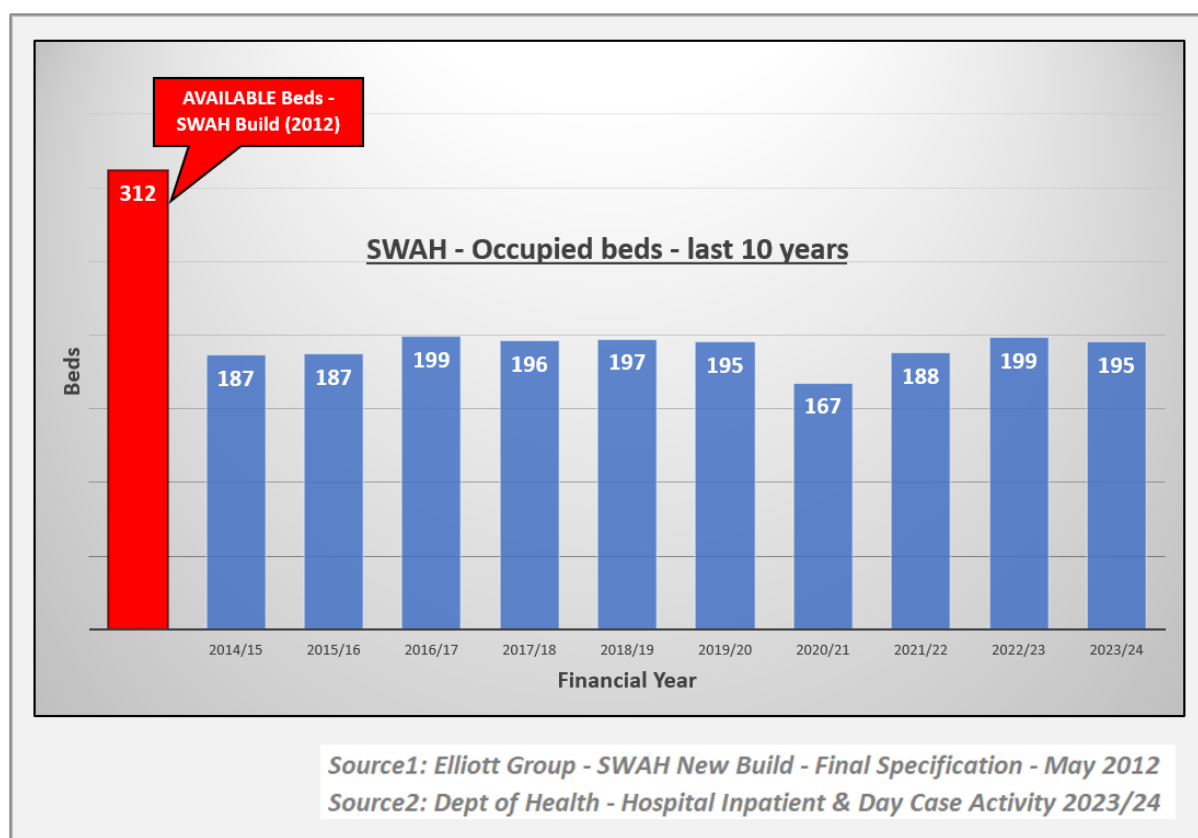
FAILURE TO USE AVAILABLE BED CAPACITY IN SWAH

There is a crisis in Urgent & Emergency Care in Northern Ireland.
One of the main causes of this crisis is the lack of bed capacity in our hospitals.
The Dept of Health would have us believe that all available capacity is being used.

" .. deploying all available levers to reduce pressures where possible. These include maximising available hospital bed capacity and taking a system-wide approach to dealing with the challenges."

(Dept of Health 'Statement on Winter Pressures' - 30th December 2024)

SOAS disagrees with the Dept of Health on this.
There are more than 100 beds in SWAH that are not being used.
We have taken a detailed look at the most recent figures from the Dept of Health on hospital activity and available beds.¹



The builders of SWAH (Elliott Group) confirm the number of available beds in SWAH):²
*"The hospital consisted of 312 single bed ensuite bedrooms which overlooked Lough Wolfe."
 "Each bedroom consisted of medical grade bedhead trunking which incorporated 3 gases, power data and lighting"*

¹ Dept of Health – Hospital Statistics on Inpatient and Day Case Activity 2023/24 Link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/hospital-statistics-inpatient-and-day-case-activity-202324>

² FCC Elliott Construction – SWAH New Build – Project Specification on Completion May 2012 Link: <https://www.elliottgroup.com/uk/projects/new-south-west-acute-hospital/>

312 available single bed ensuite rooms.

However, we can see that the number of occupied beds in SWAH has never gone above 200 in the last 10 years.

Why has the Dept of Health never commissioned these beds?

The original Business Case for SWAH shows that it was planned to have full bed occupancy of 312 beds in place by 2018.

It is a failure by the Dept of Health and by the Western Trust that has resulted in no use being made of more than 100 available extra beds.

This management failure to commission available capacity in SWAH is reinforced by the fact that 2 of the 5 operating theatres in SWAH have also never been used.

SWAH is an astonishing state-of-the-art new build that has is being seriously under-utilised at present.

Why is this?

The Dept of Health and the Western Trust must explain their failure to use this state-of-the-art hospital to its fullest capacity.

NUFFIELD TRUST: WHY CAPACITY IS SO IMPORTANT

We would suggest that the Dept of Health and Western Trust should refer to Nuffield Trust's comments relating to Capacity in their analysis of emergency service reconfigurations which was published as recently as October 2022:³

*"It is time to hit the pause button on the reconfiguration agenda and consider reversing it in some instances. The Danish study published in this issue of BMJ Quality and Safety is the second national reconfiguration of emergency services that has failed to demonstrate improvements in patient outcomes. We argue that policymakers should instead focus on the main challenge we currently face in acute and emergency care: **capacity**."*

"No further capacity should be removed from overstretched systems in the vain hope of producing efficiencies and safety improvements that never actually arrive."

It is interesting to note that Nuffield Trust was one of the organisations used as the evidence base for the Review of General Surgery by Dept of Health in June 2022.

How can we have found ourselves in the position where more than 100 beds in SWAH are not being used?

SWAH must be allowed to fulfil its potential as both a local acute hospital and a key contributor to maximising bed capacity as part of a NI-wide approach.

³ Reconfiguring emergency and acute services: time to pause and reflect (2022: Nuffield Trust - Louella Vaughan, UCC Cork - John Browne) Link: <https://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/qhc/early/2022/11/03/bmjqs-2022-015141.full.pdf>