



Royal College  
of Nursing

2020 | International Year  
of the Nurse and Midwife

# The UK Nursing Labour Market Review 2019

CORPORATE



The RCN Labour Market Review 2019 (LMR) looks at trends and trends for nursing staff working in the health sector across the UK, drawing out differences and similarities across the four UK countries.

The review is based on the best available data up until the end of 2019 and therefore does not reflect the significant changes unfolding at the time of publication due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The next Labour Market Review for 2020 will seek to provide data and analysis of the profound impact on nursing staff faced as a consequence of the pandemic.

The 2019 LMR covers:

The RCN's annual Labour Market Review (LMR) examines the shape, size and state of the nursing labour market, analysing trends in the employment and training of nursing staff across the UK economy.

It looks at recent trends in the nursing labour market across the UK and across different providers of health and social care. This year's LMR observes that the nursing workforce continues to face the following challenges and pressures.

- Weak growth in workforce numbers concealing a downward trend in certain nursing occupational groups, most notably learning disabilities and mental health nursing.
- An ageing nursing workforce.
- A shrinking supply chain of registered nurses.
- A high number of vacancies, largely covered by bank and agency staff.
- Subdued, below-inflation pay growth.

These challenges cannot be solved unless the UK health and social systems work together to increase the number of education places for nurses and improve retention in the nursing workforce, particularly by developing safe staffing policies and legislation to protect the workforce and patient care.

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# 1. Introduction

The RCN Labour Market Review 2019 (LMR) looks at recent data and trends for nursing staff working in the health sector across the UK, drawing out differences and similarities across the four UK countries. The review uses national datasets to estimate the size, shape and composition of the nursing workforce. The LMR covers:

- an overview of the UK labour market
- the UK nursing workforce across the whole UK economy
- the nursing workforce in NHS England, Scotland, Wales and in Health and Social Care Northern Ireland
- nursing earnings
- pre-registration education.

The LMR aims to estimate the size, shape and composition of the nursing workforce using Office of National Statistics datasets in addition to data collected by the four UK health departments. It should be noted that datasets often use different terminology, particularly around the definition of nurses and midwives and nursing support staff, and data is sometimes collected across different time frames; these differences have been identified where significant. For example, some datasets refer to registered and others to qualified nurses. Nursing support staff are referred to as nursing assistants and auxiliaries in UK official data from the Office of National Statistics, while other definitions are used by different health departments.

# 2. The UK labour market 2019

Recently, the most notable aspect of the UK economy is that the unemployment rate has fallen to a record low, but tightening of the labour market has not led to wage growth (due largely to the UK's mediocre productivity levels). Over the past year, the scarcity of workers across the economy has provided workers with some bargaining power, feeding through to increased real wage growth. However, this cannot be sustained unless productivity growth speeds up from the subdued rates seen over the past decade.

The UK vote to leave the EU has been followed by continued political and economic uncertainty over the implications of this decision and its impact on the economy and labour market. Against this Brexit-led uncertainty, which has held back business investment and resulted in modest economy growth in the UK, signs of a weakened global economic environment are also looming.

### 3. The UK nursing workforce

A close analysis of the *Labour Force Survey* (LFS) (ONS, 2019) provides an estimate of the number of nurses, midwives and nursing support workers working in the UK and where they work, and the number of nursing staff born outside the UK.

Here, we also include data from the NMC register to look at recent trends in the number of nurses and midwives registered in the UK. All nurses and midwives who practise in the UK must be on the register (this does not necessarily mean they are working as a nurse or midwife).

#### 3.1. Labour Force Survey data

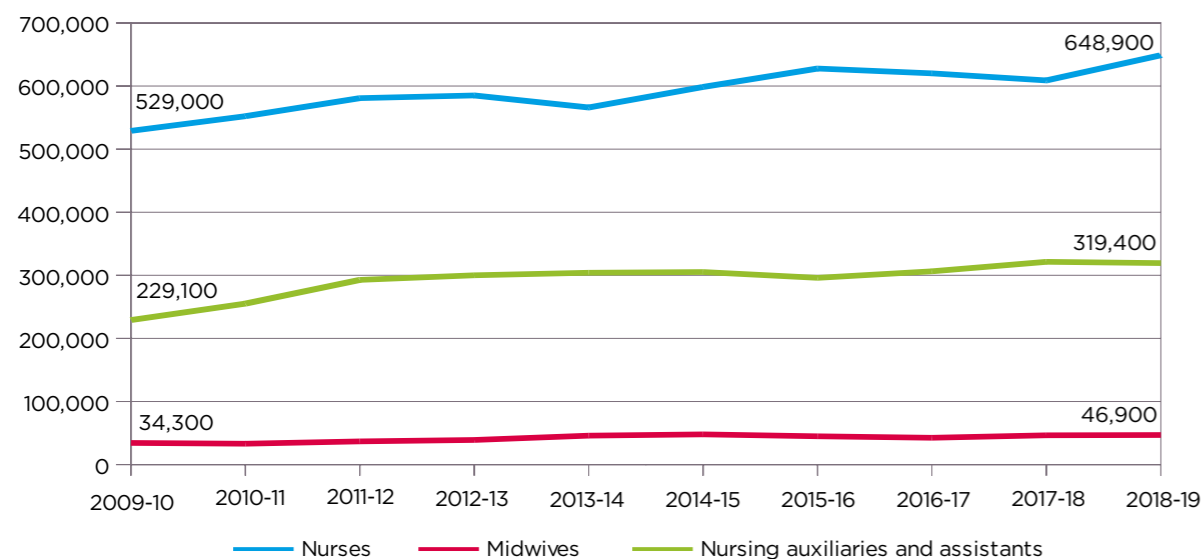
This section includes an analysis of figures from the *Labour Force Survey* (LFS) which provides official measures of employment in the UK. It gives an indication of the number of nurses, nursing assistants and auxiliaries, and midwives working across the UK economy (as defined by the Office for National Statistics). The analysis provides trends over a ten-year period, which is longer than the analysis for NMC data in section 4.

The LFS provides an estimate of the number of people working in given occupations as defined by standard occupation classification (SOC) codes – in this case nurses<sup>1</sup>, nursing auxiliaries and assistants<sup>2</sup>, and midwives<sup>3</sup>.

Figure 1 shows an estimated 648,900 people in employment in the occupational category of nurse in 2018/19. There has been an overall increase in the number of nurses in employment of 22.7% between 2009/10 and 2018/19. There are an estimated 319,400 people in employment in the category of nursing auxiliaries and assistants in the UK in 2018; this number has risen by 39.4% between 2009/10 and 2018/19. The number of midwives in employment is estimated to be around 46,900. This number has risen by 36.7% in the period between 2009/2010 and 2018/19.

The total number of people in employment in the UK rose by 10.1% from around 24.9 million to 27.4 million between 2009/10 and 2018/19. However, over this period, there has been a remarkable rise in the number of self-employed people in the UK economy. The actual number of people in self-employment rose by 25.6% representing a rise from 13% to 15% of the whole workforce. However, in the nursing workforce self-employment is very rare, accounting for around 1% of nurses and nursing assistants/auxiliaries.

**Figure 1: Nurses, midwives and nursing assistants/auxiliaries in employment (2009/10 to 2018/19)**

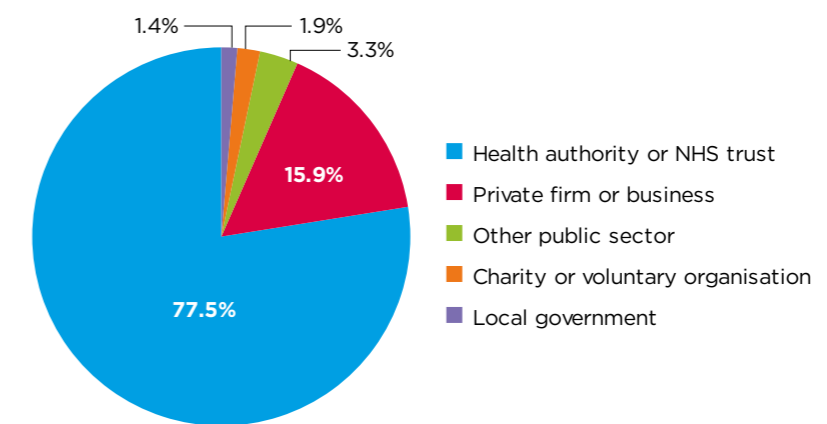


Source: Analysis of Annual Population Surveys 2009/10 to 2018/19

Figures 2 and 3 provide an analysis of LFS data for nursing staff in employment according to sector of work. The figures show that most nurses (78%) and nursing auxiliaries/assistants (61%) work for health authorities or NHS trusts/boards. A higher proportion of nursing auxiliaries/assistants (27%) than nurses and midwives (16%) work for private firms or businesses.

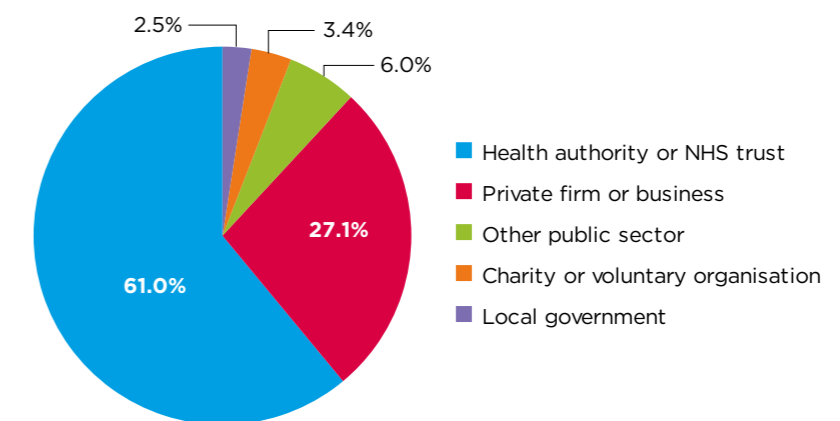
#### 3.1.2 Sector of work

**Figure 2: Nurses and midwives in employment by sector of work (2019)**



Source: Analysis of Labour Force Survey April to June 2019

**Figure 3: Nursing auxiliaries and assistants in employment by sector of work (2019)**



Source: Analysis of Labour Force Survey April to June 2019

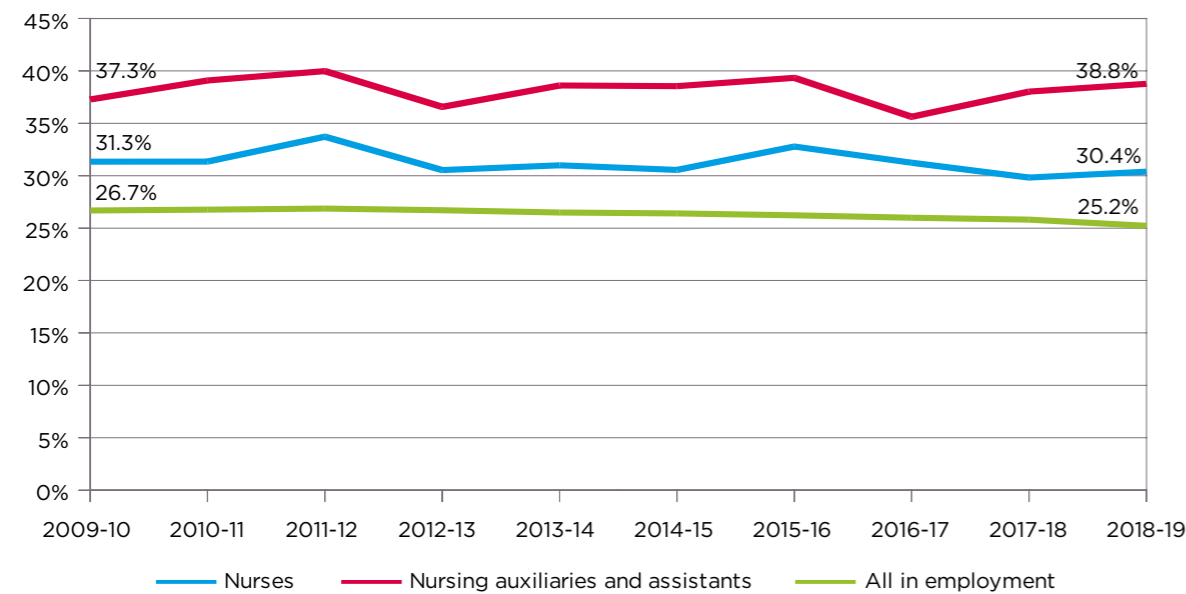
### 3.1.3 Part-time working

Figure 4 shows estimates of part-time working among the nursing workforce in employment (excluding self-employed) as compared to the whole UK working population<sup>4</sup>.

In 2009/10, almost one third (31%) of nurses reported working part-time, steadily remaining in the range of 30% to 34% over the ten-year period to 2018/19. Among nursing auxiliaries and assistants, 37% reported working part-time in 2009/10 and 39% reported doing so in 2018/19.

Figure 4 highlights that part-time working is more common in the nursing workforce than the UK workforce as a whole; around a quarter of all UK employees reported working part-time in 2018/19. This can be explained by the high proportion of women in the nursing workforce (69% of nursing assistants and auxiliaries; 89% of nurses), while just under half (47%) of all those in employment in the UK are women.

Figure 4: Proportion of nurses, nursing auxiliaries/assistants and all UK employees working part-time (2009/10 to 2018/19)

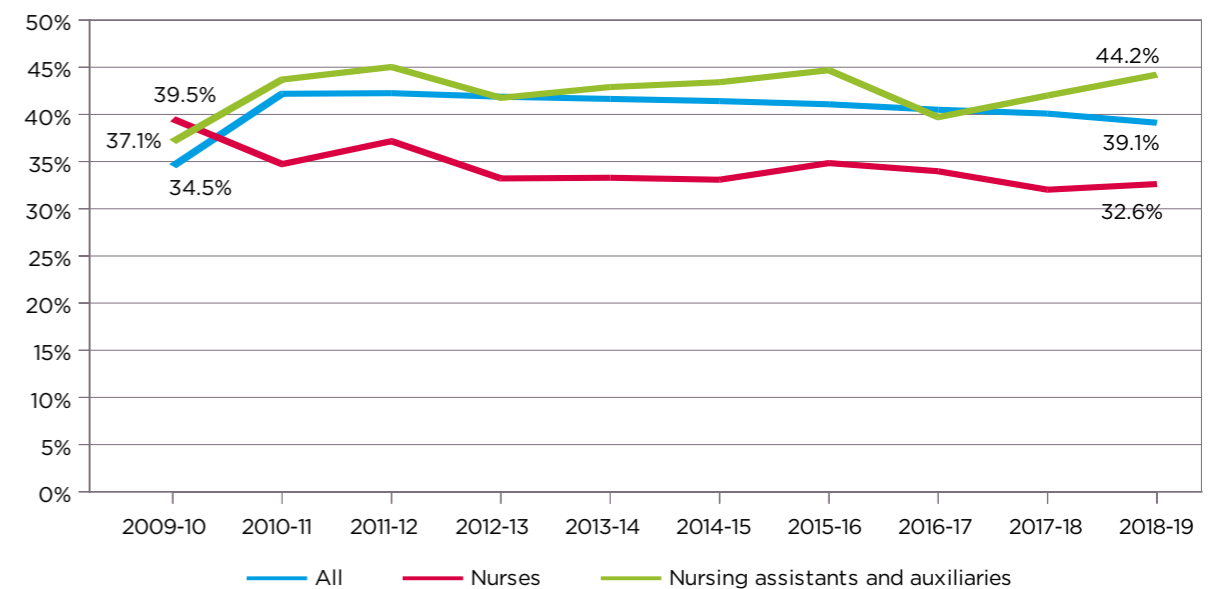


Source: Analysis of the Annual Population Survey (2009/10 to 2018/19)

Figure 5 takes into account the high proportion of women employees in the health and social care workforce and looks specifically at part-time working among the UK female workforce. Among all female employees in the UK, part-time working is higher than among men. In 2018/19, two fifths (39%) of all women reported working part-time compared to 12% of men.

The rate of part-time working among the female workforce has stayed in the range of 33% to 40% between 2009/10 and 2018/19 for nurses, and between 37% and 45% for nursing assistants and auxiliaries.

Figure 5: Proportion of female nurses, female nursing auxiliaries/assistants and all female UK employees working part-time (2009/10 to 2018/19)



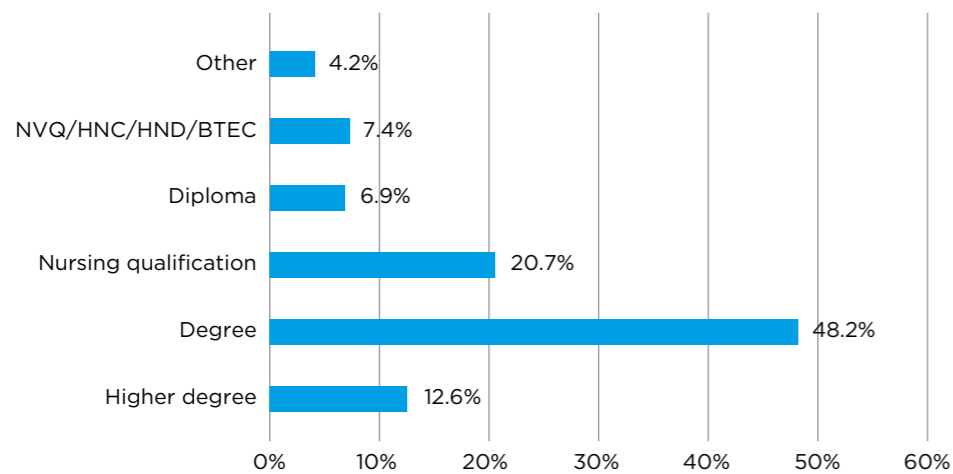
Source: Analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2009/10 to 2018/19

### 3.1.4 Qualifications

This section includes an analysis of *Labour Force Survey* data, looking at responses from respondents who report working as nurses, midwives or nursing auxiliaries and assistants, and their reported highest qualifications.

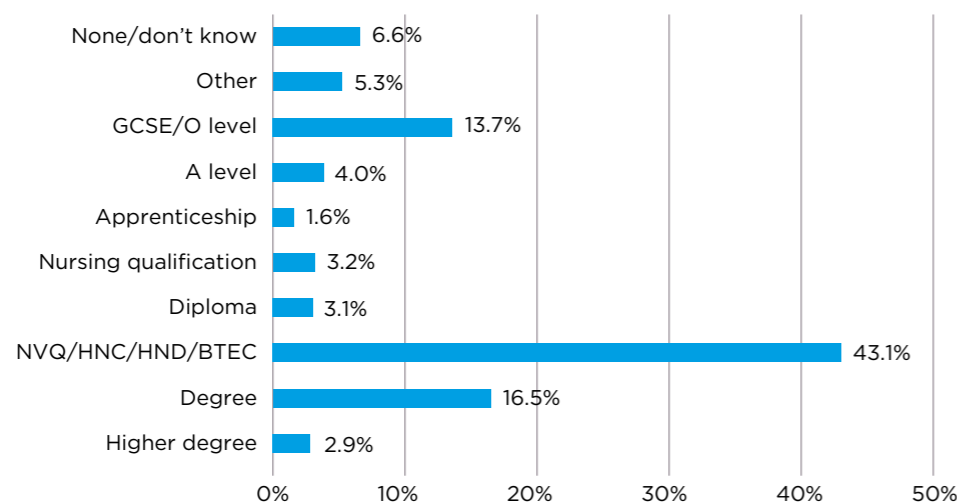
Figure 6 shows that six in ten (60.8%) of all nurses and midwives hold a degree or higher degree, with a further 20.7% holding a nursing qualification as their highest level of qualification. Figure 7 reveals that 19.4% of all nursing assistants and auxiliaries hold a degree or higher degree, with a further 43.1% holding a qualification such as an NVQ/SNVQ, BTEC, HNC or HND.

Figure 6: Nurses and midwives – highest qualification held



Source: Analysis of the Annual Population Survey April–June 2019

Figure 7: Nursing assistants and auxiliaries – highest qualifications held



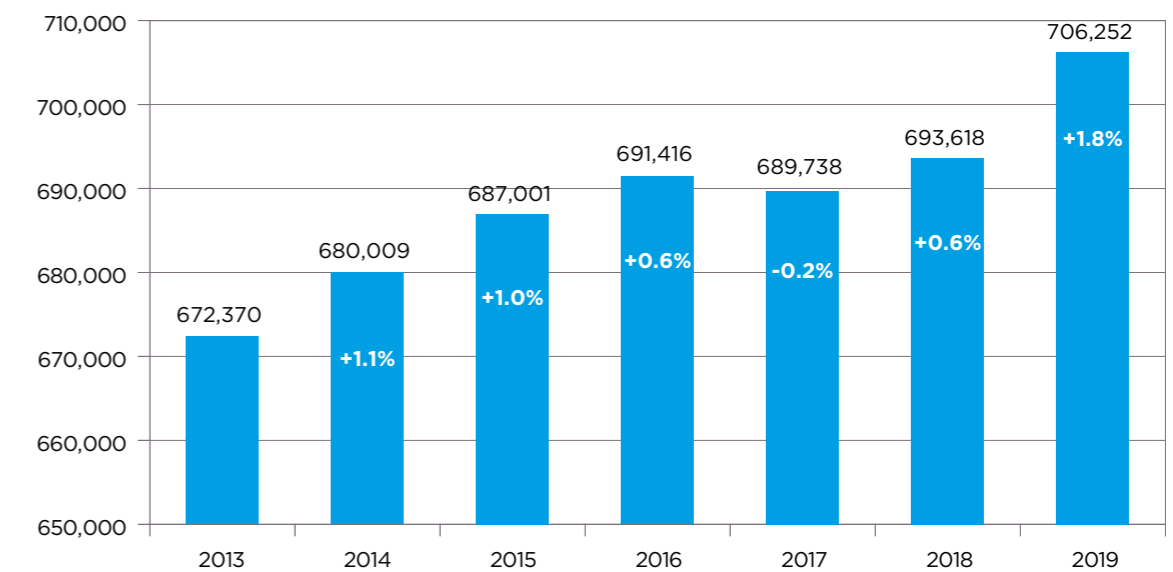
Source: Analysis of the Annual Population Survey April to June 2019

## 4. Nursing and Midwifery Council data

### 4.1 Number of registrants

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) data shows that there were 706,252 nurses and midwives on the register as of September 2019, representing an increase of 12,634 (1.8%) since September 2018<sup>5</sup>.

Figure 8: Number of nursing and midwifery registrants, with year-on-year percentage changes (2013 to 2019)



Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

Table 1 breaks these figures down into more detail according to type of registrant. Since 2015, there has been a 2.4% increase in the number of nurses, a 16% increase in the number of midwives and a fall of 27.9% in registrants with joint nursing and midwifery registration. The table also tracks the entry of nursing associates onto the register, with 1,488 joining as registrants in England between 2018 and 2019. The nursing associate part of the NMC register opened at the beginning of 2019.

Table 1: Number of nursing and midwifery registrants by registration type (2015 to 2019)

Registration Type	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2015-19	% change 2018-19
Nurse	644,769	648,617	646,243	649,619	660,213	2.4%	1.6%
Midwife	32,117	33,635	35,217	36,409	37,255	16.0%	2.3%
Nurse and midwife	10,115	9,164	8,278	7,590	7,296	-27.9%	-3.9%
Nursing associate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,488	/	/
<b>Total</b>	<b>687,001</b>	<b>691,416</b>	<b>689,738</b>	<b>693,618</b>	<b>706,252</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

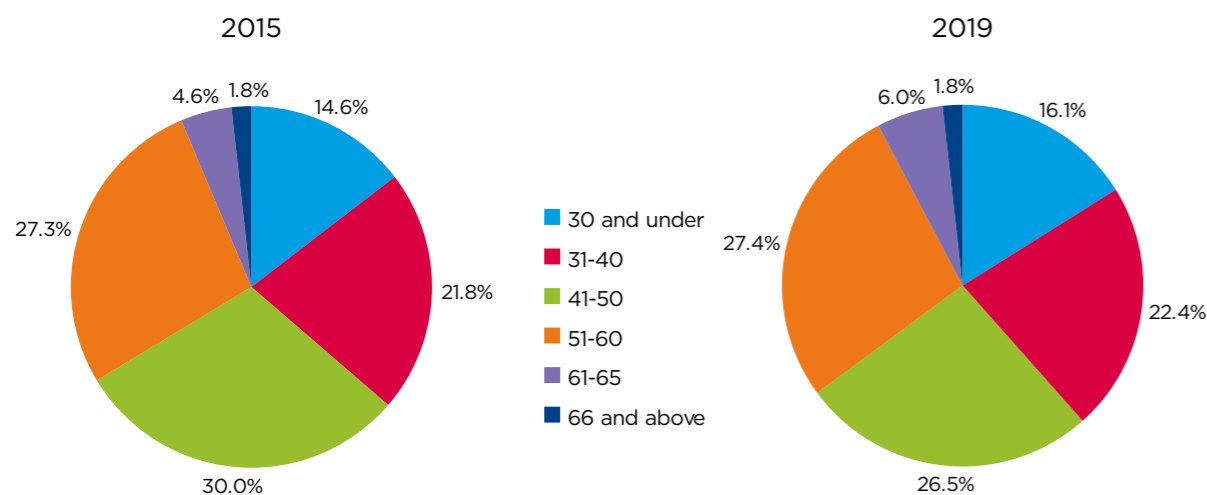
In Table 2 the breakdown of registrants is shown across the four main fields of practice. It should be noted, that one nurse or midwife can register in multiple fields of practice. In 2019 (across these four fields of practice), just over three quarters (77.1%) are registered as adult nurses, 7.5% are registered as children’s nurses, 2.5% are registered as learning disability nurses and 13% as mental health nurses. Since 2015, the number of children’s nurses has risen by 9.3%, while there has been a fall in the number of learning disability nurses of 5.8%.

**Table 2: Number of nursing and midwifery registrants by four main fields of practice (2015 to 2019)**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2015-19	% change 2018-19
<b>Adult</b>	529,648	531,331	526,152	525,819	532,703	0.6%	1.3%
<b>Children</b>	47,370	48,238	49,365	50,565	51,783	9.3%	2.4%
<b>Learning disabilities</b>	18,199	17,690	17,298	17,142	17,146	-5.8%	0.02%
<b>Mental health</b>	90,110	88,974	88,497	88,821	89,675	-0.5%	1.0%

When comparing 2015 to 2019, Figure 9 shows the age profile of NMC registrants – the proportion of older registrants has grown over a relatively short period. In 2015, 15.6% were aged 56 or over; in 2019, it is 18.2%.

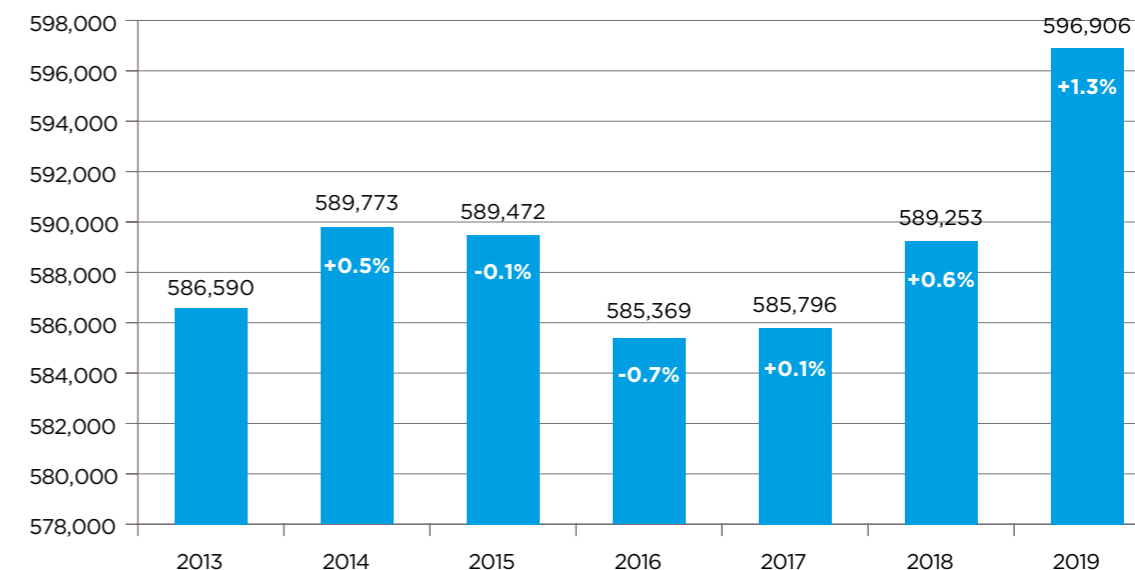
**Figure 9: Registrants by age (2015 compared to 2019)**



Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

Figures 10 and 11 look at the numbers of registrants according to their country of registration. Figure 10 shows that of the total number of registrants, 596,906 (84.5%) are nurses and midwives first registered in the UK. Of those nurses and midwives first registered in the UK, the breakdown across the four UK countries is shown in Table 3, with 79.5% having qualified in England; 11.9% in Scotland; 5% in Wales; and 3.7% in Northern Ireland.

**Figure 10: Number of nurses and midwives on the NMC register first registered in the UK, with year-on-year percentage changes (2013 to 2019)**



Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

**Table 3: Nurses and midwives first registered in the UK by place of qualification, 2019**

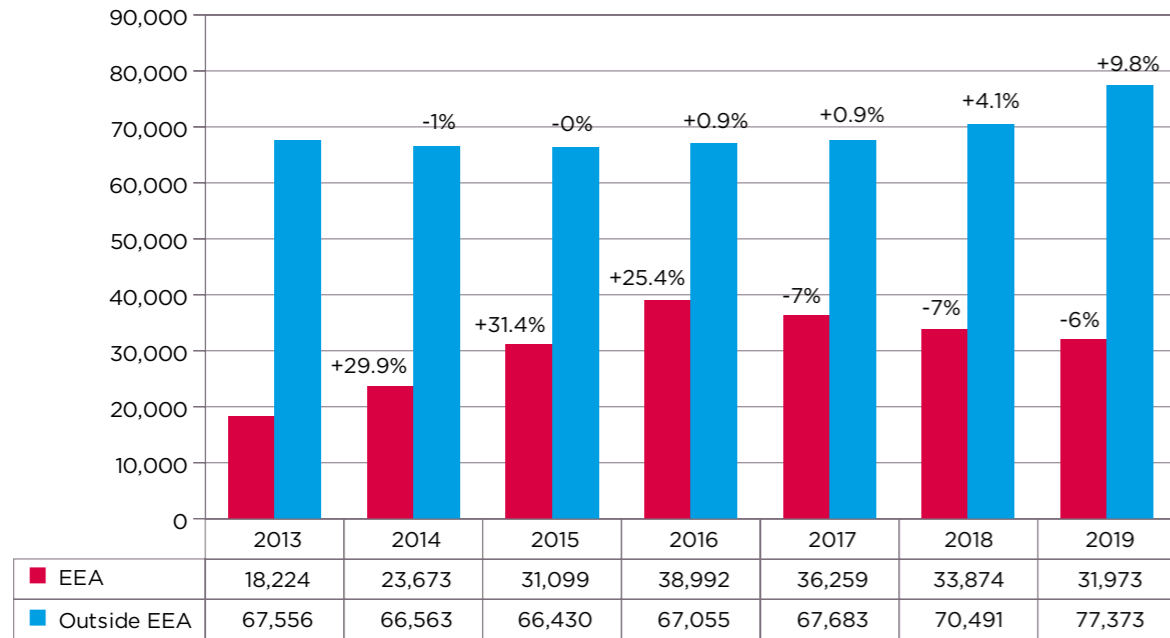
England	79.5%
Scotland	11.9%
Wales	5.0%
Northern Ireland	3.7%

Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

Figure 11 shows there are a further 31,973 (4.5%) nurses and midwives who trained in the EU or European Economic Area (EEA) and registered to work in the UK. In addition, 77,373 (11%) are nurses and midwives who first registered outside the EEA. Of all registrants who qualified outside of the EEA, the two main countries of registration are Philippines (44%) and India (30%).

The number of nurses and midwives who first qualified in the EEA has fallen by 18% since 2016, while the number who qualified outside of the EEA has grown by 15.4%. This coincides with the UK’s decision to leave the European Union, with registered nurses and midwives choosing to leave the UK or not to move to the UK for work, while the UK continues to rely on international recruitment to meet staffing needs.

Figure 11: Number of nurses and midwives on the NMC register, first registered in the EEA and outside the EEA, with year-on-year percentage changes (2013 to 2019)



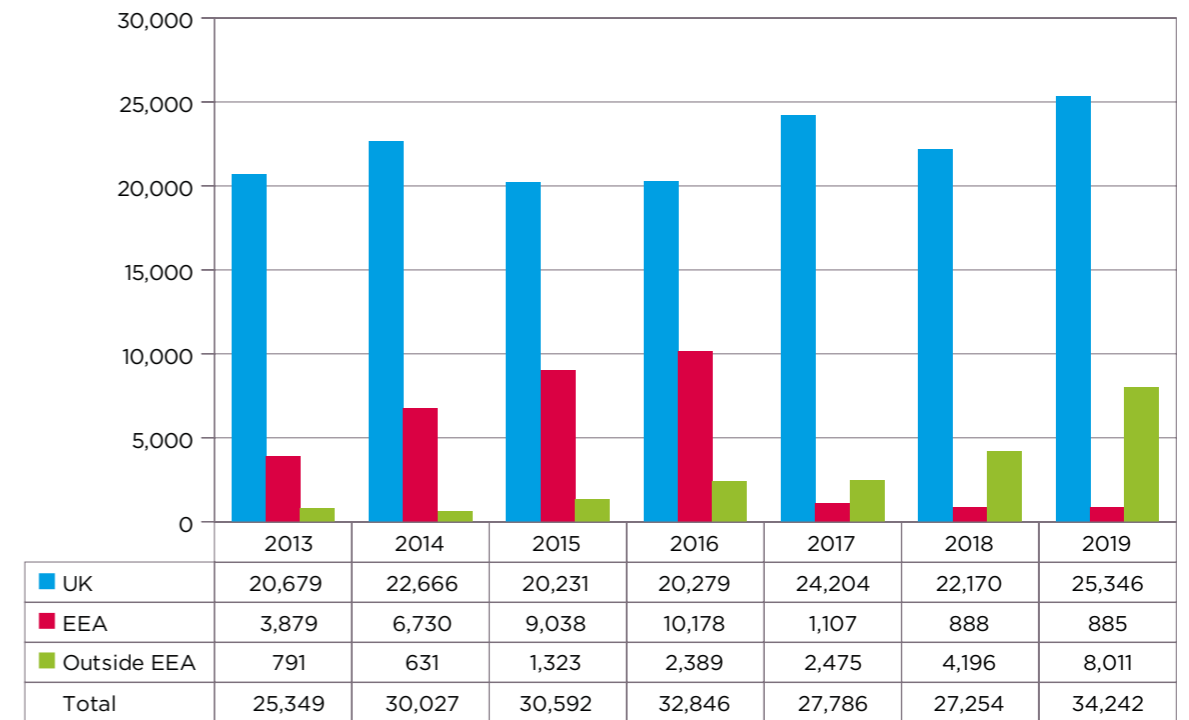
Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

## 4.2 NMC new entrants

Looking at new entrants to the NMC register, the overall number (including the UK, EEA and non-EEA registrants) stood at 34,242 in 2019 – a rise of 25.6% from 2018. This is because of a significant rise in the number of entrants from nurses first registered outside the EEA.

- UK new entrants: 25,346 (74% of all new entrants)
- EEA new entrants: 885 (2.6%)
- non-EEA new entrants: 8,011 (23.4%).

Figure 12: Number of new entrants to the UK nursing register (2013 to 2019)



Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

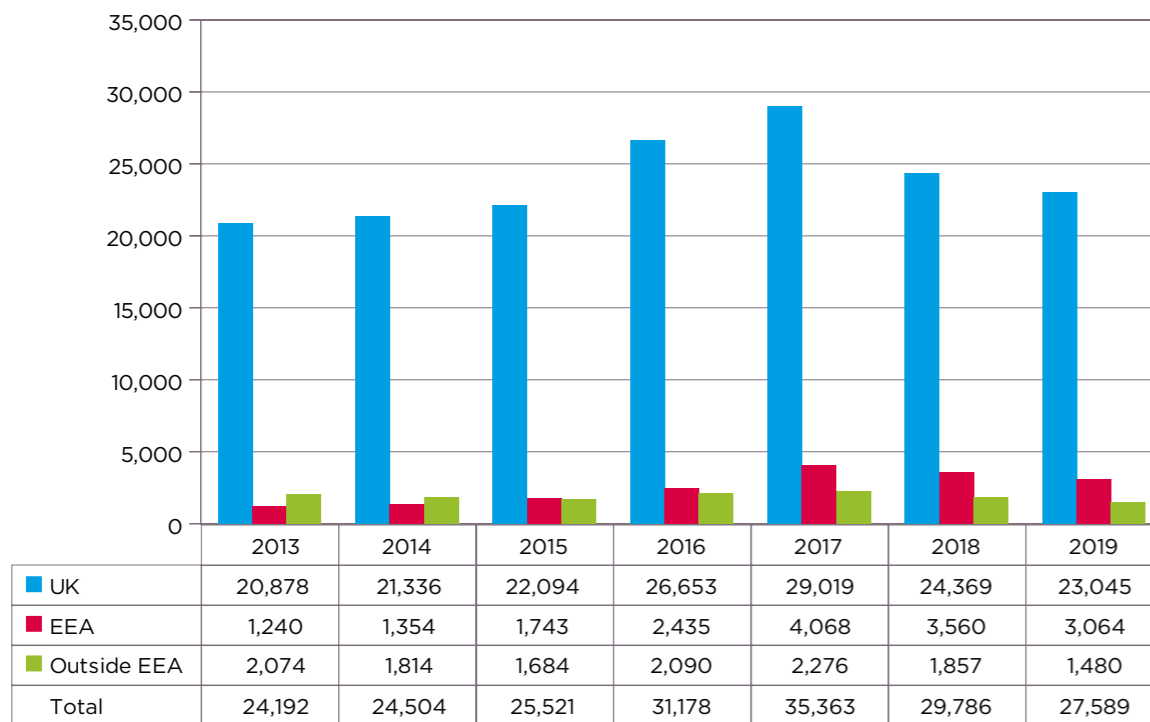


### 4.3 The number of people leaving the NMC register

While the total number of people leaving the NMC has dropped over the last year, it is 23.1% higher than in 2013. In 2019, a total of 27,589 registrants left the register which included:

- 23,045 (83.5%) who initially registered in the UK
- 3,064 (11.1%) initially registered in the EEA
- 1,480 (5.4%) from outside the EEA.

Figure 13: Number of leavers to the UK nursing register (2013 to 2019)



Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

## 5. The nursing workforce in NHS England, Scotland, Wales and in the Health and Social Care service, Northern Ireland

This section begins by looking at trends in the nursing workforce across the four UK countries between 2015 and 2018<sup>6</sup>. While services are often referred to as the NHS, they are mostly independent from each other and operate under different management, rules and political authority. This timeframe has been used to allow for consistent comparison of data; the most recent data which allows comparison is from 2018.

This analysis also takes into account methodological changes made by NHS Digital in England (responsible for the provision of NHS workforce data). These methodological changes have involved the re-categorisation of the workforce and impacts on the comparability with previously published workforce numbers used in previous editions of the RCN’s Labour Market Review. All efforts have been made to ensure consistency between measures but there are variations in definitions and methods of data collection between the different UK countries.

The rest of this section looks in greater detail at workforce trends within the four UK countries and uses different time frames (according to the availability of published data) to provide the most up-to-date analysis.

## 5.1 Comparison of workforce data across the UK

**Table 4: Full-time equivalent (FTE) and percentage change in the whole workforce (2015 to 2018) – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2015-18	% change 2017-18
England	1,014,218	1,037,054	1,052,936	1,074,054	5.9%	2.0%
Scotland	137,728	138,651	139,492	139,765	1.5%	0.2%
Wales	73,971	76,301	77,917	79,054	5.3%	1.5%
Northern Ireland	53,913	54,740	55,703	56,605	5.0%	1.6%

**Table 5: Full-time equivalent (FTE) and percentage change in the registered nursing, midwifery and health visiting workforce (2015 to 2018) – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2015-18	% change 2017-18
England	302,408	305,326	305,059	306,996	1.5%	0.6%
Scotland	43,121	43,043	43,252	43,268	0.3%	0.04%
Wales	22,195	22,479	22,612	22,576	1.7%	-0.2%
Northern Ireland	14,614	14,933	15,134	15,112	3.4%	-0.1%

**Table 6: Full-time equivalent (FTE) and percentage change in the nursing support workforce (2015 to 2018) – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2015-18	% change 2017-18
England	141,976	145,848	149,458	152,555	2.1%	7.5%
Scotland	15,732	16,051	16,097	16,178	2.8%	0.5%
Wales	9,717	10,234	10,362	10,351	6.5%	-0.1%
Northern Ireland	4,019	4,080	4,267	4,374	8.8%	2.5%

### Tables 5 and 6: the four UK countries

The following explains the different categories of roles, within each of the four countries, captured by the data.

#### England

Table 5 figures are FTE registered nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in hospital and community services. Table 6 figures are nursing support staff. September figures available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics>

#### Scotland

Table 5 figures are nursing and midwifery staff, bands 5–9 in NHS Scotland. Table 6 figures are 1–4 nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Scotland. September figures available at: [www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Workforce](http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Workforce)

#### Wales

Table 5 figures are FTE registered nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and nursing support staff in hospitals and the community. Table 6 figures are FTE nursing assistant practitioner, nursery nurse, nursing assistant/auxiliary, pre-registration learner. September figures available at: <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Staff>

#### Northern Ireland

Table 5 figures are FTE registered nursing and midwifery staff in the health and social care workforce. Table 6 figures are FTE nurse support staff. Available at: [www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/dhssps-statistics-and-research/workforce-statistics](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/dhssps-statistics-and-research/workforce-statistics)

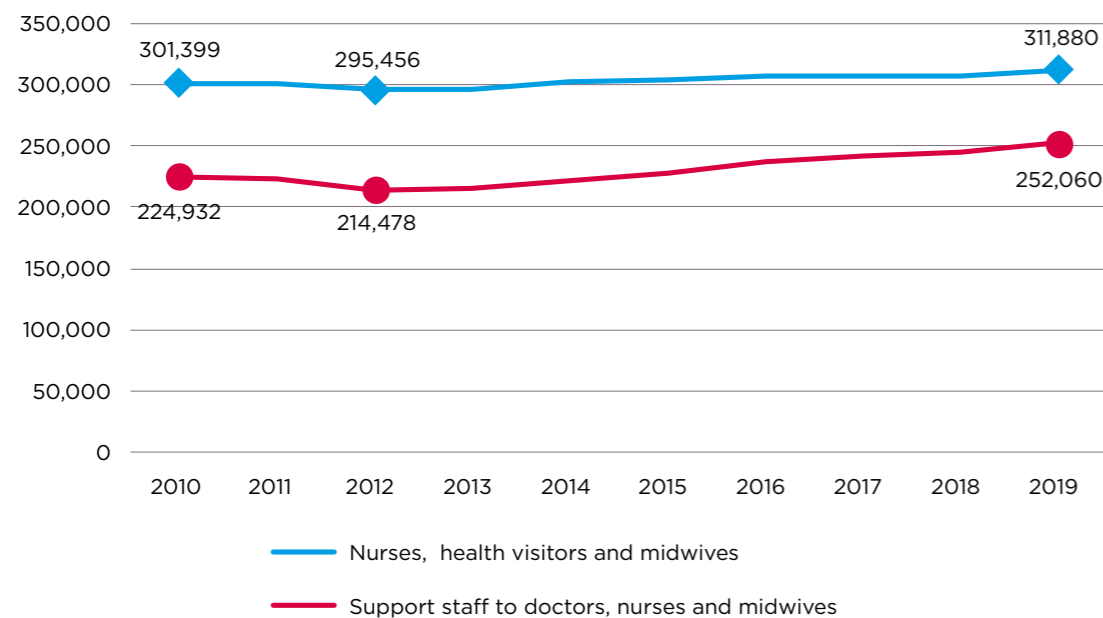
## 5.2 NHS England nursing workforce

### 5.2.1 The number of registered nursing and midwifery staff and nursing support staff

Figure 14 shows the trend in registered nursing and midwifery staff and nursing support staff in the NHS in England between 2010 and 2019. There has been a small overall increase of 3.5% in the FTE number of registered nurses, health visitors and midwives between 2010 and 2019 (rising from 301,399 to 311,880). In 2012, the number of staff reached its lowest point, standing at 295,456.

There has been an overall increase of 12.1% increase in the number of support staff to doctors, nurses and midwives between 2010 and 2019 (rising from 224,932 to 252,060). In 2012, in a similar trend to registered nursing staff, the number of support staff was at its lowest point of 214,478.

**Figure 14: Registered nurses, health visitors and midwives; support staff to doctors, nurses and midwives (FTE) (2010 to 2019)**



Source: NHS Digital

Table 7 looks at the main work areas across the registered nursing workforce since 2010, to show changes in the composition of the FTE workforce over this period. While there has been a notable increase in the children's nursing workforce (52.8%), and small increases in the adult nursing (8.2%) and midwifery workforces (12.3%), all other groups have seen decreases in this period. The learning disability workforce has been particularly badly hit, suffering a 40.7% decrease between 2010 and 2019.

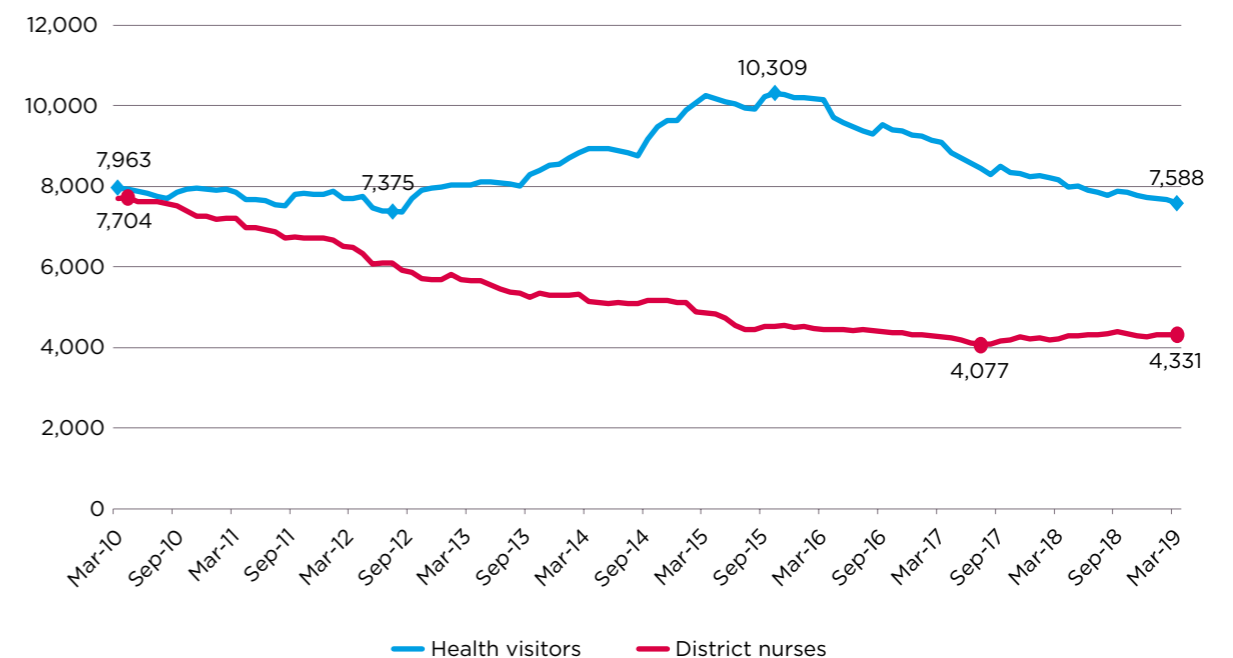
**Table 7: England, registered nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (FTE) by work area (2010 to 2019)**

	2010	2017	2018	2019	% change 2010-2019	% change 2018-2019
All	301,399	307,491	307,535	311,880	3.5%	1.4%
Adult nursing	169,897	179,784	179,941	183,889	8.2%	2.2%
Children's nursing	15,062	21,915	22,406	23,014	52.8%	2.7%
Community health nursing	42,011	35,442	35,377	35,630	-15.2%	0.7%
Mental health nursing	40,849	35,688	36,053	36,269	-11.2%	0.6%
Learning disabilities/difficulties	5,460	3,444	3,305	3,236	-40.7%	-2.1%
Other nurses	740	534	491	385	-48.0%	-21.6%
Health visitors	7,963	9,087	8,172	7,588	-4.7%	-7.1%
Midwives	19,416	21,597	21,790	21,870	12.6%	0.4%

Source: NHS Digital

Figure 15 looks in more detail at community nursing, concentrating on the number of health visitors and district nurses. The FTE number of health visitors and district nurses started at similar levels in 2010, but between 2010 and 2015 the number of district nurses fell by 44%, while the number of health visitors grew by 27%, peaking at just over 10,300. However, since then, the number has fallen below 2010 levels to 7,588.

**Figure 15: England, registered nursing workforce (FTE), health visitors and district nurses (2010 to 2019)**



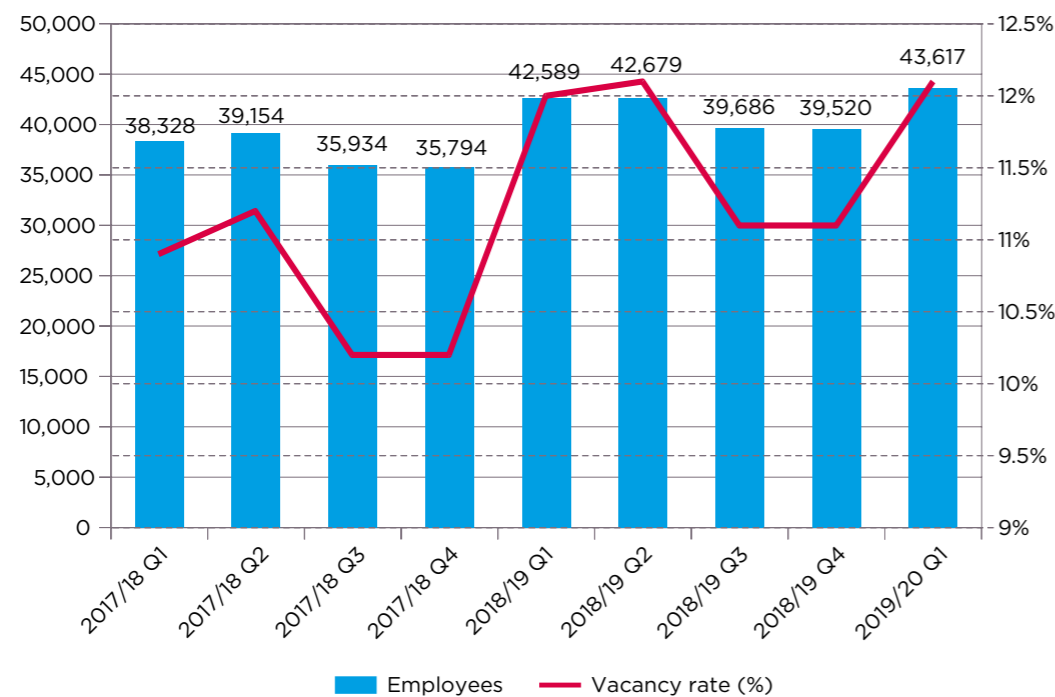
Source: NHS Digital

### 5.2.2 Vacancies

Figure 16 shows the number of vacancies and the vacancy rate from 2017 to 2019 in the registered nursing workforce in England. During this period, the number of vacancies started at 38,328 (10.9% vacancy rate) and peaked at 43,617 (12.1% vacancy rate) in the first quarter of 2019/20.

The vacancy rate varies across England, with the highest rates in London (15.3%) and the South East (13.1%) and the lowest in the North West (9.9%) and the North East and Yorkshire (9.5%).

Figure 16: Registered nursing vacancies (FTE) and vacancy rate (2017 to 2019)<sup>7</sup>

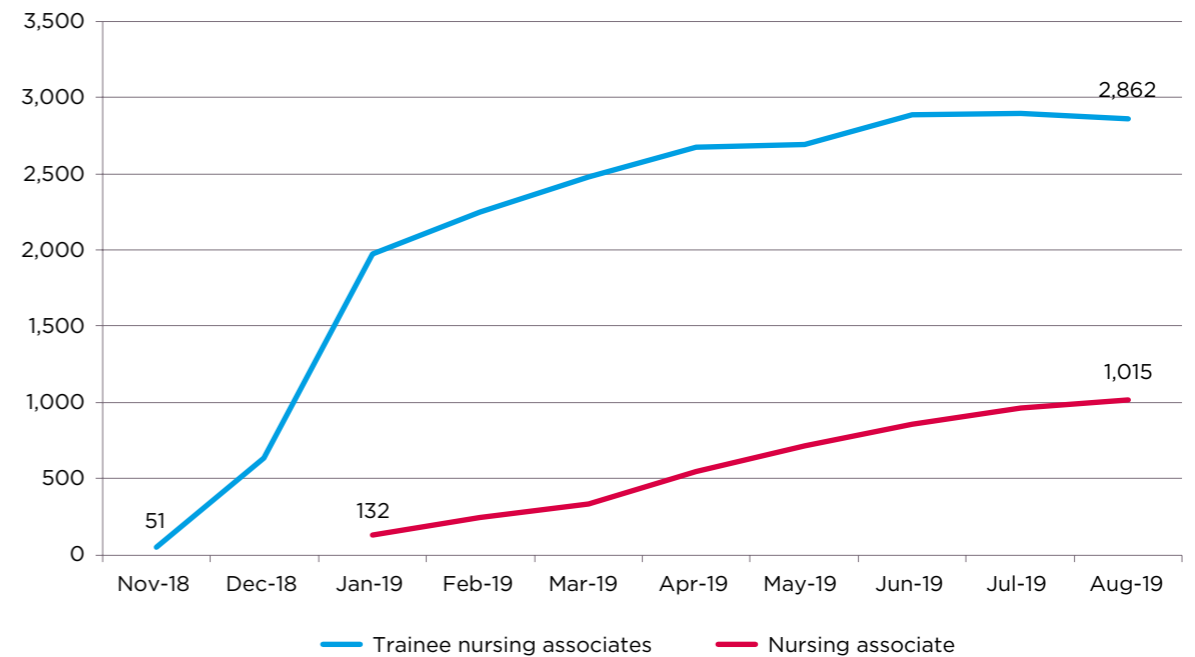


Source: NHS Digital

### 5.2.3 New nursing roles and routes in nursing

Figure 17 plots the number of nursing associates and trainee nursing associates employed in the NHS in England since the introduction of this new role. By August 2019, there were 2,862 trainee nursing associates and 1,015 nursing associates in the NHS workforce in England.

Figure 17: Nursing associates and trainee nursing associates (2018 to 2019)



Source: NHS Digital

### 5.2.4 Employers outside the NHS

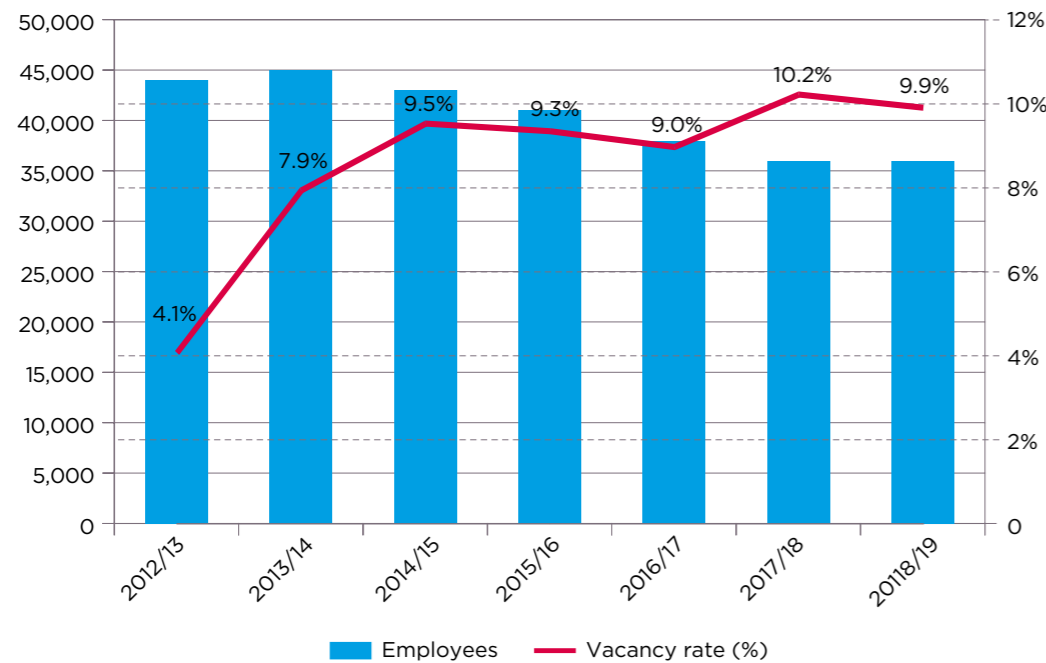
This section aims to provide a picture of the nursing workforce employed outside the NHS using available data sources. This includes employment figures for registered nurses in the adult social care sector (local authorities and independent sector employers); nursing staff employed by independent sector health care providers which provide services to the NHS; and the GP practice nursing workforce. Due to different methodologies in collecting data, there are limitations in the extent to which numbers can be compared with the NHS – however, this data provides a useful estimate of the numbers employed by different employers.

#### Adult social care sector

Data from Skills for Care provides an estimate for the number of registered nursing jobs in the adult social care sector outside the NHS in England<sup>8</sup>. This shows that there were an estimated 36,000 registered nurse jobs working in local authorities and in the independent care sector in 2018/19. This is a fall of 18.2% since 2012/13 from 44,000. Skills for Care (2019) explains that this fall ‘could be related to recruitment and retention issues, but also may be a result of some organisations creating nursing assistant roles to take on some tasks previously carried out by nurses.’

Figure 18 also shows the registered nurse vacancy rate across this period, rising from 4.1% in 2012/13 to 9.9% in 2018/19.

Figure 18: Registered nurses in the adult care sector and vacancy rate (2012 to 2019)



Source: Skills for Care

Independent sector health care providers

Table 8 provides data on the nursing workforce directly employed by independent sector health care providers where services have been commissioned from the NHS. The number of organisations providing workforce data to NHS Digital has increased from 42 to 56 between 2016 and 2019. As at March 2019, among the 56 organisations which provide services to the NHS, they employ just over 12,000 nurses, health visitors and midwives (an average of 216 per organisation) and just over 7,600 nursing support staff an average of 35 per organisation).

Table 8: Registered nurses, health visitors and midwives; nursing support staff (FTE) (2016 to 2019)

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of organisations	42	47	51	56
Nurses, health visitors and midwives	12,340	11,199	12,170	12,082
Average per organisation	294	238	239	216
Nursing support staff	7,057	7,196	7,156	7,611
Average per organisation	24	30	30	35

Source: NHS Digital

General practice nursing workforce

Table 9 shows data for the nursing workforce employed in general practice<sup>9</sup>. In March 2019, there were approximately 7,012 practices in England employing 16,484 registered nurses and a further 6,928 health care assistants. Between 2016 and 2019, the number of registered nurses has grown by 5.7%, but the number of health care assistants has dropped by 4.7%.

The largest groups in this nursing workforce are practice nurses and advanced nurse practitioners. Around seven in ten (69.7%) are practice nurses and advanced nurse practitioners at 21.7%. Another 4% are extended role practice nurses and 3.1% are specialist nurses.

Table 9: General medical practice nursing staff (FTE) (2016 to 2019): England

	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2016-19
Practice nurses	11,710	11,580	11,527	11,484	-1.9%
Advanced nurse practitioners	2,690	2,925	3,236	3,555	32.2%
Extended role practice nurses	540	592	625	653	20.9%
Nurse specialists	486	502	520	519	6.8%
District nurses	16	20	23	20	25.0%
Nursing partners	23	21	29	41	78.3%
Nurse dispensers	11	19	21	34	209.1%
Trainee	125	179	188	178	42.4%
<b>Total nurses</b>	<b>15,601</b>	<b>15,838</b>	<b>16,169</b>	<b>16,484</b>	<b>5.7%</b>
<b>Health care assistants</b>	<b>7,274</b>	<b>6,703</b>	<b>6,724</b>	<b>6,928</b>	<b>-4.7%</b>

Source: NHS Digital

## 5.3 NHS in Scotland

### 5.3.1 Employment figures

As at September 2019, Figure 19 shows that there were 43,781 (FTE) in the registered nursing and midwifery workforce and 16,193 (FTE) in the nursing support workforce. Across the period, the health nursing support workforce grew by 6.9%, while the registered nursing workforce grew by just 4%.

**Figure 19: Scotland, registered and non-registered nursing and midwifery staff (FTE) (2013 to 2019)**



Source: Information Services Division, Scotland

Table 10 provides a breakdown by selected work areas for registered nursing and midwifery staff. Between September 2015 and September 2019 there has been limited overall change in registered adult nursing numbers (FTE) and an increase in the health visiting workforce. However, there has been a downward trend in learning disability nursing, mental health nursing, paediatric nursing and district nursing<sup>10</sup>.

Table 11 provides trends for nursing support workers in selected work areas. Over the four-year period, while there have been increases in midwifery support workers, district nursing, paediatrics and adult nursing, have seen overall decreases in the FTE numbers of nursing support staff in health visiting and learning disability nursing.

**Table 10: NHS Scotland, registered nursing and midwifery staff by selected work area (FTE) (2015 to 2018)**

	Sep 2015	Sep 2016	Sep 2017	Sep 2018	Sep 2019	Change 2015-2018
All	43,121	43,043	43,252	43,268	43,781	1.5%
Adult	23,867	23,702	23,862	23,999	23,860	-0.03%
Mental health	6,615	6,500	6,468	6,387	6,483	-2.0%
District nursing	2,855	2,866	2,809	2,800	2,822	-1.2%
Midwifery	2,440	2,353	2,387	2,373	2,413	-1.1%
Health visiting	1,634	1,739	1,861	1,900	1,966	20.3%
Paediatric	1,654	1,580	1,527	1,512	1,491	-9.9%
Learning disabilities	692	675	641	627	626	-9.5%

Source: Information Services Division, Scotland

**Table 11: NHS Scotland, nursing and midwifery support staff by selected work area (FTE) (2015-18)**

	Sep 2015	Sep 2016	Sep 2017	Sep 2018	Sep 2019	Change 2015-2019
All	15,732	16,051	16,097	16,178	16,193	2.9%
Adult	9,741	10,018	10,108	10,285	10,181	4.5%
Mental health	2,863	2,904	2,902	2,822	2,847	-0.6%
District nursing	639	640	633	653	686	7.4%
Midwifery	497	495	494	528	544	9.5%
Paediatric	491	468	486	479	517	5.3%
Learning disabilities	569	559	508	473	430	-24.4%
Health visiting	266	276	275	266	255	-4.1%

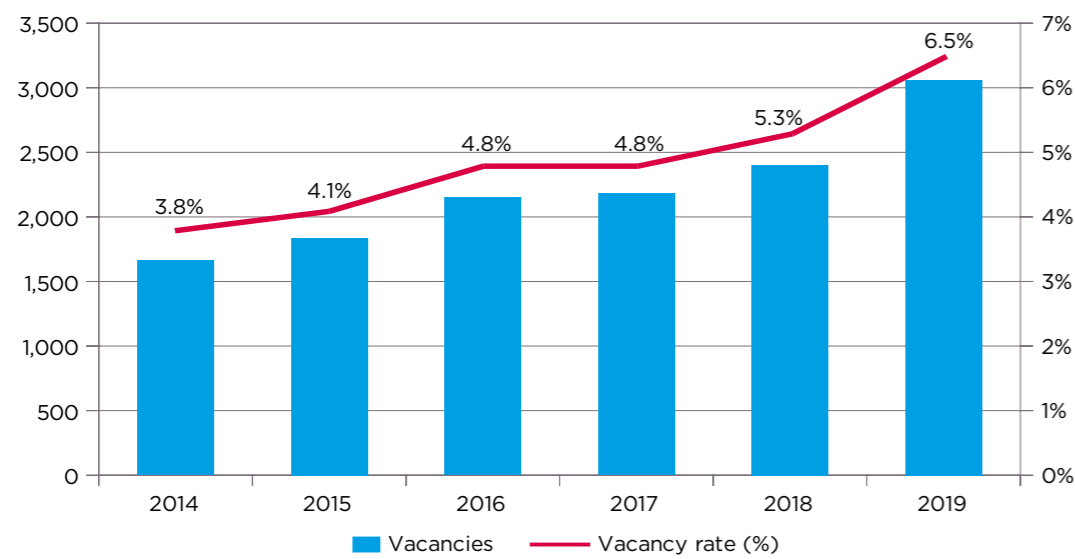
Source: Information Services Division, Scotland

### 5.3.1 Vacancy figures

Figure 20 shows that the number of vacancies (expressed as a percentage of the nursing and midwifery workforce) have increased steadily since 2014. The number of vacancies in September 2014 stood at 1,662 (3.8% vacancy rate) to 3,060 (6.5% vacancy rate) in September 2019.

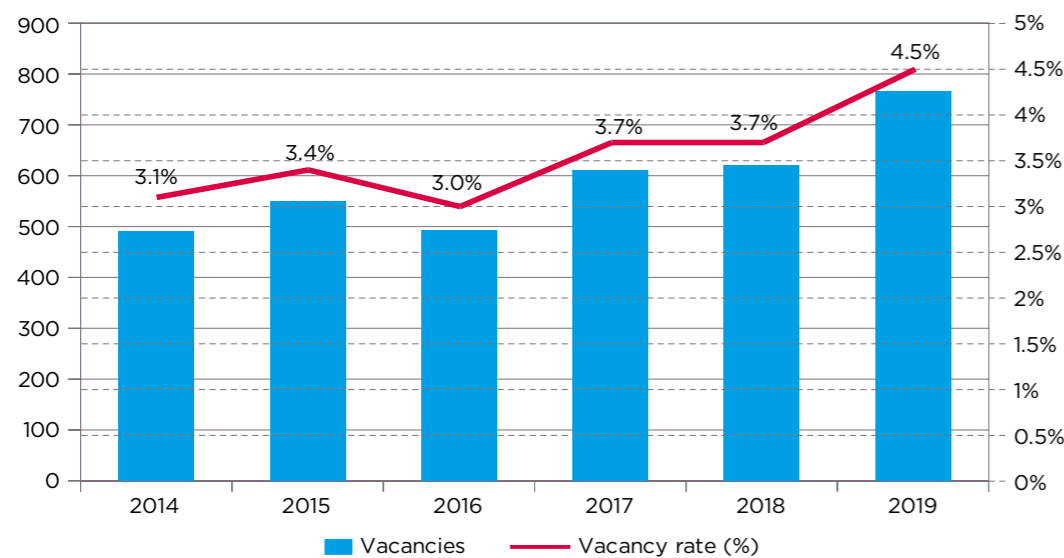
Figure 21 shows a similar picture among the nursing support workforce, with the the number of vacancies increasing from 491 (3.1% vacancy rate) in September 2014 to 766 (4.5% vacancy rate) in September 2019.

**Figure 20: Number of vacancies and vacancy rate, registered nursing and midwifery workforce (2014 to 2019)**



Source: Information Services Division, Scotland

**Figure 21: Number of vacancies and vacancy rate, nursing support workforce (2014 to 2019)**



Source: Information Services Division, Scotland

### 5.3.2 The Scottish social service sector

Table 12 provides an estimate of the number of registered nurses employed in the social service sector in Scotland at the end of 2018<sup>11</sup>. The majority (65.2%) are employed in private care homes for adults, with a further substantial number (30.1%) employed by nursing agencies which introduce and supply registered nurses to independent and voluntary sector health care providers and to the NHS in Scotland.

**Table 12: Nurses by sub-sector and employer type in the social service sector (2018)**

	Sep 2015	Sep 2016	Sep 2017	Sep 2018
Adult day care	10	-	-	10
Care homes for adults	20	4,190	390	4,610
Day care of children	-	-	-	10
Housing support/care at home	-	40	20	60
Nurse agencies	-	2,130	190	2,320
Offender accommodation services	-	-	10	10
Residential child care	20	-	10	40
School care accommodation	-	-	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>6,380</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>7,070</b>

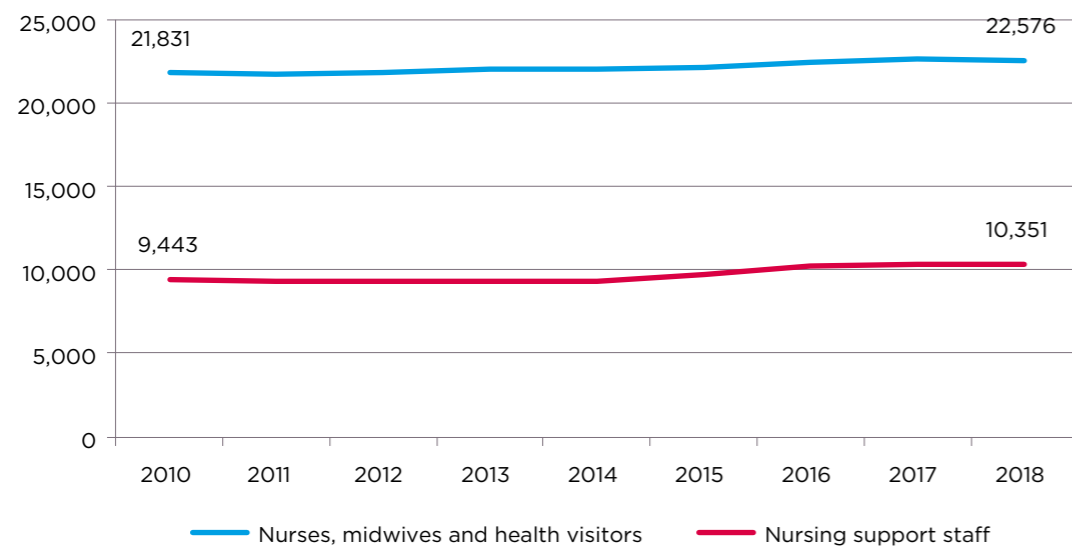
Source: Scottish Social Services Workforce Data

## 5.4 NHS in Wales

### 5.4.1 Employment figures

In Figure 22, the number of registered nursing and midwifery staff has barely grown since 2010, showing just a 3.4% rise from 21,813 (FTE) in 2010 to 22,576 in 2018, while the nursing support workforce has grown from 9,443 (FTE) to 10,351 (9.6%).

Figure 22: Wales - registered nursing and midwifery staff and nursing support staff (FTE) (2010 to 2018)



Source: StatsWales, Welsh Government

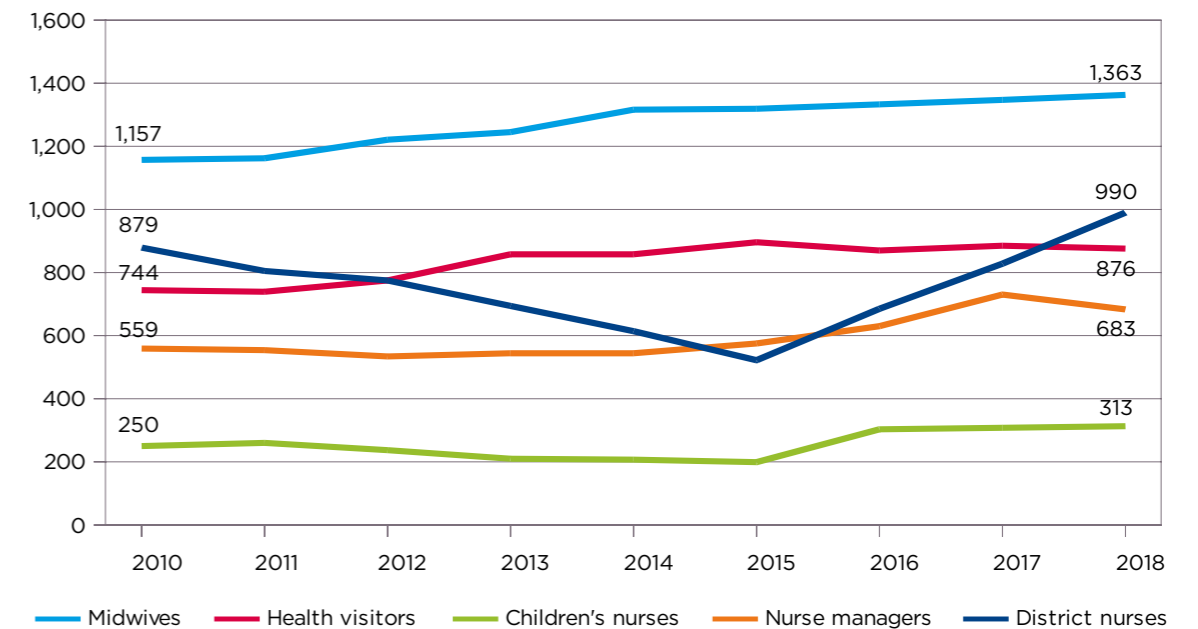
Table 13 shows the FTE nursing, midwifery and health visiting workforce in Wales by work area from 2009 to 2018. The overall trend shows very little change across this period, but some groups have seen significant change. The largest work area (acute and elderly), which makes up around two thirds of the workforce, has seen a 4% decrease since 2009; the community services workforce has almost doubled. The number of nurses working in maternity services has dropped by 78% yet Figure 23 shows the number of registered midwives grew by 12%. This figure, which draws out the trend across a group of nursing and midwifery specialisms, also shows a 15.3% increase in the health visitor workforce and a 16.3% rise in the district nurse workforce.

Table 13: Wales - nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (FTE) by work area (2009 to 2018)

	2009	2017	2018	% change 2009-2018	% change 2017-2018
Acute, elderly and general	12,078	12,150	11,579	-4.1%	-4.7%
Psychiatry	2,762	2,783	2,614	-5.4%	-6.1%
Community services	1,188	1,794	2,320	95.3%	29.3%
Paediatric nursing	749	700	686	-8.4%	-2.0%
Learning disabilities	447	334	309	-30.9%	-7.5%
Maternity services	268	64	58	-78.4%	-9.4%
Neonatal nursing	179	292	319	78.2%	9.2%
School nursing	92	122	129	40.2%	5.7%
Education staff	60	48	58	-3.3%	20.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,822</b>	<b>18,287</b>	<b>18,074</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>-1.2%</b>

Source: StatsWales, Welsh Government

Figure 23: Wales - registered nursing staff in select specialisms (FTE) (2010 to 2018)



Source: StatsWales, Welsh Government

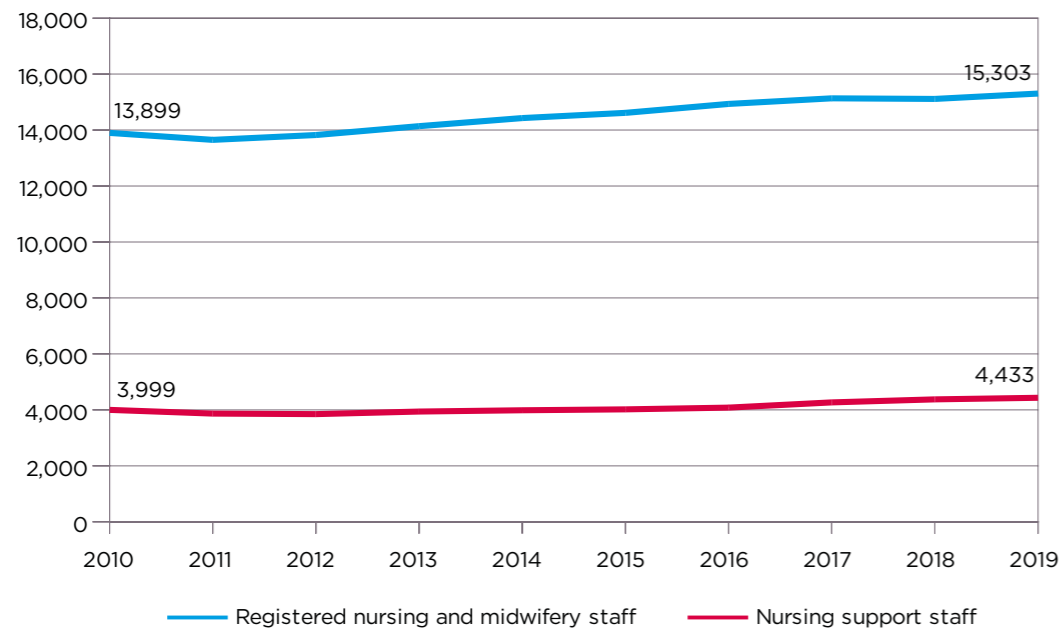


## 5.5 Health and Social Care Service, Northern Ireland

### 5.5.1 Employment figures

In Figure 24, the registered nursing and midwifery workforce (FTE) grew overall between 2010 and 2019 by 10.1% while the nursing support workforce grew by 10.8%.

Figure 24: Northern Ireland – registered nursing and midwifery staff (FTE), nurse support staff (2010 to 2019)



Source: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland HSC Workforce Census

Table 14 provides the FTE numbers of registered nursing and midwifery workforce across the main work areas between 2010 and 2019. There have been increases in some groups, including a 7% rise in the largest group of acute and general nursing, and 9.3% increase in midwifery, but a marked decrease in the number of learning disability nurses (-22.2%).

Table 14: Northern Ireland – registered nursing and midwifery staff (FTE) by work area (2010 to 2019)

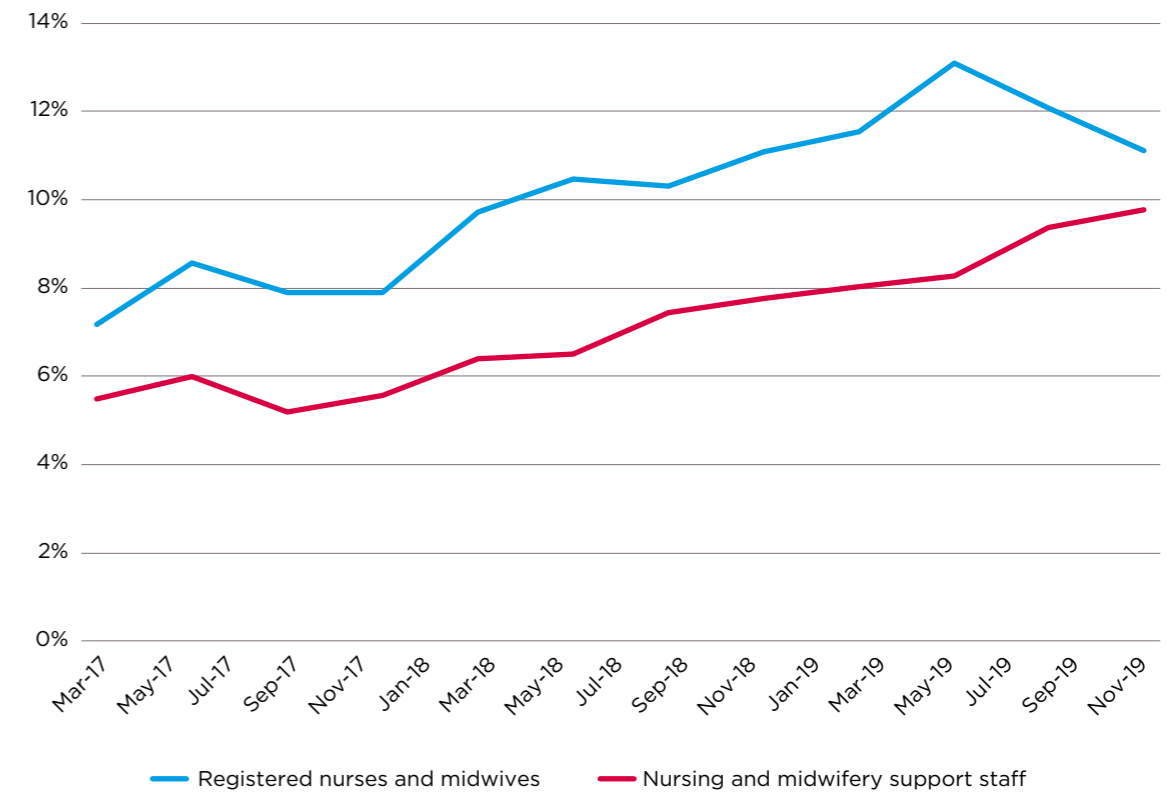
	2010	2017	2018	2019	% change 2010-2019	% change 2018-2019
Acute/general	7,533	8,021	8,011	8,062	7.0%	0.6%
Mental health	1,633	1,617	1,604	1,597	-2.2%	-0.4%
Midwifery	990	1,078	1,090	1,082	9.3%	-0.7%
District nursing	908	860	851	861	-5.2%	1.2%
Paediatric	631	786	780	793	25.7%	1.7%
Health visiting	445	497	496	527	18.4%	6.3%
Learning disability	437	395	367	340	-22.2%	-7.4%

Source: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland HSC Workforce Census

### 5.5.2 Vacancy figures

Figure 25 shows the vacancy rate between March 2017 and December 2019. The vacancy rate has increased from 7.2% to 11.2% in the registered nursing and midwifery workforce. This figure also shows the vacancy rate among the nursing and midwifery support workforce has grown from 5.5% to 9.8% over the same period.

Figure 25: Number of vacancies among nursing, midwifery and nursing support workforce (2017 to 2019)



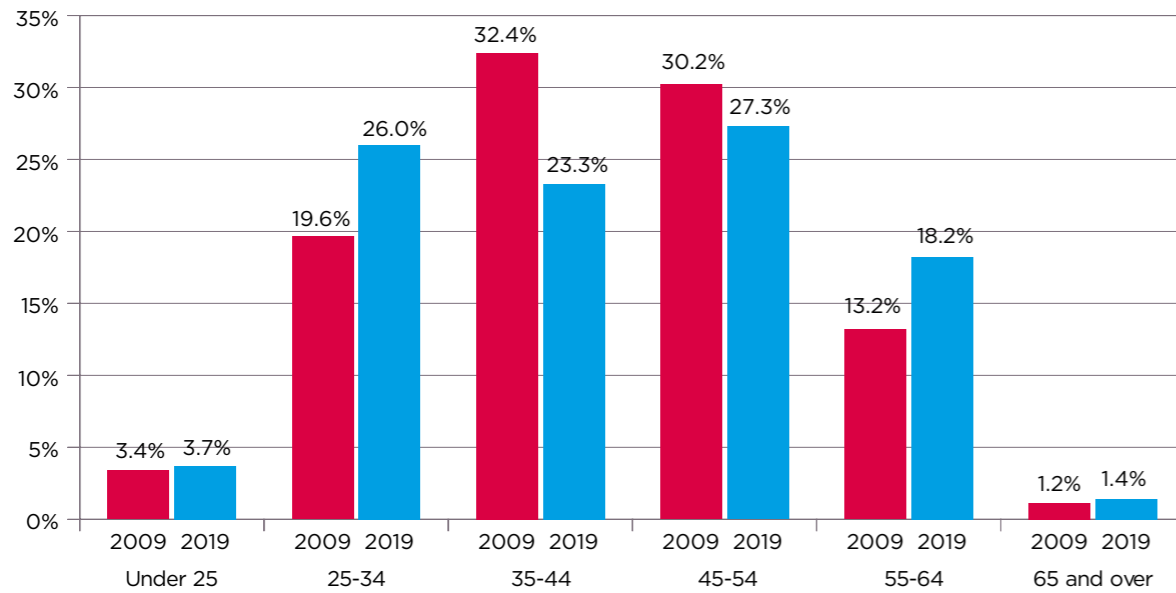
Source: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland HSC Workforce Census

## 6. Nursing and age

The following figures provide estimates of the age profiles of registered nursing staff using available data from the *Labour Force Survey*, NHS England, Scotland and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland. There is no specific data available for NHS staff in Wales.

These figures confirm how the profile of the nursing workforce is progressively ageing. Comparisons of data from over the last decade highlight how older workers form a growing component of the workforce across the UK. Analysis of the *Labour Force Survey* (see Figure 26) shows that 14.3% of the nursing workforce, across all sectors, was aged 55 or over in 2009, compared to 19.6% in 2019.

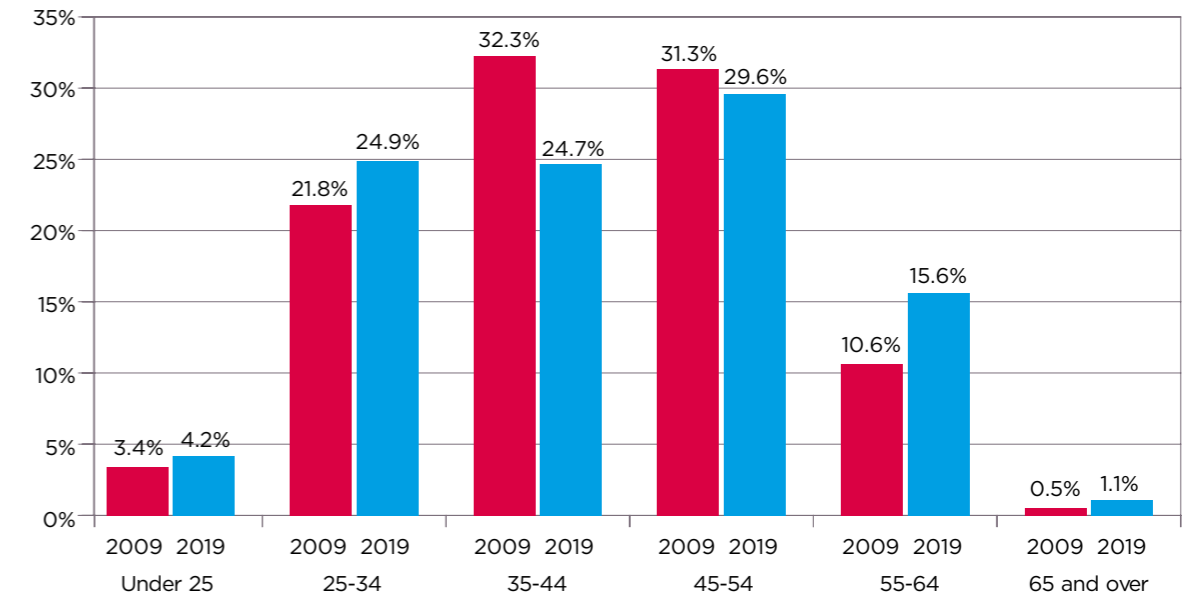
**Figure 26: Age profile of nurses working in the UK (2009 and 2019)**



Source: *Labour Force Survey April to June 2009 and April to June 2019*

Figure 27 shows the changing age profile among the registered nursing workforce in England over the last decade – just over one in ten (11.1%) were aged 55 or over in 2009, compared to 16.7% in 2019.

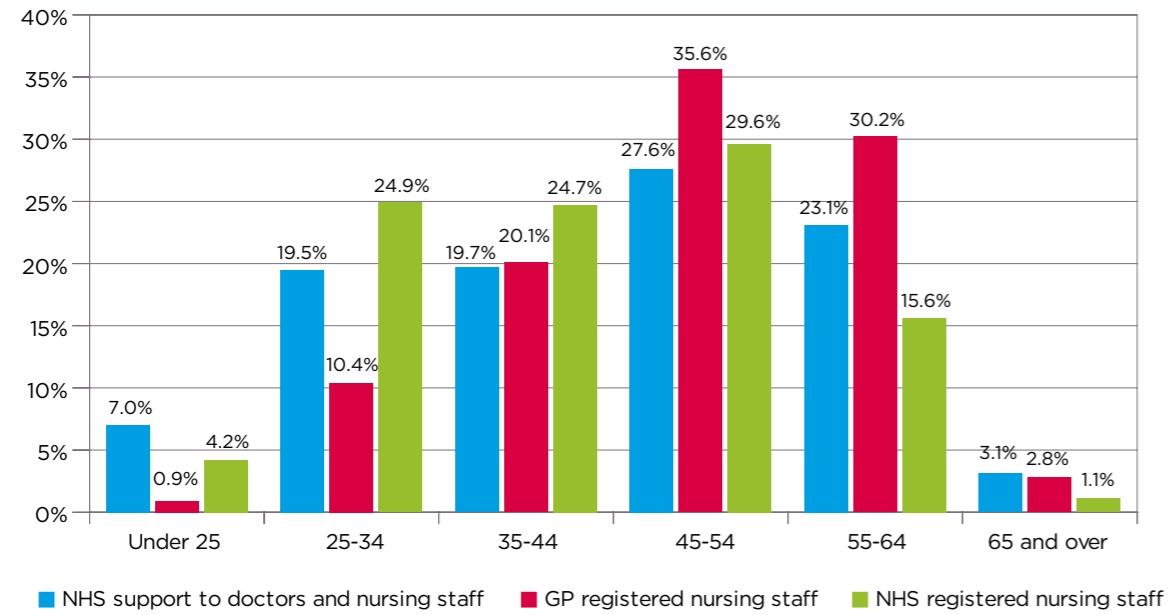
**Figure 27: NHS England – age profile, registered nursing staff (2009 and 2019) (headcount)**



Source: *NHS Digital*

Figure 28 includes the age profile for nurse support staff and practice nurses, in comparison to registered nursing, and midwifery and health visiting staff. This suggests that the practice nurse workforce has a much higher proportion of older staff than the other two groups. A third (33%) of practice nurses are aged over 55, compared to a quarter (26.2%) of nursing support staff and 16.7% of registered nursing staff working in NHS hospital and community health services in England.

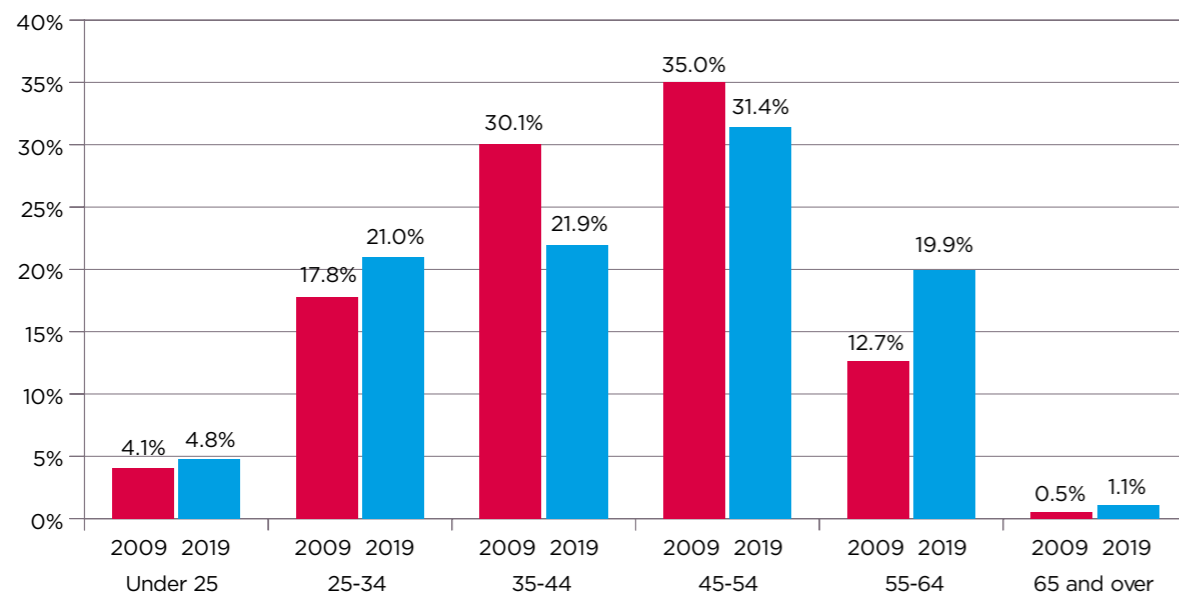
**Figure 28: NHS England – age profile, registered nursing staff, support staff and practice nurses (2019) (headcount)**



Source: NHS Digital

The age profile for Scotland presents a similar picture to England (see Figure 29). In 2019, 21% of the nursing and midwifery workforce was aged 55 and over compared to just 13% in 2009.

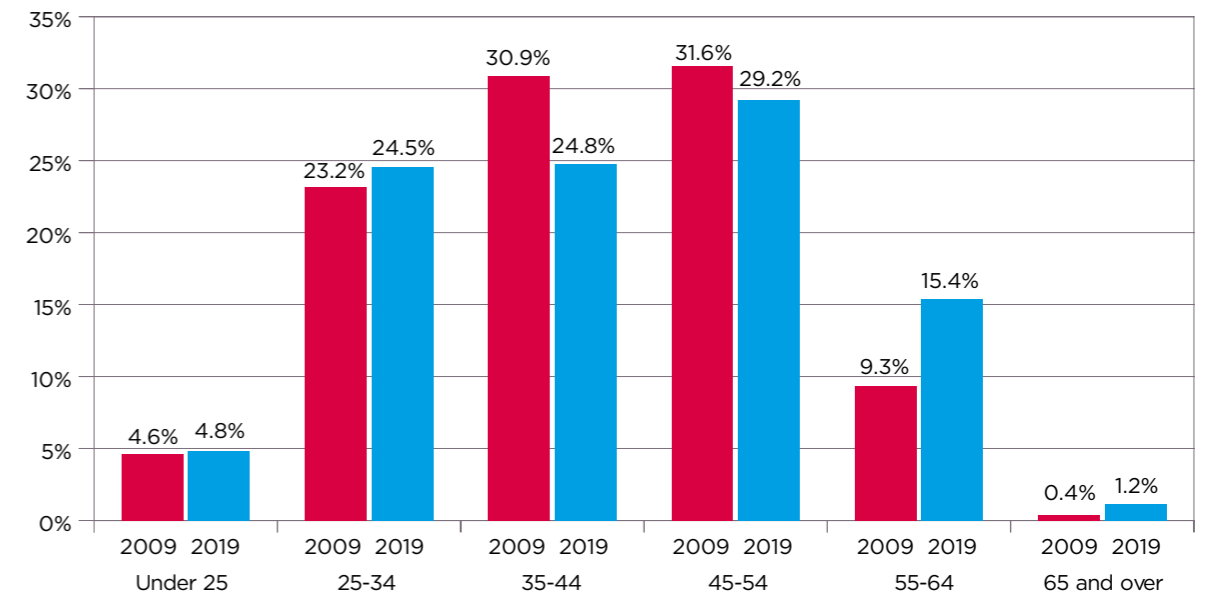
**Figure 29: NHS Scotland – age profile, all nursing and midwifery staff (2009 and 2019) (headcount)**



Source: Information Services Division, Scotland

Figure 30 shows the contrasting age profile of the registered nursing workforce in Northern Ireland between 2009 and 2019. In 2009, one in ten (9.7%) of all nursing staff were aged 55 or over, compared to 16.6% in 2019.

**Figure 30: Health and Social Care Services, Northern Ireland – age profile, all nursing staff (2009 and 2019) (headcount)**



Source: Department of Health, Northern Ireland HSC Workforce Census

# 7. Nursing and earnings

## 7.1 All nursing staff

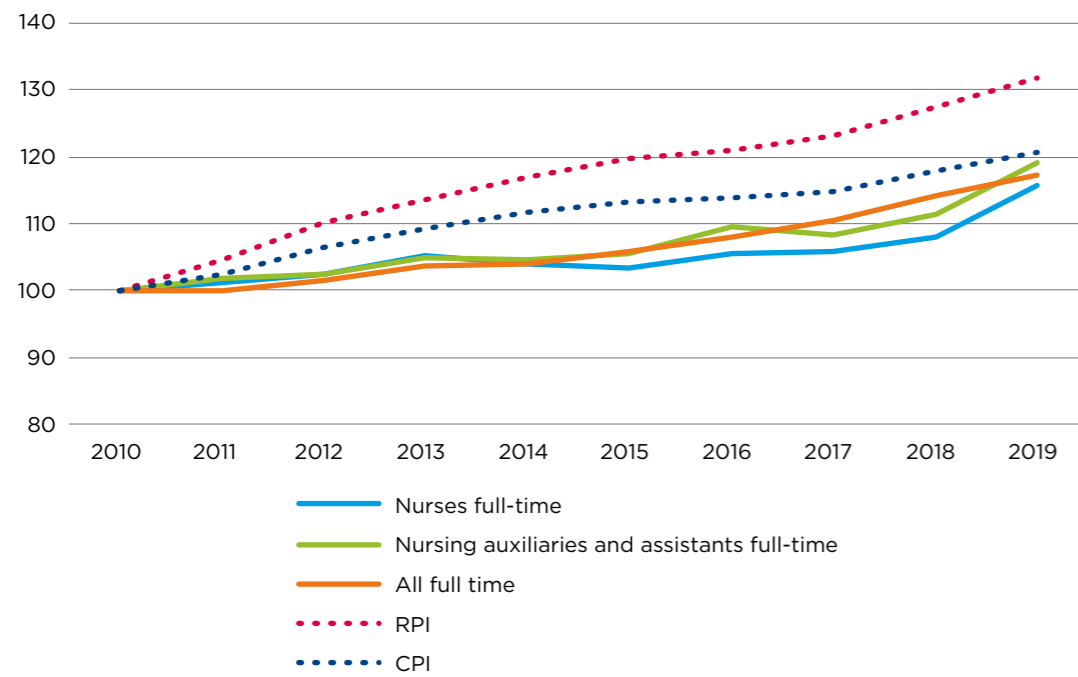
This section looks at average earnings growth for nursing staff compared to other employees in the UK, using Office for National Statistics data.

Figure 31 shows the growth in full-time weekly earnings for all UK nursing staff and all UK employers between 2010 and 2019 (using 2010 as the base). Since 2010, nominal weekly earnings rose by 15.8% for nurses and 19.1% for nursing auxiliaries and assistants, compared to 17.3% for the whole population working full-time. Over this period, the Retail Prices Index (RPI) rose by 30.7% and the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) by 20.8%. This equates to a real-term fall in earnings over this period, with a gap of 14.9% for registered nurses (as measured by RPI) and 11.6% for nursing auxiliaries and assistants.

Between 2010 and 2019 there was below inflation growth in earnings, with the only significant growth seen between 2018 and 2019. Full-time earnings rose by 7.2% for nurses and 6.9% for nursing assistants and auxiliaries, compared to 2.8% for all employees. Given that the NHS is the largest employer of nursing staff, the increase across these occupations is largely driven by rises in salaries as part of a three-year pay award made in England, Wales and Scotland. However, due to the failure to make comparable pay awards in Northern Ireland, salaries for nursing and other health care staff have fallen behind those for colleagues working in other parts of the UK.

In 2019, median weekly full-time earnings for nurses stood at £688 and £421 for nursing auxiliaries and assistants.

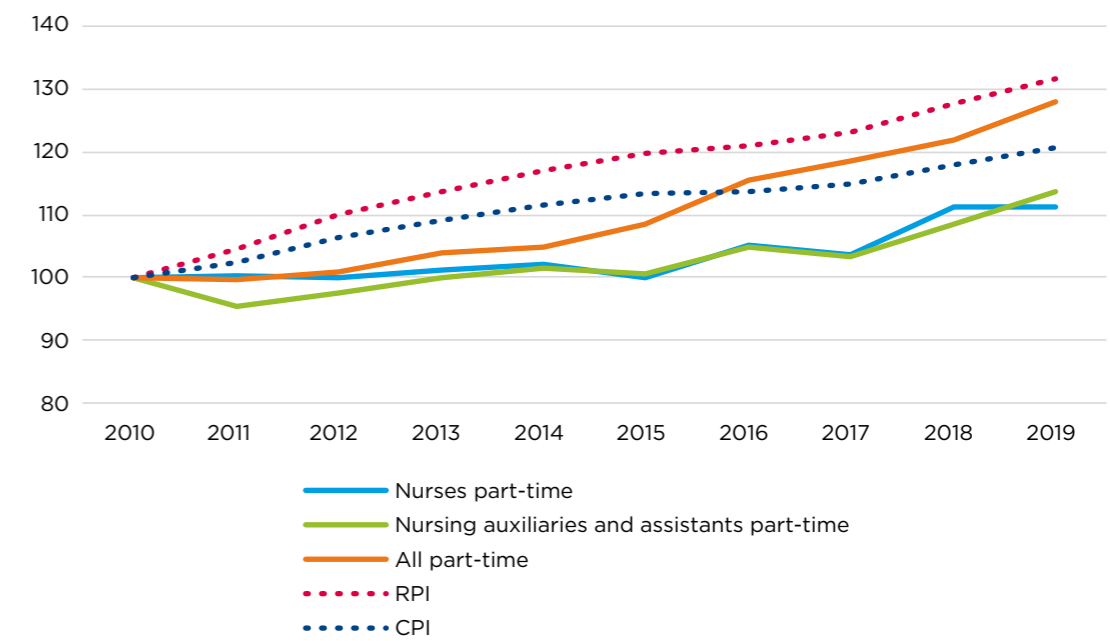
**Figure 31: Median weekly earnings for full-time employees compared to CPI and RPI inflation**  
Index: 2010=100



Source: Office for National Statistics. Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings and Consumer Price Inflation time series dataset

Figure 32 shows median weekly earnings growth for part-time workers between 2010 and 2019. Nursing staff, and nursing auxiliaries and assistants working part-time have experienced a cumulative below inflation fall in earnings over this period. While median earnings for nursing staff have increased by 11.2% and 13.6% for nursing auxiliaries and assistants, RPI has risen by 30.7% and CPI by 20.8%. Growth in earnings for these occupations is also lower than that for all part-time workers who saw an increase of 28.1% between 2010 and 2019. In 2019, median part-time earnings for nursing staff stood at £360 and £220 for nursing auxiliaries and assistants.

**Figure 32: Median weekly earnings for part-time employees compared to CPI and RPI inflation**  
Index: 2010=100



Source: Office for National Statistics. Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings and Consumer Price Inflation time series dataset

## 7.2 NHS earnings

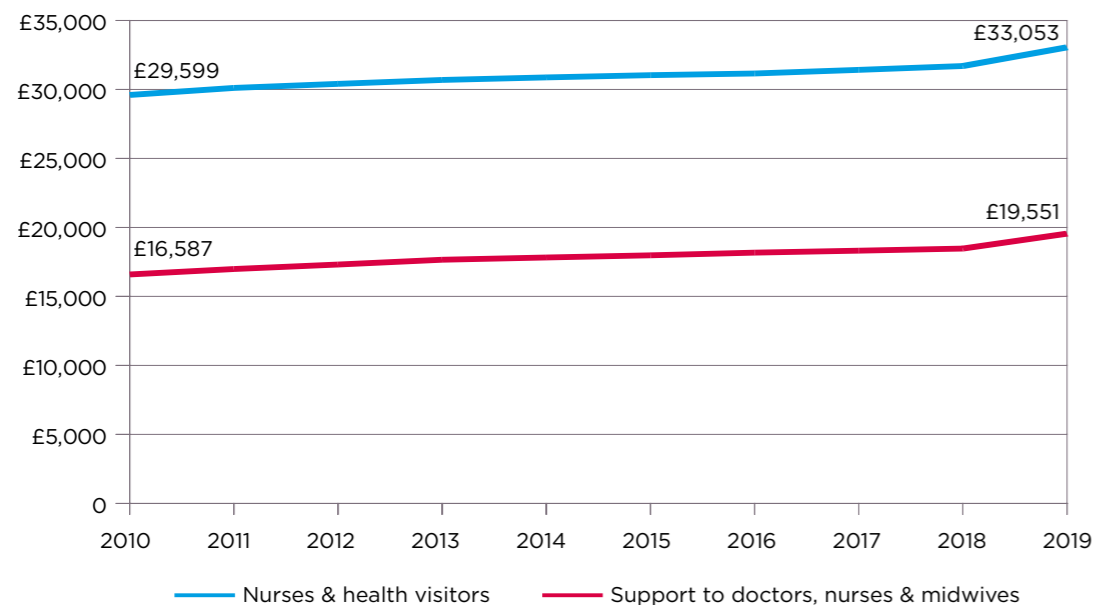
In the NHS, pay has been subject to a policy of public sector pay constraint since 2012, set out in the following timeline.

- **2012** – pay freeze for those earning above £21,000 per year.
- **2013** – 1% consolidated uplift for all staff in UK.
- **2014** – 1% non-consolidated uplift, only for staff at the top of their pay band in England and Northern Ireland; a one-off payment of £187 in Wales; 1% consolidated uplift for all staff in Scotland.
- **2015** – 1% consolidated uplift for those earning up to point 42 of the Agenda for Change pay scale (£56,504) in England; 1% consolidated uplift for all Agenda for Change staff in Wales and Scotland, as well as the Living Wage.
- **2016** – 1% consolidated pay uplift for all staff.
- **2017** – 1% consolidated pay uplift for all staff.
- **2018 to 2020** – three-year agreements in England, Wales and Scotland. Northern Ireland one year pay uplift for 2018/19. Two year agreement (2019-2021) reached in early 2020 following industrial action by health and social care staff, backdated to April 2019.

Figure 33 shows trends in median earnings for nursing staff in England between 2011 and 2017 – specifically, the change in median annual earnings for the following staff groups (comparative data for other UK countries isn't available):

- registered nursing and health visiting staff
- support to doctors and nursing staff (includes health care assistants and support workers).

**Figure 33: Median annual earnings – NHS Hospital and Community Health Service; registered nursing and health visiting staff; and support to doctors and nursing (2010 to 2019)**



Source: NHS Digital

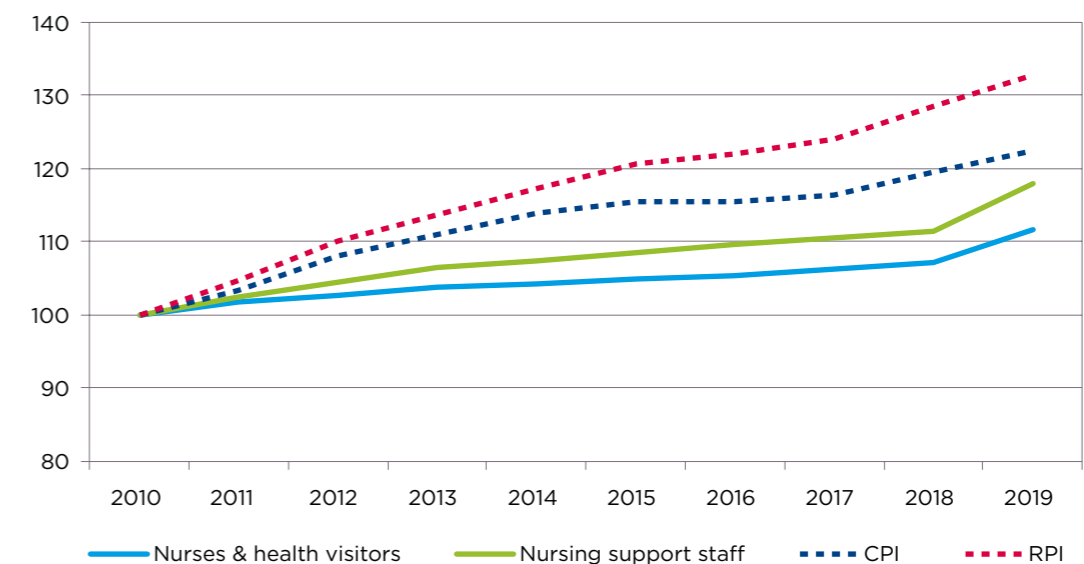
Table 15 shows median annual earnings trend figures compared to CPI and RPI inflation between 2010 and 2019. While median earnings have increased among nursing staff between 11.7% and 17.9% across this period, this growth has been outpaced by increases in the cost of living. Inflation, as measured by CPI, increased by 20.8%; RPI (which includes housing costs) has increased by 30.7%. Table 15 and figure 24 show illustrates the relative change in median annual earnings among registered nurses and support staff against inflation over the period 2010 to 2019.

**Table 15: Median annual earnings compared to inflation (2010 to 2019)**

	2010-2019 increase
Registered nursing and health visiting staff	11.7%
Support to doctors and nursing staff	17.9%
CPI inflation	20.8%
RPI inflation	30.7%

Source: NHS Digital

**Figure 34: Change in median annual earnings: NHS Hospital and Community Health Service; registered nursing and health visiting staff; and support to doctors and nursing staff, compared to RPI and CPI inflation (2010 to 2019)**  
Index: 2010=100



Source: NHS Digital

## 8. Nurse education

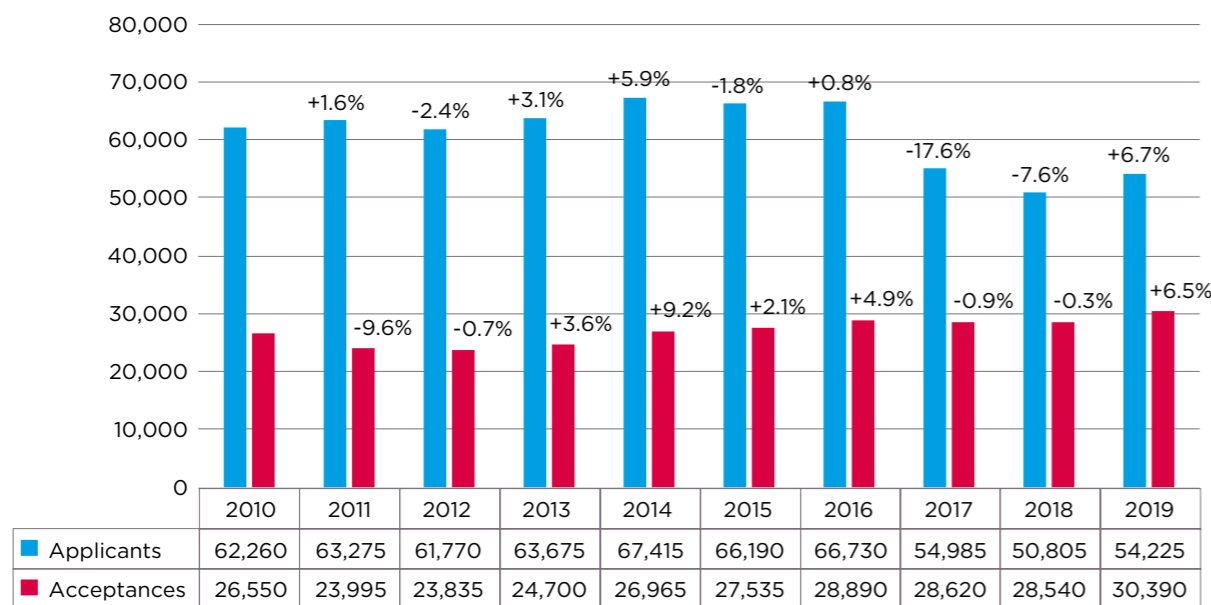
This section looks at data and trends regarding the demand for, and entry to, pre-registration nursing courses in higher education institutions (HEI). This data<sup>12</sup> provides an indication of the future supply of registered nurses into the UK workforce.

### 8.1 Higher education

Figure 35 shows the trend in applicants and acceptances to nursing courses between 2010 and 2019. The overall number of applicants to nursing courses fell by 23.9% between 2016 and 2018 but picked up by 6.5% between 2018 and 2019.

The number of acceptances also fell between 2016 and 2018, but again the trend has been reversed between 2018 and 2019, with a 6.5% increase in acceptances in the last year.

Figure 35: Nursing applicants and acceptances, with year-on-year percentage changes (2010–2019)



Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Table 16 looks at the number of placed applicants to UK university nursing courses. In England, (which accounts for three-quarters of all placed applicants) there was a 3.9% fall in acceptances between 2016 and 2018 which coincided with the removal of the nursing bursary. Between 2018 and 2019, the number has recovered with an annual rise of 6%. The table also shows a substantial rise in the number of placed applicants from countries outside the UK, increasing by three quarters between 2018 and 2019.

Table 16: Placed applicants to nursing courses

	2010	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2010-2019	% change 2018-2019
England	21,165	22,630	22,045	21,745	23,060	9.0%	6.0%
Scotland	3,250	2,950	3,225	3,375	3,655	12.5%	8.3%
Wales	1,080	1,630	1,730	1,785	1,925	78.2%	7.8%
Northern Ireland	500	1,105	1,090	1,090	1,110	122.0%	1.8%
EU	470	515	425	410	410	-12.8%	0.0%
Outside EU	90	60	105	135	235	161.1%	74.1%
Total	26,550	28,890	28,620	28,540	30,390	14.5%	6.5%

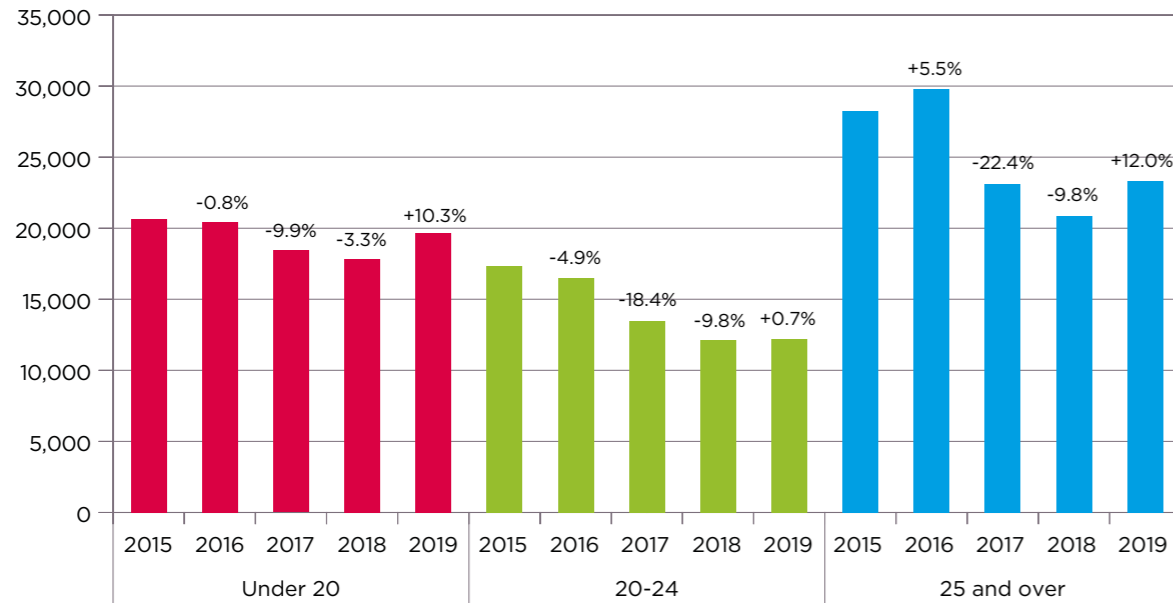
Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

### 8.2 Applicants and acceptances by age

The following section looks at the number of applicants and placed applicants according to age profile. The major change in the age profile of applicants (see Figure 36) has been the drop in the number aged 20 and over. There was a 26% fall among applicants aged between 20 and 24, while there was a 30% fall in applicants aged over 25 between 2016 and 2018. By contrast, there was a 13% fall in the number of applicants aged under 20.

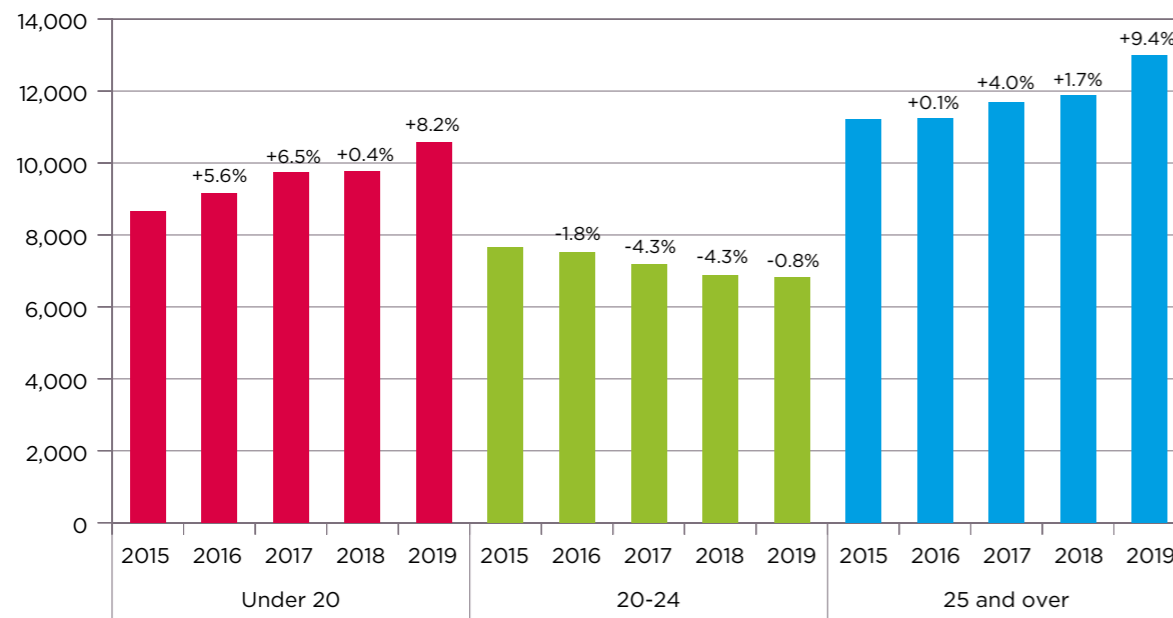
Figure 37 shows the age profile of placed applicants between 2015 and 2019, with an overall 11% decline in the number of those aged between 20 and 24, a 22% rise in the number aged under 20, and a 16% rise in those aged 25 and above.

**Figure 36: Applicants to nursing courses by age, and year-on-year percentage change (2015 to 2019)**



Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

**Figure 37: Placed applicants to nursing courses by age, and year-on-year percentage change (2015 to 2019)**



Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

## References

- 1 SOC 2231 defines nurses as those providing ‘general and/or specialised nursing care for the sick, injured and others in need of such care, assist medical doctors with their tasks and work with other health care professionals and within teams of health care workers. They advise on and teach nursing practice.’
- 2 SOC 6141 defines nursing auxiliaries and assistants as those who ‘assist doctors, nurses and other health professionals in caring for the sick and injured within hospitals, homes, clinics and the wider community.’
- 3 SOC 2232 defines midwives as those who ‘deliver, or assist in the delivery of babies, provide antenatal and postnatal care and advise parents on baby care. They work with other health care professionals and advise on and teach midwifery practice.’
- 4 Full-time and part-time status is self-classified by respondents to the *Labour Force Survey*.
- 5 [www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-accounts/registration-statistics](http://www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-accounts/registration-statistics)
- 6 Data for all four countries is provided as whole time equivalent (WTE) figures and measured at September annually.
- 7 A vacancy is described as the variance between the reported full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in post against planned workforce levels. A vacancy is defined as a post that is unfilled by permanent or fixed-term staff. Agency or temporary staff may fill some vacant posts. Total vacancy rates are a calculation of the total number of FTE vacancies with the total funded or budgeted establishment comprised of the number of staff in post and the number of vacant posts.
- 8 [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/adult-social-care-workforce-data.aspx](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/adult-social-care-workforce-data.aspx)
- 9 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/general-and-personal-medical-services>
- 10 Workforce data has been under review in Scotland due to issues with data quality and in 2014/15 an NHS Scotland wide project to improve the accuracy of recording and reporting on the community nursing workforce was carried out. Longer term trend data is not available as data prior to the completion of the review (for December 2014 and earlier) is not comparable.
- 11 <https://data.sssc.uk.com/data-publications/22-workforce-data-report/216-scottish-social-service-sector-report-on-2018-workforce-data>
- 12 UCAS (2020) 2019 End of Cycle Report. [www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2019-end-cycle-report](http://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2019-end-cycle-report)

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