

# The UK Nursing Labour Market Review 2020

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# The UK nursing labour market review 2020

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.

This report is part of a longstanding series which looks at trends in the nursing labour market across the UK and across different providers of health and social care. However, as this review was undertaken at the end of 2020, as lives, economies and health and social care systems across the world reel from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it can only provide a partial picture of the state of the nursing labour market.

Firstly, this series of reports aims to compile a statistical overview of the labour market. While it is important to provide an objective analysis, the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individual nursing staff and their families cannot be understated. Nursing staff have faced risks of exposure to the virus, both to their physical and mental health and too many have lost their lives. They have faced challenges in securing access to sufficient personal protective equipment and support for their own health and wellbeing. Many have faced disruption in their working lives, including having to shield or self isolate, while others have been redeployed to different roles. Nursing staff also face heightened pressure from new service demands caused by the pandemic, as well as continuing demand, highlighting the importance of the nursing workforce's contribution to health and social care.

Secondly, all of these issues are of great significance in themselves and the RCN will continue to monitor, analyse and describe them as they impact on the RCN membership and wider nursing workforce. As the world and the UK recovers from the pandemic, the impact on the workforce will become clearer, in terms of the numbers of individuals choosing to study nursing, and to work as nurses, midwives or health care support workers. The choice and impact of policy interventions to support the training, education, recruitment and retention of nursing staff will also be clearer. At this point, however, not only do we face a certain time lag in terms of the availability of data which affects our ability to accurately analyse and describe trends in the nursing workforce, but the full impact of the pandemic on the economic, health and social life of the UK is far from clear.

While this labour market review shows an overall upward trend in the number of nursing staff over the last ten years, it is clear that this increase has been insufficient to meet health and social care demands, as all parts of the system face growing vacancy levels. This deficiency has been even more evident by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report also tracks the impact of policy interventions to increase the nursing workforce by encouraging returners to the newly established temporary NMC nursing register and by enabling student nurses and midwives to enter paid clinical placements. These are short-term policies and will only have a limited impact on the number of individuals in the workforce.

As in previous years, this review aims to piece together available data and intelligence from government data sources, from public sector and independent sector employers across the UK and other bodies including the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (Ucas). Improvements in data quality and accessibility are made every year allowing us to paint an increasingly comprehensive picture. However, differences in data collection and publication across the various parts of the health and social care system mean it is not possible to provide a fully comprehensive analysis of the whole workforce.

# 1. Introduction

This report provides a review of the UK nursing labour market, looking 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 data sets to estimate the size, shape and composition of the nursing workforce. The review 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 *Labour Market Review* 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 and that these differences have been identified where significant. For example, some data sets 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 2020

Since March 2020, daily life, the economy and the labour market have changed beyond recognition due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. As many countries, the UK responded to the health crisis by curbing travel and social contact, as well as closing and placing restrictions on shops, restaurants, bars, hotels, and leisure facilities. This led to a rise in unemployment in largely consumer facing industries including retail, hospitality, tourism, leisure, and parts of the transport sector. Job cuts have tended to be concentrated among the self-employed, part-time workers and temporary staff, with women, younger workers and those from a black and ethnicity minority background particularly badly affected.

The major labour market policy response has been through the Government's job retention scheme, with almost 10 million employee jobs furloughed by the end of November 2020, involving employees receiving 80% of their salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500 and remain classed as employed. This was followed by a separate policy aimed at supporting the self-employed. In addition, security benefits were temporarily enhanced for those who lost their jobs or who were already unemployed. Employers also responded in different ways, including switching their operations to enable employees to work from home, or by reducing or altering working hours or frequency of services.

COVID-19 has sent shockwaves through the economy, pushing the UK into its first technical recession since 2009 defined as two consecutive quarters of economic decline. Yet at the time of publication, it is too early to tell the full impact on the economy and the labour market, not least because while the job retention scheme is in place, employer plans and intentions are not clear. It is, however, becoming clear that the crisis will lead to wage stagnation across many industries. This would follow a decade long squeeze on wages, prolonging the weakening of living standards.

The scale, breadth and depth of the pandemic on the UK economy and labour market will depend on how long restrictions are in place and the nature of the transition from the shutdown. Moreover, this transition will be taking place at the same time as the UK's departure from the European Union which will impact on the trade of goods and services between the UK and the EU, as well as the introduction of a new immigration system.

## 3. The UK nursing workforce

Section 3 starts by providing an analysis from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to estimate both the number of nurses, midwives and nursing support workers working in the UK and where they work. It also provides estimates about the number of nursing staff born outside the UK.

### 3.1 Labour Force Survey data

This section provides 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 since 2010.

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 that there were estimated to be around 666,100 people in employment in the occupational category of nurse in 2019/20. There has been an overall increase in the number of nurses in employment of 20.6% between 2010/11 and 2019/20.

There are an estimated 354,500 people in employment in the category of nursing auxiliaries and assistants in the UK in 2019/20, representing a rise of 39% over the previous 10 years.

The number of midwives in employment is estimated to be 49,400, rising by 49.2% between 2010/11 and 2019/20.

The total number of people in employment in the UK rose by 11.2% from around 24.9 million to 27.7 million between 2010/11 and 2019/20.

Over this period, the number of people classed as self employed rose by 23.4% marking an important shift in the UK labour market. This represents a rise from 13.7% 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.

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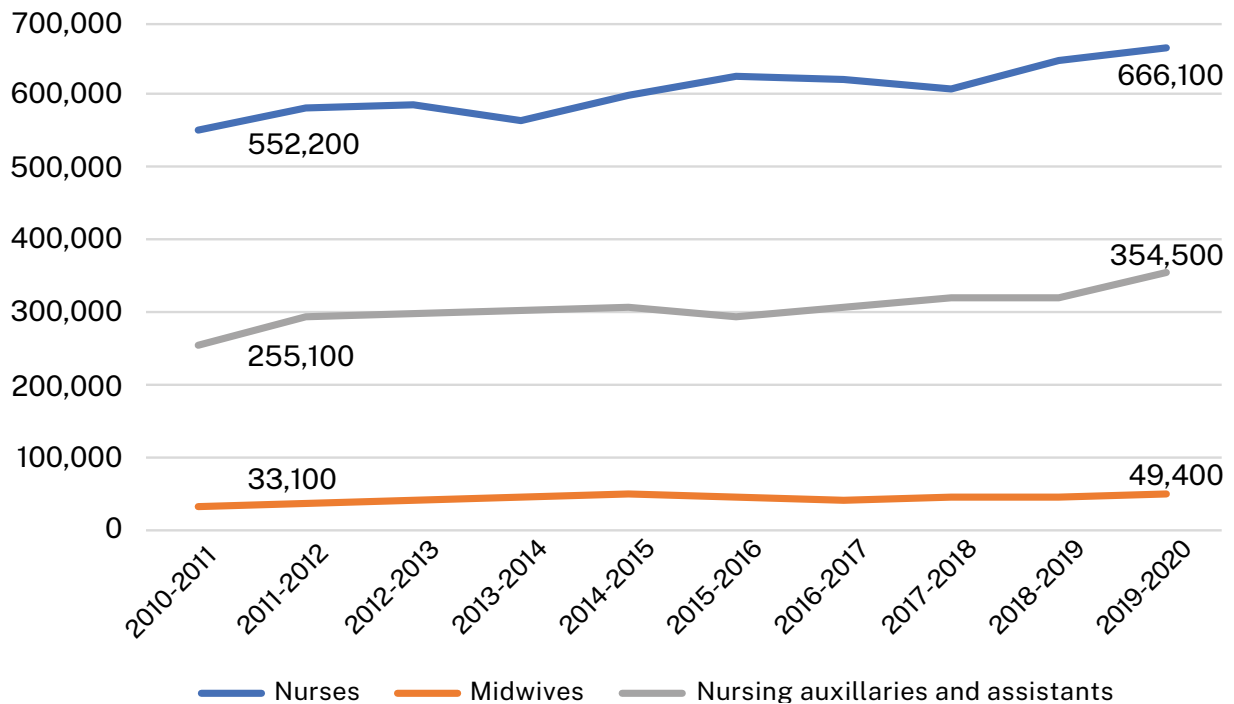
1. SOC 2231 defines nurses as those providing 'general and/or specialised nursing care for the sick, injured and others in need of such care, assist medical doctors with their tasks and work with other health care professionals and within teams of health care workers. They advise on and teach nursing 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.'



**Figure 1: Nurses, midwives and nursing assistants/auxiliaries in employment (2010/11 - 2019/20)**

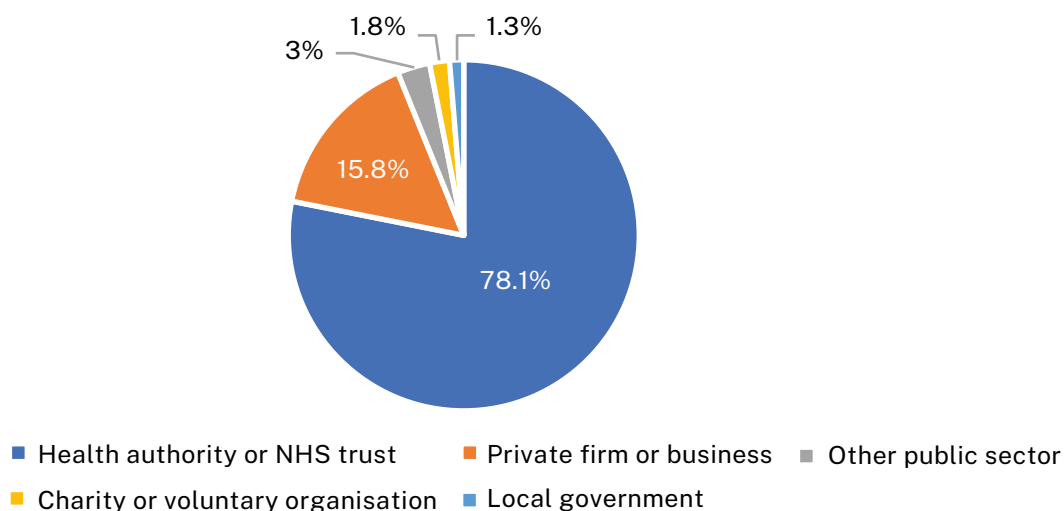


Source: Analysis of Annual Population Surveys 2010/11-2019/20

Figures 2 and 3 provide an analysis of LFS data for nursing staff in employment according to sector of work. They show that the majority of both nurses (78%) and nursing auxiliaries/assistants (63%) work for health authorities or NHS trusts/boards. A higher proportion of nursing auxiliaries/assistants (27%) than nurses and midwives (15.8%) work for private firms or businesses.

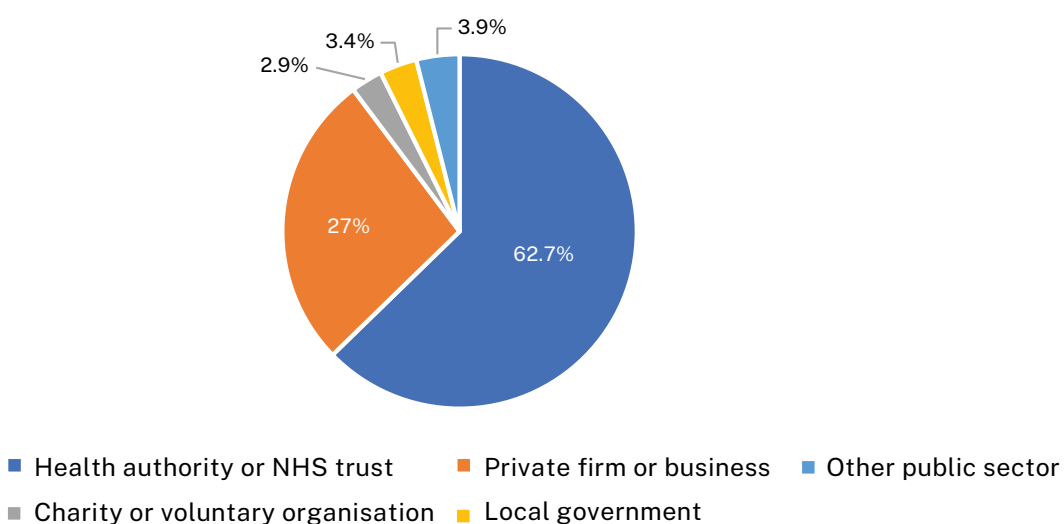
### 3.1.2 Sector of work

Figure 2: Nurses and midwives in employment by sector of work (2020)



Source: Analysis of Labour Force Survey April - June 2020

Figure 3: Nursing auxiliaries and assistants in employment by sector of work (2020)



Source: Analysis of Labour Force Survey April - June 2020

### 3.1.3 Part-time working

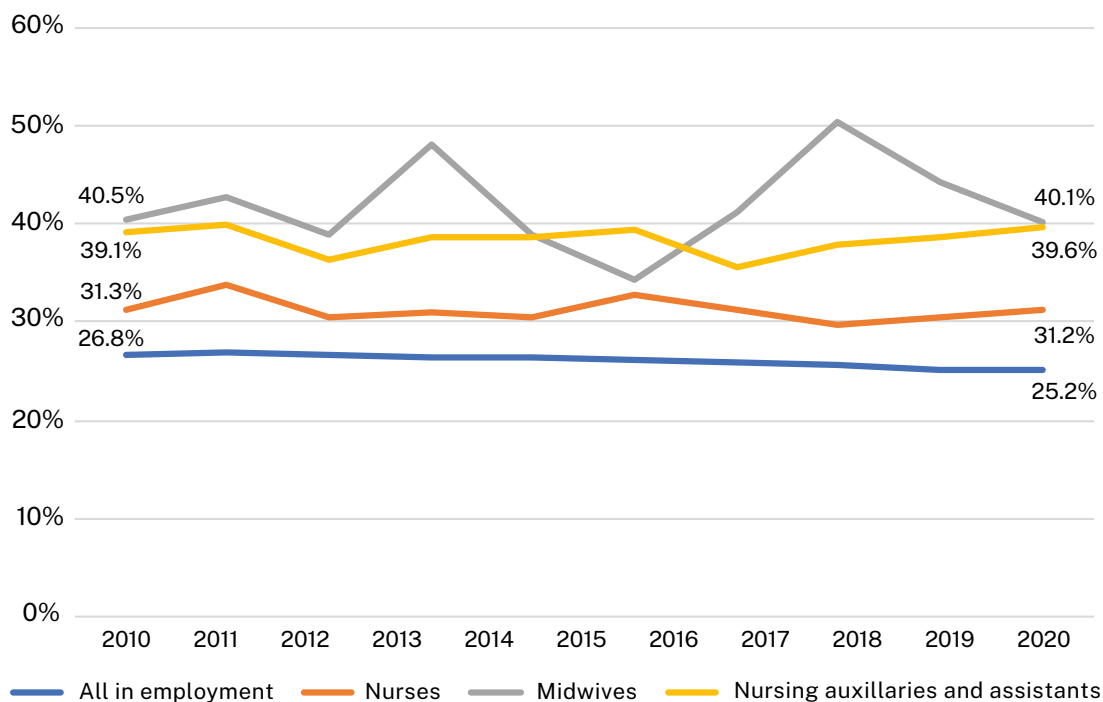
Figure 4 shows estimates of part-time working among the nursing workforce in employment (excluding self-employed) as compared to the whole UK working population.<sup>4</sup>

In 2010/11, almost a third (31.3%) of nurses reported working part-time, with the proportion barely shifting over the ten-year period to period to 2019/20. The proportion of midwives working part-time has fluctuated to a greater extent over this time, varying between 50.2% and 34.4%.

Among nursing auxiliaries and assistants, 39.1% reported working part-time in 2009/10, and 39.6% reported doing so in 2019/20.

The chart shows that part-time working is clearly more common in the nursing workforce than the UK workforce as a whole, with around a quarter of all UK employees reporting they worked part-time in 2018/19. This can be explained by the high proportion of women in the nursing workforce – while it is estimated that half of all those in employment in the UK are women, 82% of nursing assistants and auxiliaries and 87% of nurses are women.

**Figure 4: Proportion of nurses, nursing auxiliaries/assistants and all UK employees working part-time (2010/11-2019/20)**



Source: Analysis of the Annual Population Survey (2010/11-2019/20)

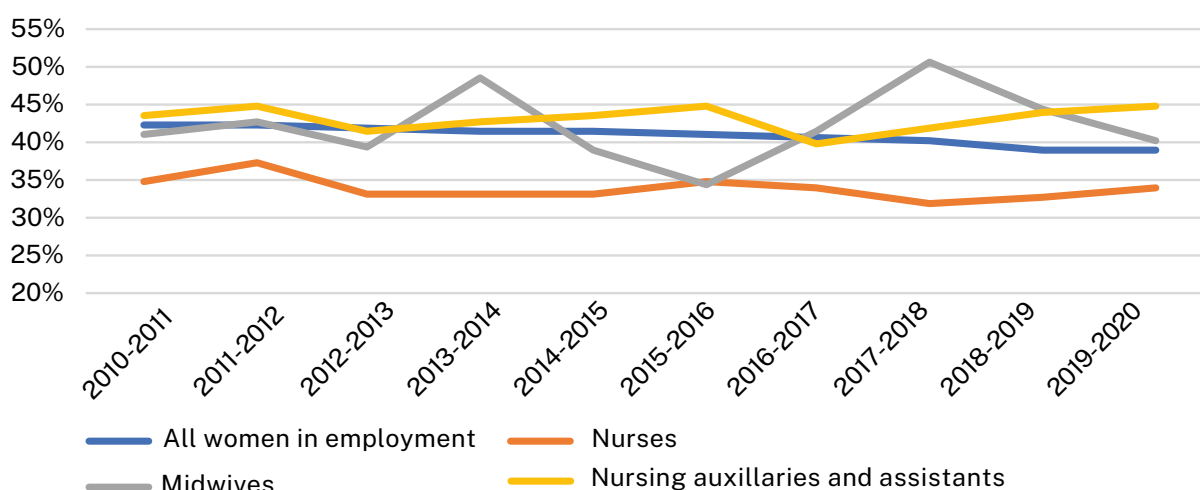
4. Full-time and part-time status is self-classified by respondents to the Labour Force Survey.

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 2019/20, four in ten (39%) of all women reported working part-time compared to 12% of men.

Between 2001/11 and 2019/20, the rate of part-time working among the female workforce has stayed in the range of 32% to 37% between 20/10 among nurses; between 40% and 45% for midwives and between 40% and 49% for nursing assistants and auxiliaries.

**Figure 5: Proportion of female nurses, midwives, nursing auxiliaries/assistants and all female UK employees working part-time (2010/11 - 2019/20)**



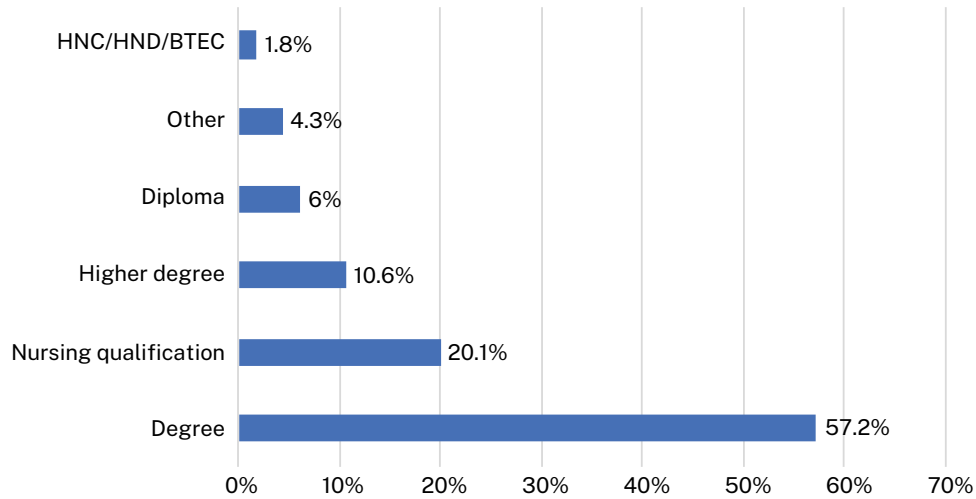
Source: Analysis of the Annual Population Survey 2010/11-2019/20

### 3.1.4 Qualifications

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

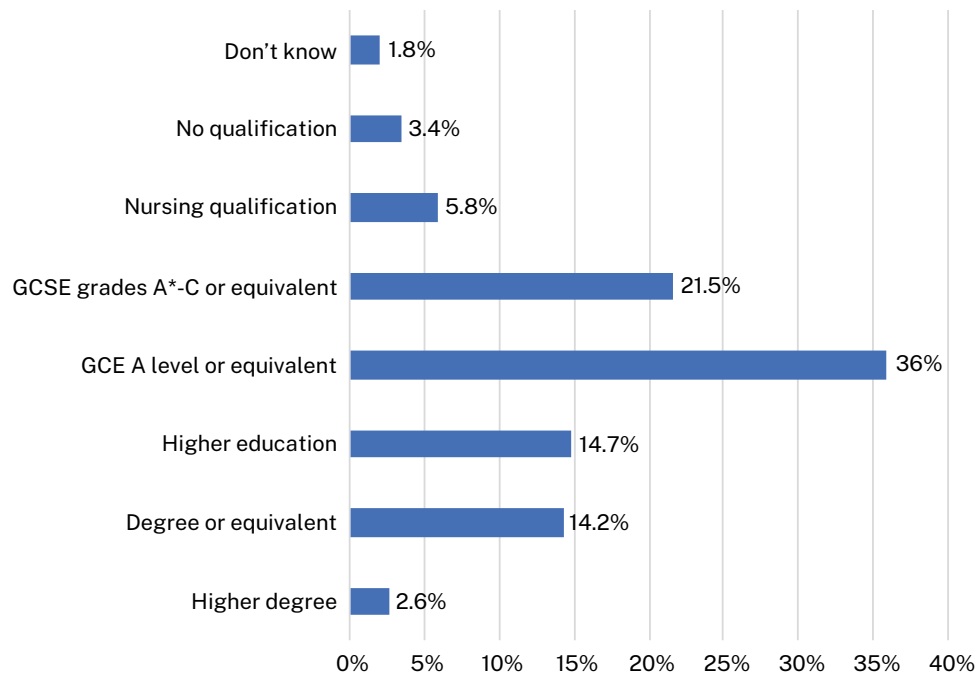
Figure 6 shows that almost six in ten (56.7%) of all nurses and midwives hold a degree or higher degree, with a further 28.1% holding a nursing qualification as their highest level of qualification. Figure 7 shows that 16.8% of all nursing assistants and auxiliaries hold a degree or higher degree, with a further 50.7% holding a qualification equivalent to or higher than an A level (including HNC/HND/BTEC).

**Figure 6: Nurses and midwives – highest qualification held**



Source: Analysis of the Annual Population Survey April-June 2020

**Figure 7: Nursing assistants and auxiliaries – highest qualifications held**



Source: Analysis of the Annual Population Survey April-June 2020

## 4. Nursing and Midwifery Council data

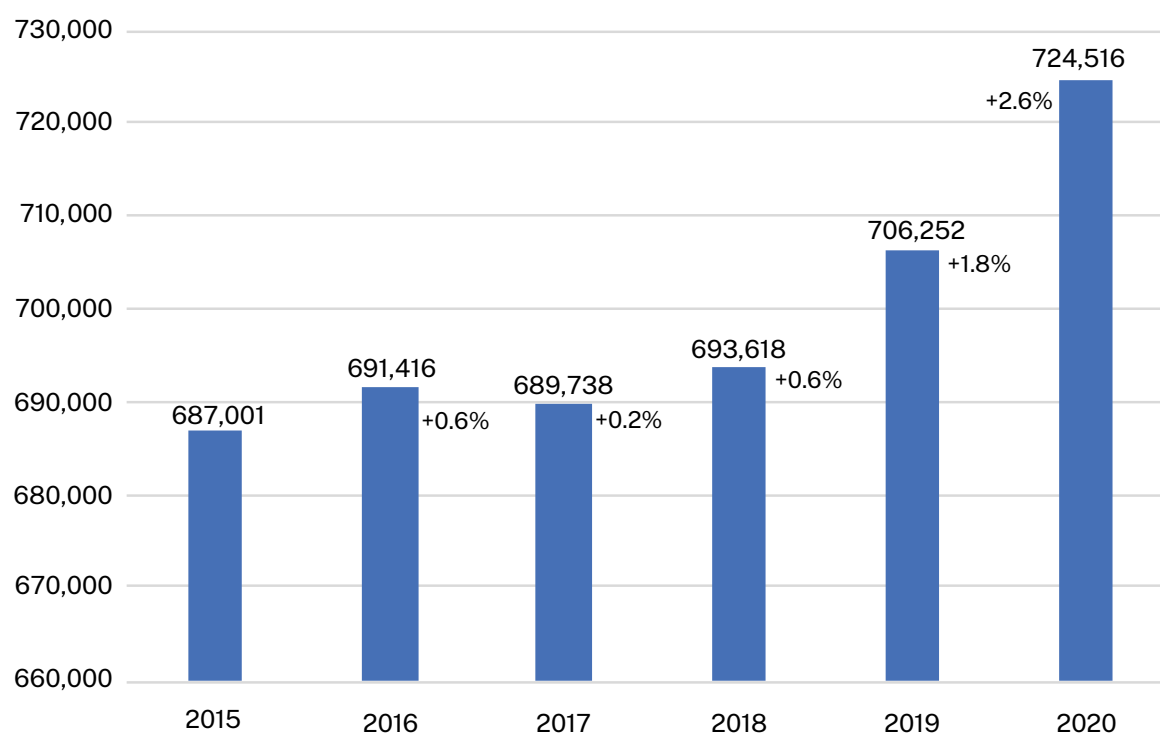
This section provides data from the NMC Register to look at recent trends in the number of nurses and midwives registered in the UK. All nurses and midwives who practise in the UK must be on the register, however this does not necessarily mean they are working as a nurse or midwife.

### 4.1 Number of registrants

Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) data shows that there were 724,516 nurses, midwives and nursing associates on the register as of September 2020, representing an increase of 18,264 (2.6%) since September 2019.<sup>5</sup>

It is also worth noting that at the time of reporting, there were 12,756 nurses and midwives on the COVID-19 temporary register, and between April and September, almost 2,000 people left the temporary register to join the permanent one.

**Figure 8: Number of nursing and midwifery registrants, with year-on-year percentage changes (2015-2020)**



Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

5. [www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-accounts/registration-statistics/](http://www.nmc.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-accounts/registration-statistics/)

Table 1 breaks these figures down into more detail according to type of registrant. Since 2015, there has been a 4.8% increase in the number of nurses, a 21.0% increase in the number of midwives and a fall of 29.5% in registrants with joint nursing and midwifery registration.

The table also tracks the entry of nursing associates onto the register, with 1,219 joining as registrants in England between 2019 and 2020. 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 2020**

Registration Type	2015	2019	2020	% change 2015-20	% change 2019-20
Midwife	32,117	37,255	38,855	21.0%	4.3%
Nurse	644,769	660,213	675,803	4.8%	2.4%
Nurse and Midwife	10,115	7,296	7,151	-29.5%	-2.0%
Nursing Associate	N/A	1,488	2,707	N/A	81.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>687,001</b>	<b>706,252</b>	<b>724,516</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>

Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

Table 2 shows the breakdown of registrants into the four main fields of practice. It should be noted, however, that one nurse or midwife can register multiple fields of practice. Across these four fields of practice, just over three quarters (77%) are registered as adult nurses, 7.6% are registered as children's nurses, 2.5% are registered as learning disability nurses and 12.9% as mental health nurses in 2020. Since 2015, the number of children's nurses has risen by 13.0%, while there has been a fall in the number of learning disabilities nurses of 3.9%.

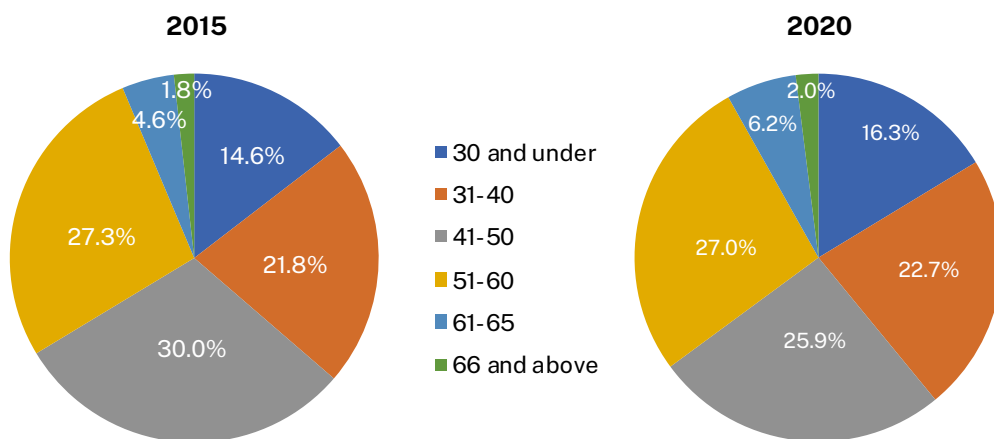
**Table 2: Number of nursing and midwifery registrants by four main fields of practice 2015 to 2020**

	2015	2019	2020	% change 2015-20	% change 2019-20
Adult	529,648	533,078	544,361	2.9%	2.1%
Children	47,370	51,998	53,539	13.0%	3.0%
Learning Disabilities	18,199	17,383	17,494	-3.9%	0.6%
Mental Health	90,110	89,831	91,215	1.2%	1.5%

Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

Figure 9 shows the age profile of NMC registrants and compares 2015 to 2020. This shows that the proportion of older registrants has grown over a relatively short period. In 2015, 17.3% were aged 56 or over; in 2020, it is 20.8%.

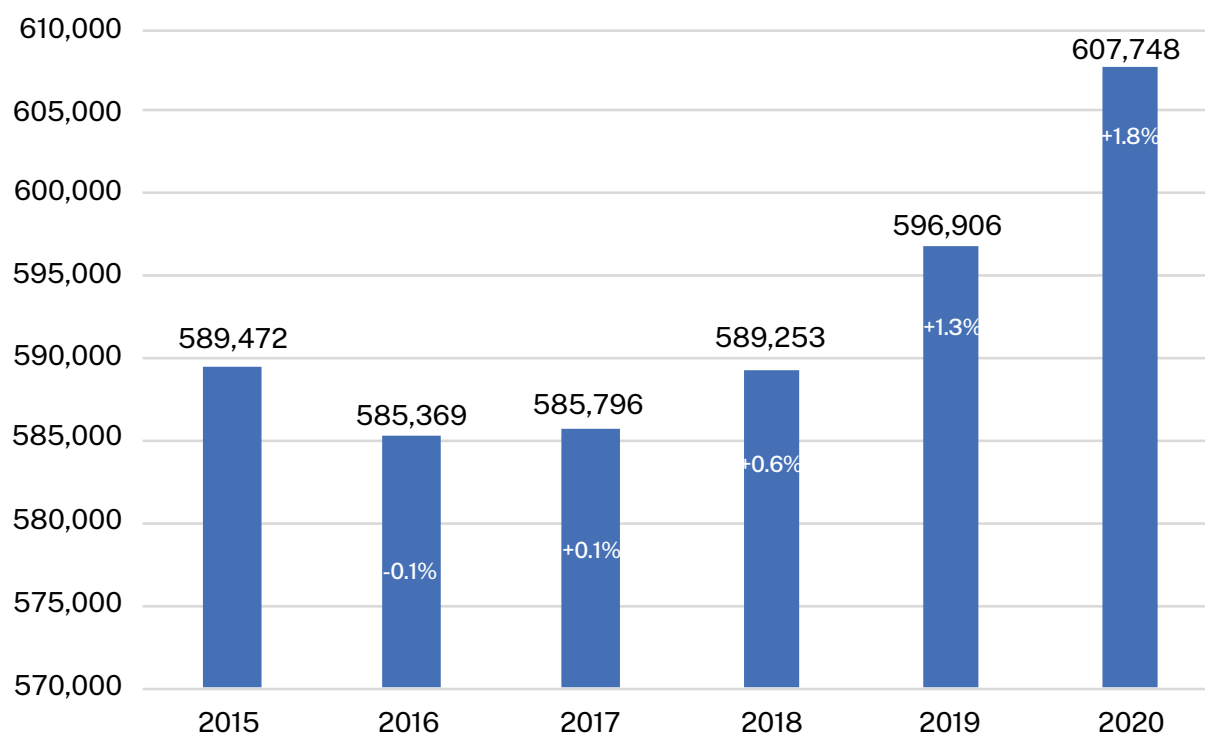
Figure 9: Registrants by age 2015 compared to 2020



Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

Figures 10 and 11 show the numbers of registrants according to their country of registration. Figure 10 shows that of the total number of registrants, 607,748 (84.8%) are nurses and midwives first registered in the UK. Of those nurses and midwives first registered in the UK, 79.6% qualified in England; 11.9% in Scotland; 5% in Wales; and 3.6% in Northern Ireland.

Figure 10: Number of nurses, midwives and nursing associates on the NMC register first registered in the UK, with year-on-year percentage changes (2015-2020)



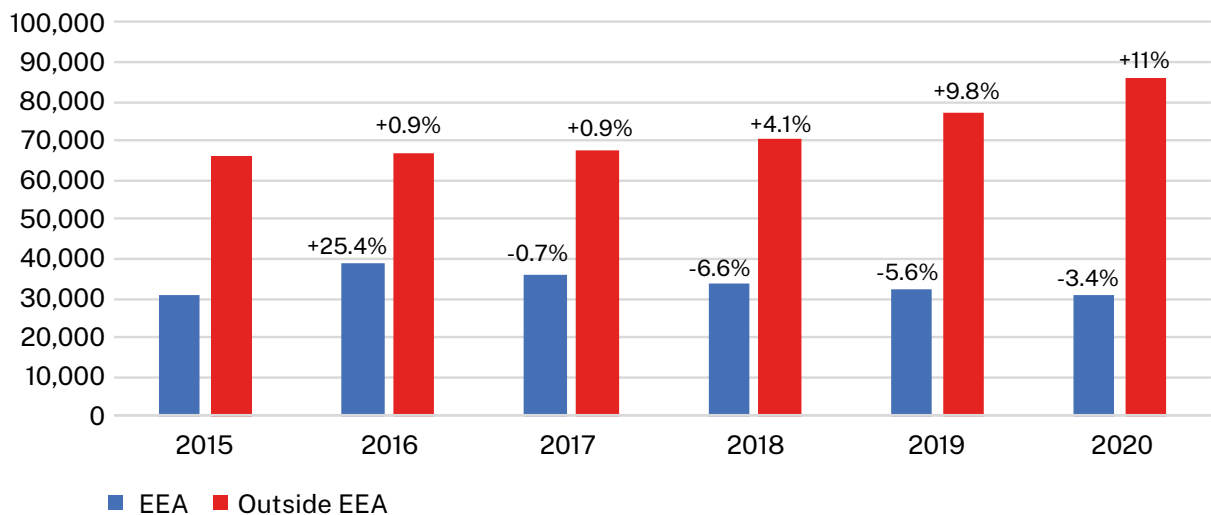
Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council



Figure 11 shows there are a further 30,895 (4.3%) nurses and midwives who trained in the EU or European Economic Area (EEA) and registered to work in the UK. In addition, 85,873 (12.0%) are nurses and midwives first registered outside the EEA. The majority of those registrants first registered outside the EEA qualified either in the Philippines (39.1%) or India (29.0%).

The number of nurses and midwives first qualified in the EEA has fallen by 20.8% since 2015, while the number qualified outside the EEA has grown by 28.1%. This coincides broadly 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 NMC register, first registered in the EEA and outside the EEA, with year on year percentage changes (2015-2020)**



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>EEA</b>	31,099	38,992	36,259	33,874	31,973	30,895
<b>Outside EEA</b>	66,430	67,055	67,683	70,491	77,373	85,873

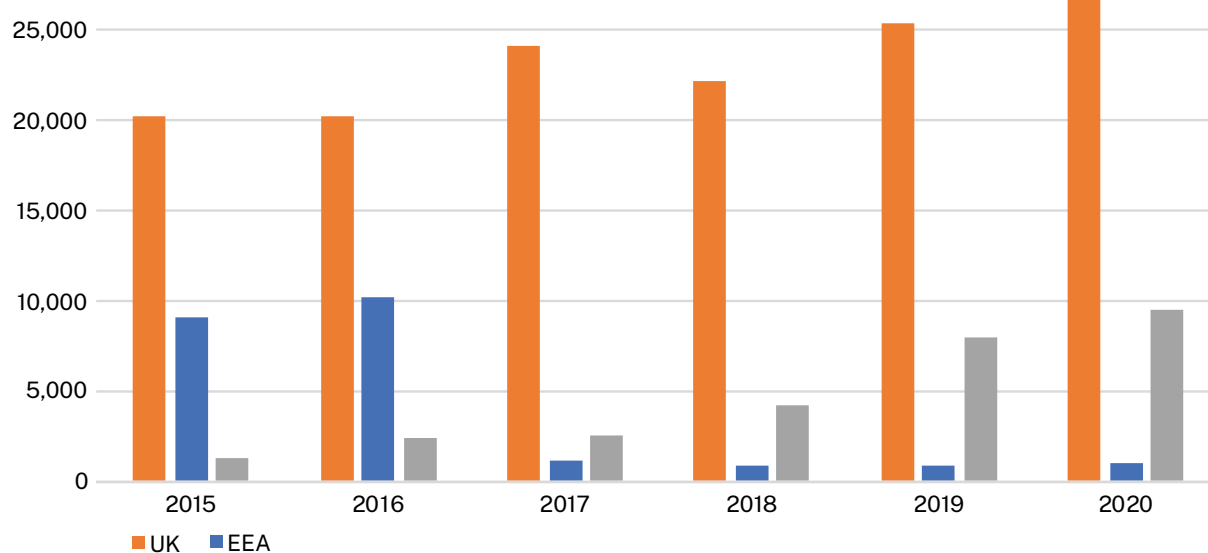
Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

## 4.2 NMC new entrants

Looking at new entrants to the NMC register, the overall number (including UK, EEA and non-EEA registrants) stood at 37,324 in 2020 – a rise of 9.0% from 2019. This is largely accounted for by a significant rise in the number of entrants from nurses first registered outside the EEA.

- UK new entrants: 26,841 (71.9% of all new entrants)
- EEA new entrants: 938 (2.5%)
- Non-EEA new entrants: 9,545 (25.6%)

Figure 12: Number of new entrants to the UK nursing register (2016 to 2020)



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>UK</b>	20,231	20,279	24,204	22,170	25,346	26,841
<b>EEA</b>	9,038	10,179	1,107	888	885	938
<b>Outside EEA</b>	1,323	2,389	2,475	4,196	8,011	9,545
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,592</b>	<b>32,847</b>	<b>27,786</b>	<b>27,254</b>	<b>34,242</b>	<b>37,324</b>

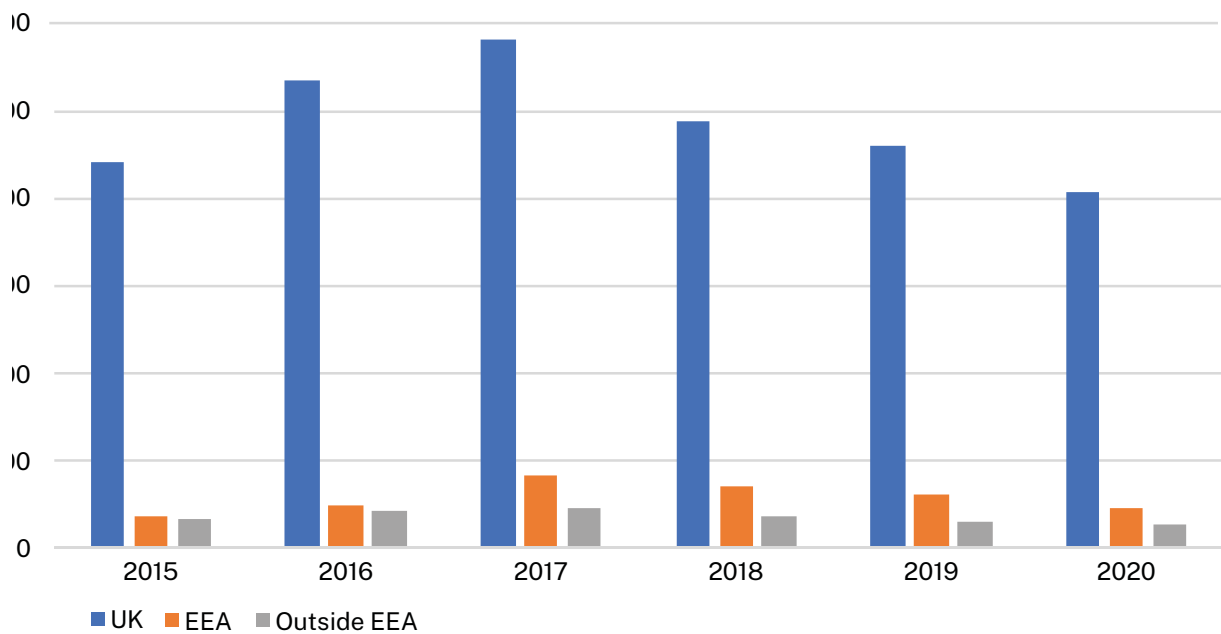
Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

### 4.3 Numbers leaving the NMC register

In 2020, a total of 23,836 registrants left the register which included:

- 20,282 (85.1%) who initially registered in the UK
- 2,236 (9.4%) initially registered in the EEA
- 1,318 (5.5%) from outside the EEA

Figure 13: Number of leavers to the UK nursing register (2015 to 2020)



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>UK</b>	22,094	26,653	29,019	24,369	23,045	20,282
<b>EEA</b>	1,743	2,435	4,068	3,560	3,064	2,238
<b>Outside EEA</b>	1,684	2,090	2,276	1,857	1,480	1,480
<b>Total</b>	<b>25,521</b>	<b>31,178</b>	<b>35,363</b>	<b>29,786</b>	<b>27,589</b>	<b>23,836</b>

Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

## 5. The nursing workforce in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Section 5 looks at trends in the nursing workforce across the four UK countries between 2015 and 2020.<sup>6</sup>

This section concentrates on the NHS in England, Scotland and Wales and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland as the main employer of nursing staff. 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 section also attempts to draw on other data sources to build a picture of the wider workforce, for example in general practice and in adult social care where possible. The extent to which data is collected and published varies across each UK country. Moreover, differences in the ways health and social care are structured and provided across all countries mean that comparisons cannot easily be drawn. All efforts have been made to ensure consistency between measures but there are variations in definitions and methods of data collection between the different countries.

Section 5.1 provides an overview of the NHS workforce and uses a timeframe which allows for consistent comparison of data; the most recent data which allows full comparison of workforce numbers is March 2020. Sections 5.2 to 5.5 provide more detailed analysis of workforce data for each of the UK countries and uses the most recent data available.

This situation has obvious implications for the ability to assess the impact of COVID-19 on key workforce metrics. It is therefore difficult to ascertain the full effect of government and employer policies or how nursing staff have responded to changing circumstances. In response to the pandemic, steps were taken to increase the number of staff, to promote flexibility and to provide support to ensure workers were deployed where they were most needed. Nurses and midwives who had left the NMC register, as well as overseas registrants, joined the emergency register, while student nurses and midwives were given the choice to opt in to paid clinical placements. Other policy responses have been enacted such as technological developments to enable faster deployment of bank staff. However, the lack of data on numbers of bank staff in the NHS make it impossible to assess the full impact.

This analysis takes into account methodological changes made by NHS Digital in England, which is responsible for the provision of NHS workforce data. These methodological changes have involved the re-categorisation of the workforce, which in turn impacts on the comparability with previously published workforce numbers which have been used in previous editions of the RCN's *Labour Market Review*.

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6. Data for all four countries is provided as whole time equivalent (WTE) figures and measured at March annually, apart from September 2015 figures for Wales

## 5.1 Comparison of workforce data across the UK

Tables 3 to 5 track trends in workforce numbers between 2015 and 2020 across the UK. Over the last five years, there has been overall growth in the whole NHS workforce in all countries, with the strongest growth seen in England and Wales. In the nursing workforce, the nursing support workforce has generally grown at a faster rate than the registered nursing workforce in all countries, however the trend has been less pronounced in Scotland.

**Table 3: Full-time equivalent (FTE) and percentage change in the whole workforce, 2015-20, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

	2015	2019	2020	% change 2015-2020	% change 2019-20
England	1,143,102	1,205,246	1,289,793	12.8%	7.0%
Scotland	137,604	140,881	143,441	4.2%	1.8%
Wales	73,971	80,070	83,404	12.8%	4.2%
Northern Ireland	53,913	58,037	59,785	10.9%	3.0%

**Table 4: Full-time equivalent (FTE) and percentage change in the registered nursing, midwifery and health visiting workforce, 2015-20, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

	2015	2019	2020	% change 2015-2020	% change 2019-20
England	304,360	311,880	323,611	6.3%	3.8%
Scotland	43,383	44,052	44,609	2.8%	1.3%
Wales	22,195	22,745	22,949	3.4%	0.9%
Northern Ireland	14,614	15,305	15,692	7.4%	2.5%

**Table 5: Full-time equivalent (FTE) and percentage change in the nursing support workforce, 2015-2020, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

	2015	2019	2020	% change 2015-2020	% change 2019-20
England	228,424	252,060	264,763	15.9%	5.0%
Scotland	15,717	15,968	16,166	2.9%	1.2%
Wales	9,717	10,419	10,690	10.0%	2.6%
Northern Ireland	4,019	4,433	4,447	10.6%	0.3%

### Notes on tables 4 and 5:

- England**<sup>7</sup>. Table 4 figures are FTE registered nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in hospital and community services. Table 5 figures are nursing support staff. (March figures)
- Scotland**<sup>8</sup>. Table 4 figures are nursing and midwifery staff, bands 5–9 in NHS Scotland. Table 5 figures are 1-4 nursing and midwifery staff in NHS Scotland. (March figures)
- Wales**<sup>9</sup>. Table 4 figures are FTE registered nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and nursing support staff in hospitals and the community. Table 5 figures are FTE nursing assistant practitioner, nursery nurse, nursing assistant/auxiliary, pre-registration learner. (September 2015, March 2019 and March 2020 figures)
- Northern Ireland**<sup>10</sup>. Table 4 figures are FTE registered nursing and midwifery staff in the health and social care workforce. Table 5 figures are FTE nurse support staff. (March figures)

## 5.2 NHS England nursing workforce

This section brings together available data on the nursing workforce across the different parts of the NHS. It starts by examining the largest group of workers which are those employed in hospital and community settings, in terms of workforce numbers and vacancy levels. It then turns to workers outside these settings, including those directly employed by independent sector health care providers (including those who are providing NHS commissioned services) and those working in general practice.

### 5.2.1 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 July 2010 and July 2020. It is worth noting that the following figures for 2020 include staff who joined or returned to the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has been an overall increase of 8.2% in the FTE number of registered nurses, health visitors and midwives between 2010 and 2020 (rising from 299,310 to 323,885). The number of staff reached its lowest point in this period in 2012, standing at 291,570.

Between 2019 and 2020, the number of registered nurses, health visitors and midwives has risen by 4.5%.

There has been an overall increase of 26.4% increase in the numbers of support staff to doctors, nurses and midwives between 2010 and 2020 (rising from 224,578 to 283,896). In a similar trend to registered nursing staff, the number of support staff was at its lowest point of 213,549 in this period in 2012.

Between 2019 and 2020, the number of support staff to doctors, nurses and midwives has risen by 11.1%, which is likely to reflect the number of nursing students on paid placements as part of the temporary COVID-19 response.

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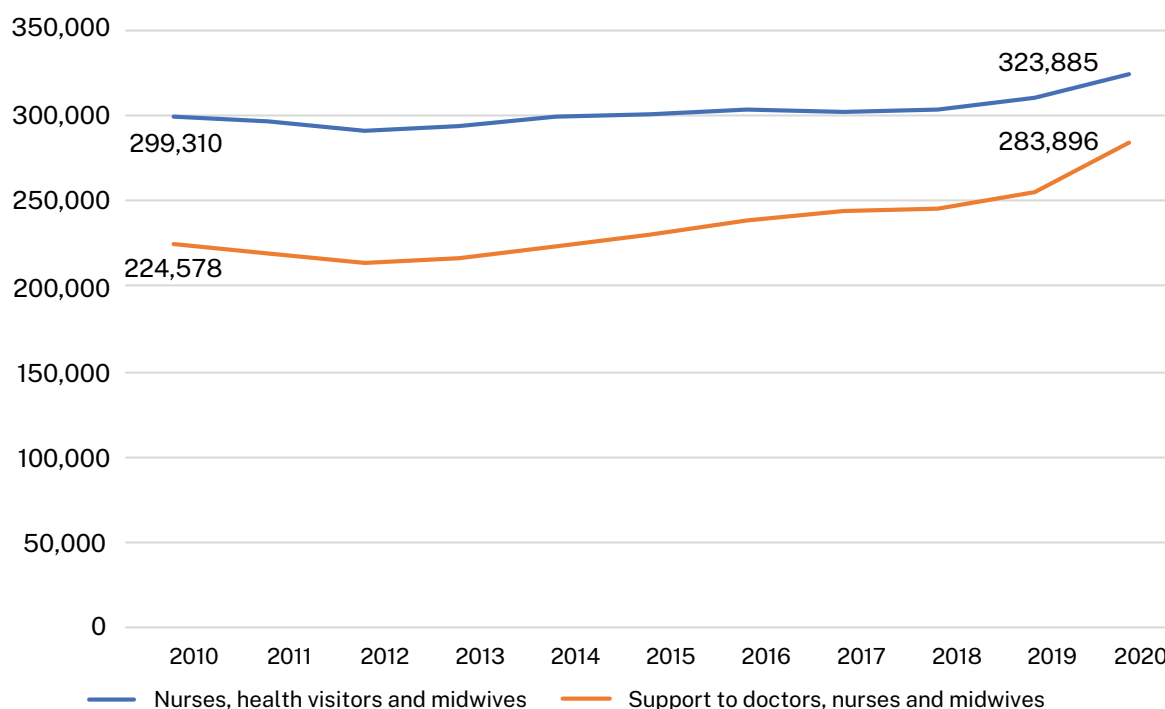
7. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics>

8. <https://turasdata.nes.nhs.scot/workforce-official-statistics/>

9. <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Staff>

10. [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)

**Figure 14: Registered nurses, health visitors and midwives; support staff to doctors, nurses and midwives (FTE), 2010-2020**



Source: NHS Digital

Table 6 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 (60.2%), and small increases in the adult nursing (14.2%) maternity (24.2%) and midwifery workforces (13.8%) all other groups have seen decreases in this period. The learning disabilities workforce has been particularly badly hit, suffering a 38.5% decrease between 2010 and 2020.

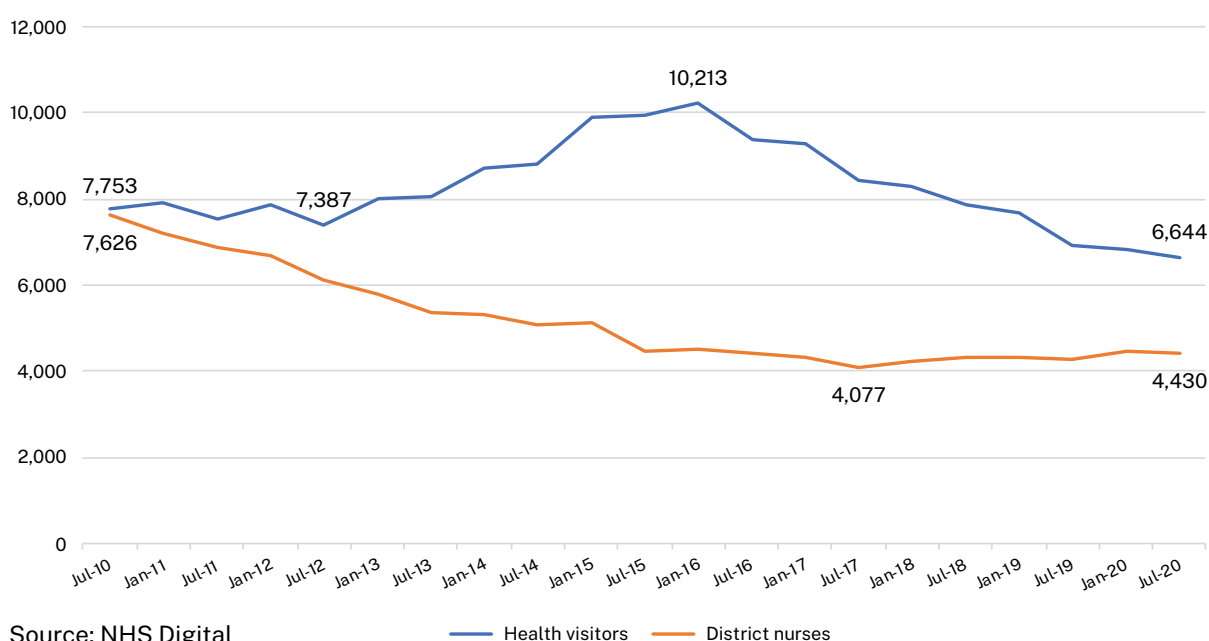
**Table 6: England, registered nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (FTE) by work area (2010-2020)**

	2010	2019	2020	% change 2010-2020	% change 2019-2020
All	299,310	309,920	323,885	8.2%	4.5%
Adult nursing	169,428	183,707	193,411	14.2%	5.3%
Children's nursing	15,004	22,927	24,036	60.2%	4.8%
Community health nursing	41,554	35,327	36,379	-12.5%	3.0%
Mental health nursing	40,387	36,028	37,421	-7.3%	3.9%
Learning disabilities/difficulties	5,227	3,192	3,217	-38.5%	0.8%
Other nurses	588	293	730	24.2%	148.8%
Health visitors	7,753	6,931	6,644	-14.3%	-4.1%
Midwives	19,369	21,515	22,049	13.8%	2.5%

Source: NHS Digital

Figure 15 looks in more detail at community nursing, concentrating on the number of health visitors and district nurses. This shows that while the FTE number of health visitors and district nurses started at similar levels in 2010, the number of district nurses has fallen by 41.6%, while the number of health visitors grew by 28.3% between 2010 and 2015, peaking at almost 10,000. However, since then, the number has fallen even below 2010 levels to 6,644.

**Figure 15: England, registered nursing workforce (FTE), health visitors and district nurses 2010-2020**



Source: NHS Digital

### 5.2.2 Vacancies

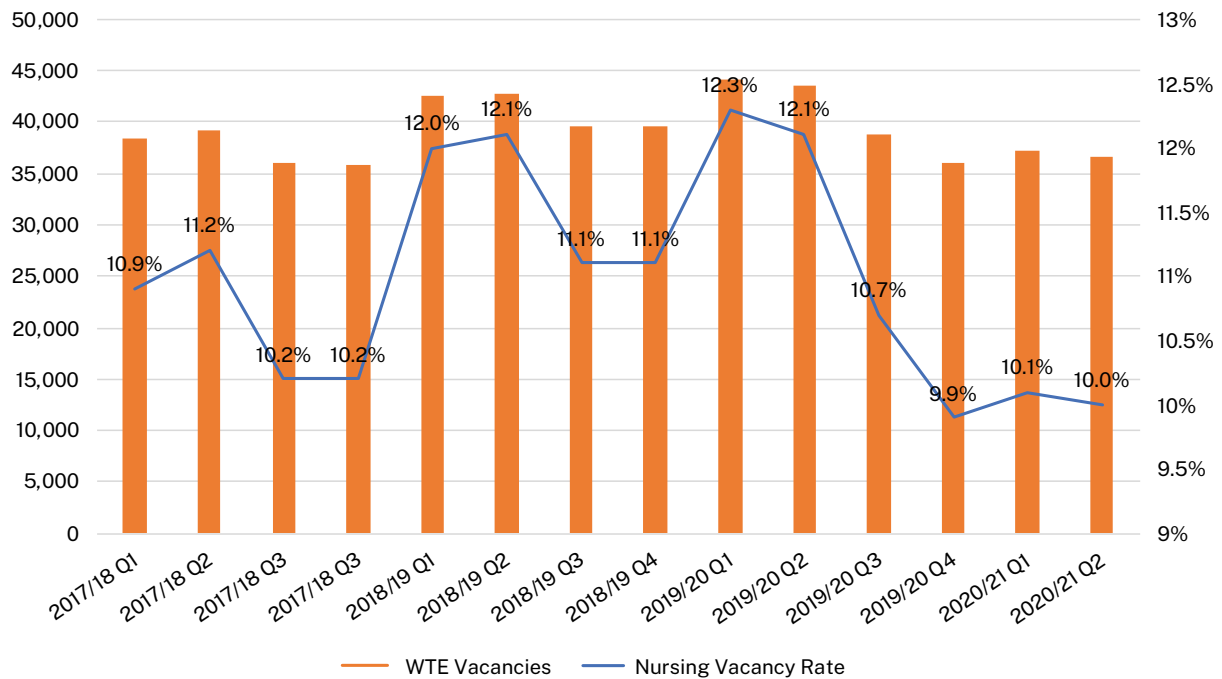
Figure 16 shows the number of vacancies and the vacancy rate from 2017 to 2020 in the registered nursing workforce in the NHS in England. During their period, the number of vacancies started at 38,328 (10.9% vacancy rate) and peaked at 44,195 (12.3% vacancy rate) in the first quarter of 2019/20.

The latest available data on local vacancy rates shows the variance across England, with the highest rates in London (13.0%) and the Midlands (10.9%) and the lowest in the North East and Yorkshire (8.1%) and the South West (6.4%).

However, caution must be taken in interpreting this data. NHS Digital warn that this data reflects open vacant posts and that once opened, vacant posts can be used to fill multiple vacancies so it is not possible to accurately state the number of vacancies within a specified period. The number of vacancies published by NHS Digital shows the minimum number of vacancies and it is not possible to state the precise level of undercounting. In addition, they warn that undercounting is greater among certain staff groups and particularly nurses due to the high level of rolling vacancies. This data is a useful proxy source and can be best used to track trends across the system. However, this is further complicated by the disruption in recruitment activity caused by COVID-19. NHS Digital state that this disruption is apparent from the significantly lower reported vacancies between March and June 2020.



Figure 16: Registered nursing vacancies (FTE) and vacancy rate, 2017-2020<sup>11</sup>



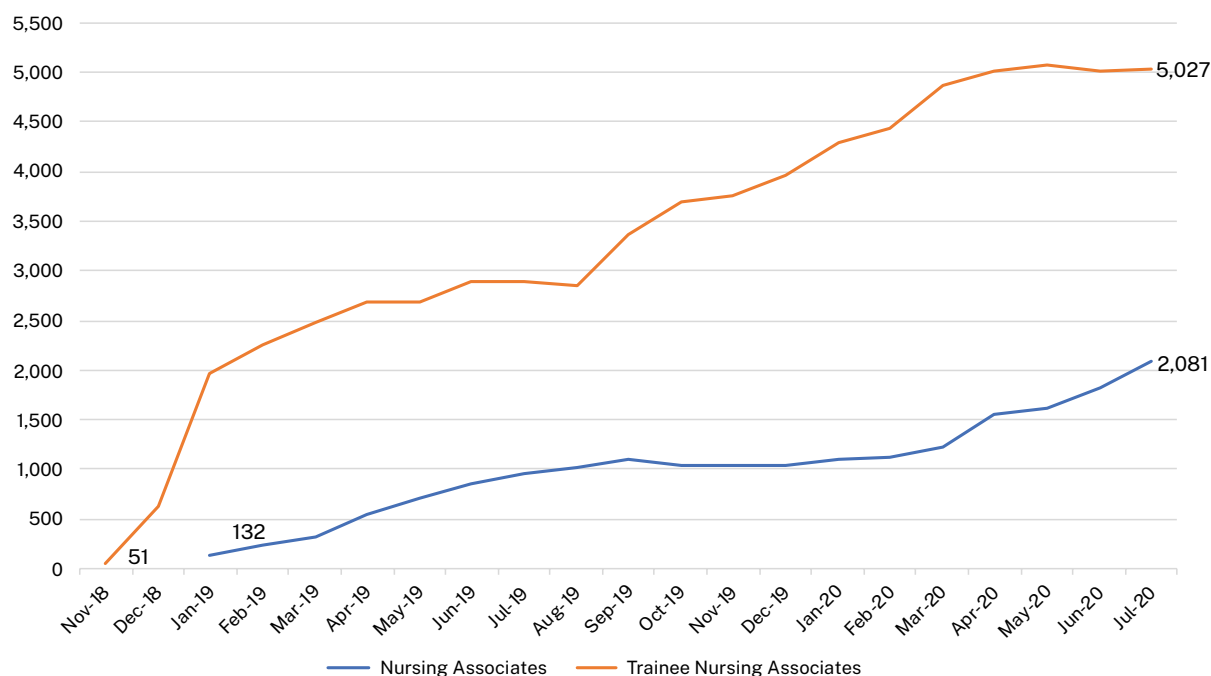
Source: NHS Digital

### 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 July 2020, there were 5,027 Trainee Nursing Associates and 2,081 Nursing Associates in the NHS workforce in England.

11. 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.

Figure 17: Nursing associates and trainee nursing associates, 2018-2020



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.

### 5.2.4.1 Adult social care sector

Data from Skills for Care provides an estimate of workforce numbers and vacancies in the adult social care sector outside the NHS in England in local authorities and across many individual providers in the independent care sector.<sup>12</sup> Overall there were an estimated 112,000 unfilled posts overall in English social care in 2019/20, equivalent to 7.3% of the workforce.

12. [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)

Among the registered nursing workforce, there were an estimated 36,000 registered nurse jobs, representing a fall of 29.4% since 2012/13 from 51,000. Skills for Care explain 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.’<sup>13</sup>

However, figure 18 also shows that the registered nurse vacancy rate across this period, has risen from 4.1% in 2012/13 to 12.3% in 2019/20 highlighting the severe recruitment and retention problems faced by the sector.

**Figure 18: Registered nurses in adult care sector and vacancy rate, 2012-2020**



Source: Skills for Care

### 5.2.4.2 Independent sector health care providers

Table 7 provides data on the nursing workforce directly employed by independent sector health care providers (including those who are providing NHS commissioned services).

The table shows that the number of organisations providing workforce data to NHS Digital has increased from 41 to 59 between 2015 and 2019. It also shows that as at September 2019, among these 59 organisations (some of which provide services to the NHS), they employ just over 13,000 nurses, health visitors and midwives (average of 221 per organisation) and just over 9,700 nursing support staff (average 165 per organisation).

13. Skills for Care (2020) *The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England*

**Table 7: Registered nurses, health visitors and midwives; nursing support staff (FTE) 2015-2019**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of organisations	41	43	52	52	59
Nurses, health visitors and midwives	11,156	11,404	12,276	11,854	13,032
Average per organisation	294	238	239	216	221
Nursing support staff	7,728	7,450	7,399	7,313	9,758
Average per organisation	24	30	30	35	165

Source: NHS Digital

### 5.2.4.3 General Practice Nursing Workforce

Table 8 shows data for the nursing workforce employed in general practice<sup>14</sup>. In September 2020, there were approximately 6,650 practices in England (-3.2% or 217 fewer than September 2019). These practices employ 16,727 registered nurses, 129 Nursing Associates and a further 7,113 health care assistants. Between 2015 and 2020 the number of registered nurses has grown by 9.7%, and the number of health care assistants has grown by 2.4%.

The largest groups in this nursing workforce are practice nurses and advanced nurse practitioners. Around seven in ten (67.8%) are practice nurses and the second largest group are advanced nurse practitioners at 23.4%. Another 4.3% are extended role practice nurses and 3.0% are specialist nurses.

**Table 8: General Medical Practice Nursing staff (FTE) 2015-2020: England**

	2015	2019	2020	% change 2015-2020
Practice Nurses*	11,515	11,443	11,346	-1.5%
Advanced Nurse Practitioners	2,626	3,679	3,919	49.2%
Extended Role Practice Nurses	381	688	716	88.1%
Nurse Specialists	576	508	500	-13.2%
District Nurses*	15	-	-	N/A
Nursing Partners	19	43	43	134.5%
Nurse Dispensers	14	35	31	125.9%
Trainee Nurses	96	177	171	78.9%
<b>Total Nurses</b>	<b>15,241</b>	<b>16,573</b>	<b>16,727</b>	<b>9.7%</b>
Health care assistants	6,948	7,069	7,113	2.4%
Nursing Associates	-	86	129	N/A

\*District Nurses were collected separately up to March 2019 but have been recategorised and incorporated into Practice Nurses from June 2019 onwards.

Source: NHS Digital

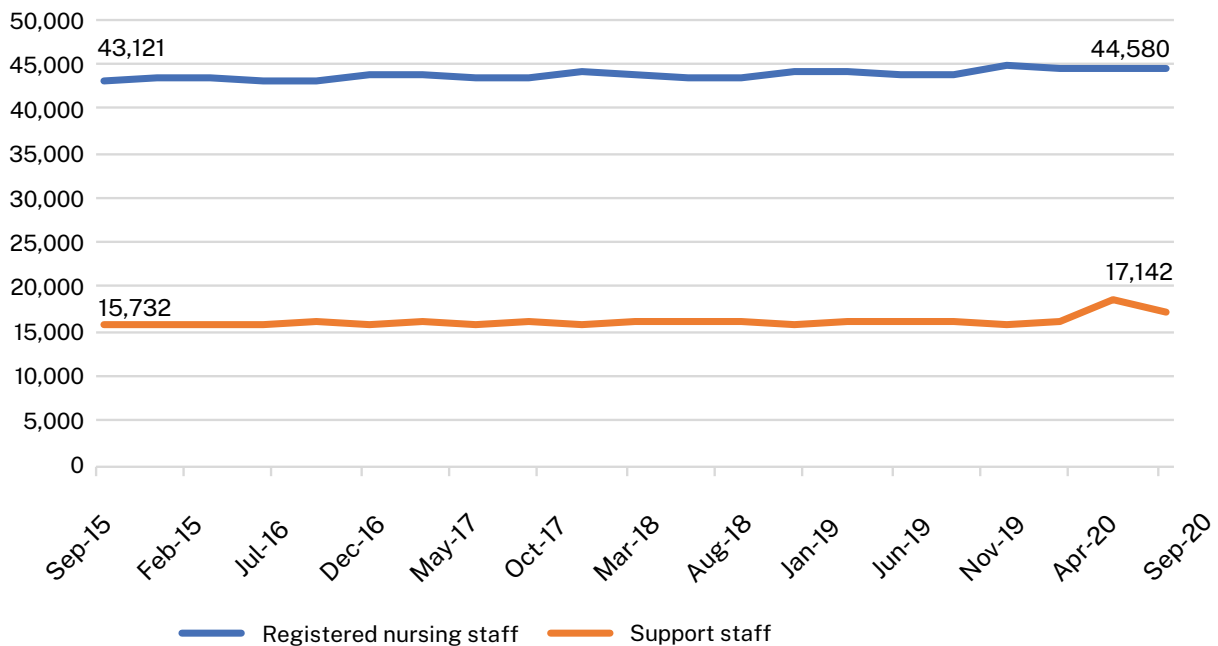
14. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/general-and-personal-medical-services>

## 5.3 Scotland

### 5.3.1 NHS employment figures

Figure 19 shows the NHS nursing workforce trend between 2010 and 2020, showing the latest available data at the time of publication. There were 44,580 (FTE) in the registered nursing and midwifery workforce as at September 2020 and 17,142 (FTE) in the nursing support workforce. The figures for the nursing support workforce for June and September include nursing students on Band 3 and 4 paid placements as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

**Figure 19: Scotland, registered and non-registered nursing and midwifery staff (FTE) 2015-2020**



Source: NHS Education for Scotland

Table 9 provides a breakdown in by selected work areas for registered nursing and midwifery staff (full-time equivalent). Between September 2015 and September 2020 there has been a small increase in registered adult nursing numbers (1.0%), and a larger increase in both the health visiting (18.6%) and district nursing workforces (2.7%). However there has been a downward trend in learning disability nursing, mental health nursing and paediatric nursing.

Table 10 provides trends for nursing support workers in selected work areas. The increase in the workforce in 2020 largely reflects the temporary inclusion of nursing students on COVID paid placements in the figures.

**Table 9: NHS Scotland, registered nursing and midwifery staff by selected work area (FTE) 2015-20**

	2015	2019	2020	Change 2015-19	Change 2019-20
All	43,121	43,781	44,591	3.4%	1.9%
Adult	23,867	23,860	24,114	1.0%	1.1%
Mental health	6,615	6,483	6,622	0.1%	2.1%
District nursing	2,855	2,822	2,933	2.7%	3.9%
Midwifery	2,440	2,413	2,438	-0.1%	1.0%
Health visiting	1,634	1,966	1,938	18.6%	-1.4%
Paediatric	1,654	1,491	1,543	-6.7%	3.5%
Learning disabilities	692	626	606	-12.4%	-3.2%
Public health	525	404	480	-8.6%	18.8%

Source: NHS Education for Scotland

**Table 10: NHS Scotland, nursing and midwifery health care support workers by selected work area (FTE), 2015-20**

	2015	2019	2020	Change 2015- 19	Change 2019-20
All	15,732	16,193	17,141	9.0%	5.9%
Adult	9,741	10,181	10,858	11.5%	6.6%
Mental health	2,863	2,847	2,963	3.5%	4.1%
District nursing	639	686	711	11.3%	3.6%
Midwifery	497	544	615	23.7%	13.1%
Paediatric	491	517	509	3.7%	-1.5%
Learning disabilities	569	430	410	-27.9%	-4.7%
Health visiting	266	255	258	-3.0%	1.2%
Public health	105	74	111	5.7%	50.0%

Source: NHS Education for Scotland

## Vacancy figures

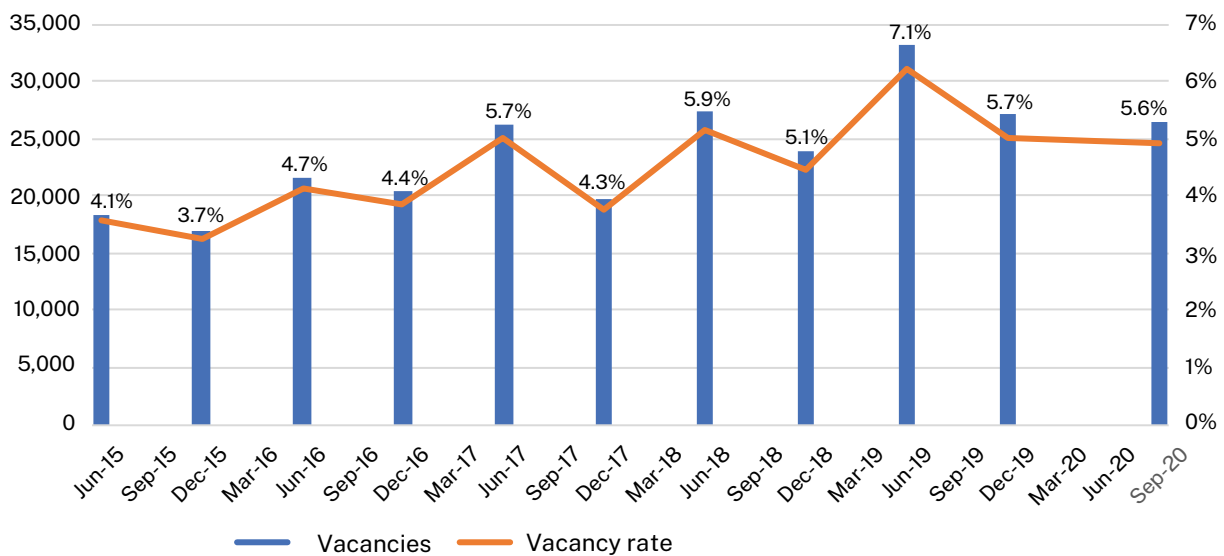
No national NHS Scotland vacancy figures were published by NHS Education for Scotland for March and June 2020 as reduced data was reported on vacancies from NHS Boards due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a seasonal trend with June showing the highest quarterly vacancies in recent year. National reporting resumed for September 2020.

Figure 20 shows that the number of vacancies and as expressed as a percentage of the nursing and midwifery workforce have both increased steadily since 2015. The number of registered vacancies in June 2015 stood at 1,837 (4.1% vacancy rate) to 3,313 (7.1% vacancy rate) in June 2019.

With no national figures available for June 2020, there were 2,650 WTE registered vacancies in September 2020 (5.6% vacancy rate).

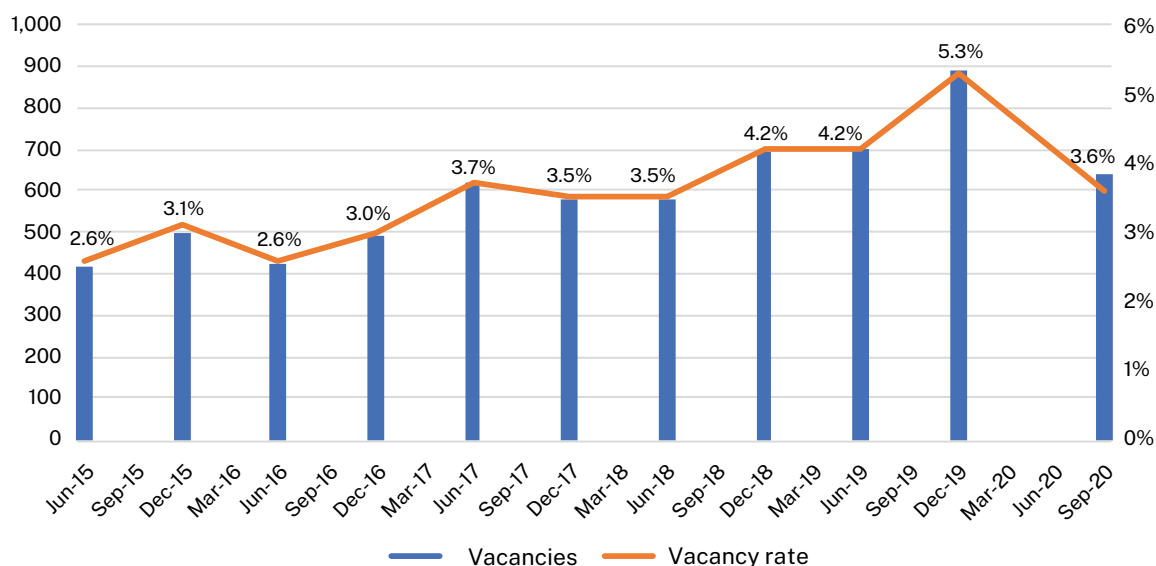
Figure 21 shows a similar picture among the nursing support workforce, with the number of vacancies increasing from 415 (2.6% vacancy rate) in June 2015 to 892 in December 2019 (5.3% vacancy rate). With no national figures available for June 2020, there were 643 WTE nursing support workforce vacancies in September 2020 (3.6% vacancy rate).

**Figure 20: Number of vacancies and vacancy rate, registered nursing and midwifery workforce (2015-2020)**



Source: NHS Education for Scotland

Figure 21: Number of vacancies and vacancy rate, nursing support workforce (2015-2020)



Source: NHS Education for Scotland

### 5.3.2 The Scottish Social Service Sector

Table 11 provides an estimate of the number of registered nurses employed in the social service sector in Scotland at the end of 2019 and Table 12 shows the trend over the last five years<sup>15</sup>.

The majority (61.6%) are employed in private care homes for adults, with another third (33.7%) 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 11: Nurses by sub-sector and employer type in the social service sector, 2019

	Public sector	Private sector	Voluntary sector	Change 2015-2019
Adult day care	10	-	-	10
Care homes for adults	20	4,190	340	4,550
Day care of children	10	-	-	10
Field work services (children)	100	-	-	100
Housing support/care at home	-	60	100	160
Nurse agencies	-	2,380	120	2,490
Offender accommodation services	-	-	10	10
Residential child care	20	-	10	40
School care accommodation	-	-	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>6,630</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>7,390</b>

Source: Scottish Social Services Workforce Data

15. <https://data.sssc.uk.com/data-publications/22-workforce-data-report/239-scottish-social-service-sector-report-on-2019-workforce-data>



**Table 12: Nurses employed in the social service sector, 2016-19**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	Change 2016-19
Total registered nurses	6,630	6,400	7,070	7,390	11.5%

Source: Scottish Social Services Workforce Data

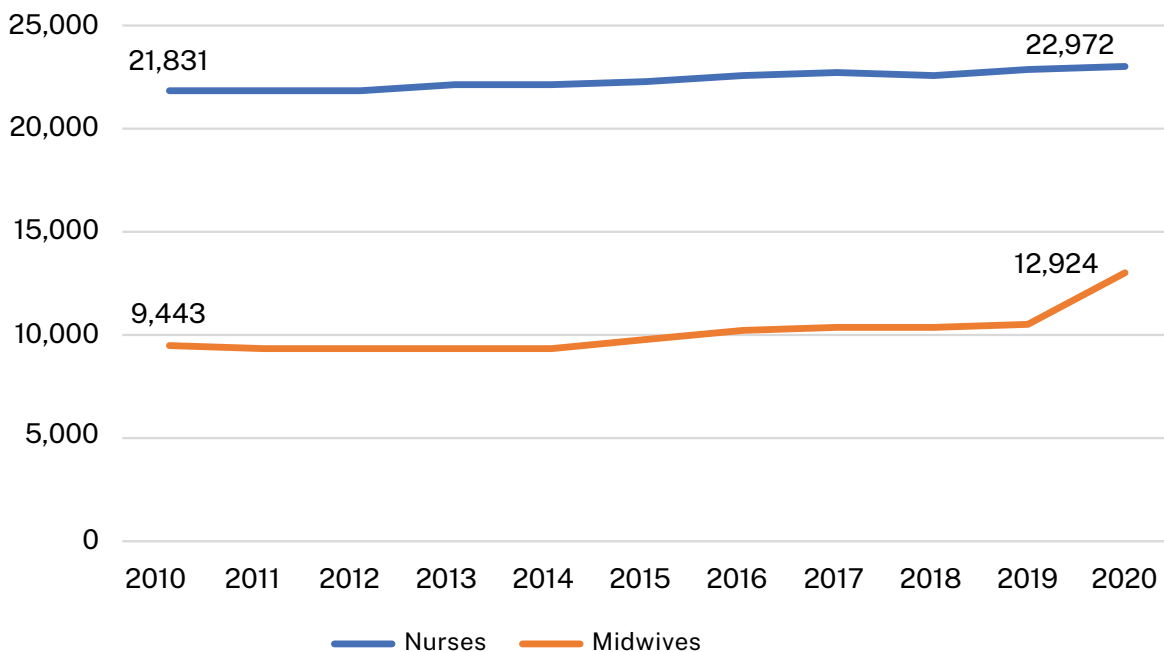
## 5.4 Wales

### 5.4.1 NHS employment figures

Figure 20 shows that that number of registered nursing and midwifery staff has grown by 5.2% from 21,831 (FTE) in 2010 to 22,924 in 2020. The nursing support workforce has grown from 9,443 (FTE) to 12,972 (36.9%).<sup>16</sup>

The registered nursing and midwifery workforce has grown by just 1% in the last year while the nursing support workforce has grown by 22.5%. In common with other UK countries, this largely reflects the number of students on paid clinical placements.

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

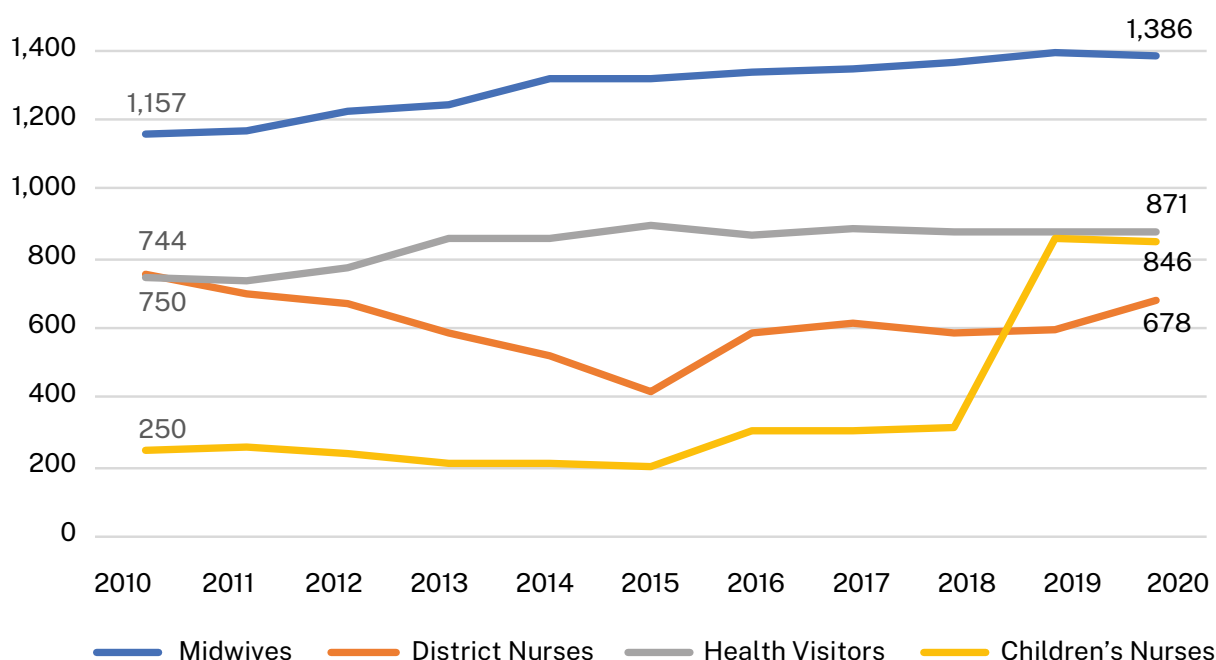


Source: StatsWales, Welsh Government

Figure 23 shows the trend in specific specialisms between 2010 and 2020 and shows that the number of midwives (FTE) has increased by 19.7% and the number of health visitors has increased by 17.1%. By contrast, the number of district nurses has decreased by 9.6%. The long-term trend is over a threefold increase in the number of children’s nurses, but the greatest increase seen between 2018 and 2019.

16. September figures up to 2019; then June 2020 figures

Figure 23: Wales, registered nursing staff in selected specialisms (FTE) 2010-2020



Source: StatsWales, Welsh Government

### 5.4.2 General Practice

Table 13 shows the nursing workforce employed in general practice, which makes up approximately 25% of the total non-GP workforce of 7,617 across 404 practices.<sup>17</sup>

Table 13: General Practice Nursing Workforce, 2020

Practice nurse	898
Advanced Nurse Practitioner	246
Extended Role Practice Nurse	156
Nurse Specialist	37
Trainee Nurse	3
Health care assistant/Apprentice	544

### 5.4.3 Social Care

The latest available data for 2018 show that among the 1,300 individual, external care providers commissioned by local authorities in Wales, they employed an estimated 53,000 people. Of these 1,545 (3.5%) are registered nurses, a further 65.5% are care workers, care officers and care assistants and 9.1% are senior care workers.<sup>18</sup> In addition, among local authority regulated services ie services that deliver social care in Wales, are owned and/or managed by Welsh local authorities, there is an estimated workforce of 11,900, of which 62.3% are care workers, care officers and care assistants and 4.8% are senior care workers. Less than 1% of this workforce are registered nurses.

17. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-04/general-practice-workforce-29-february-2020-925.pdf>

18. <https://socialcare.wales/research-and-data/workforce-reports>

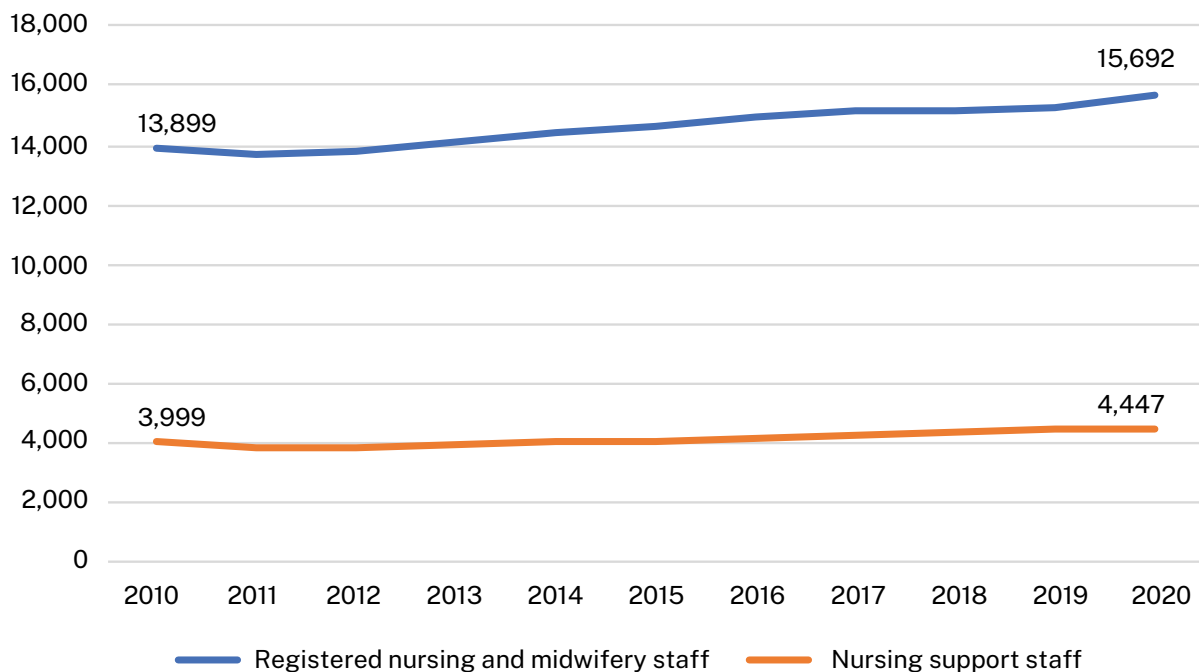
## 5.5 Northern Ireland

### 5.5.1 Health and Social Care Service employment figures

Figure 24 shows that the registered nursing and midwifery workforce (FTE) grew overall between 2010 and 2020 by 12.9% while the nursing support workforce grew by 11.2%.

In the last year, the registered nursing and midwifery workforce has grown by 2.5% while the nursing support workforce has remained unchanged.

**Figure 24: Northern Ireland, registered nursing and midwifery staff (FTE), nurse support staff (2010-2020)**



Source: Department of Health, Northern Ireland HSC Workforce Census

Table 14 provides the numbers of registered nursing and midwifery workforce (FTE) across the main work areas between 2010 and 2020. There have been increases in some groups, including a 10.5% rise in the largest group of in acute and general nursing and 10.4% increase in midwifery as well as a 28.4% increase in the number of paediatric nurses, but a marked decrease in the number of learning disability nurses (-25.4%).

**Table 14: Northern Ireland, registered nursing and midwifery staff (FTE) by work area (2010-2020)**

	2010	2019	2020	% change 2010-2020	% change 2019-2020
Acute/general	7,533	8,062	8,327	10.5%	3.3%
Mental health	1,633	1,597	1,589	-2.7%	-0.5%
Midwifery	990	1,082	1,093	10.4%	1.0%
District nursing	908	861	884	-2.6%	2.7%
Paediatric	631	793	810	28.4%	2.1%
Health visiting	445	527	511	14.8%	-3.0%
Learning disability	437	340	326	-25.4%	-4.1%

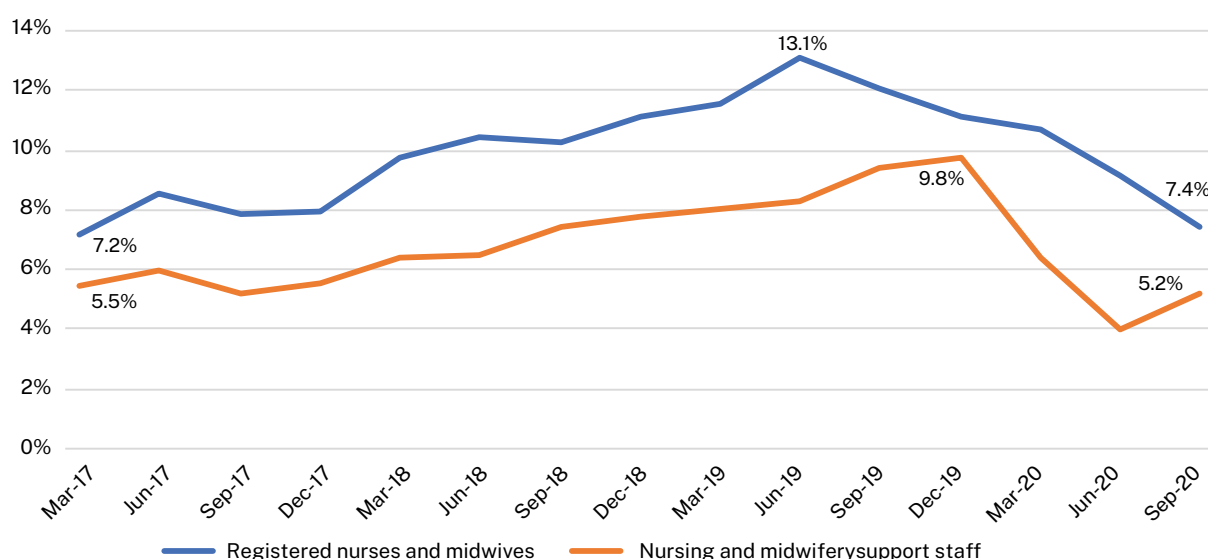
Source: Department of Health Northern Ireland HSC Workforce Census

### 5.5.2 Vacancy figures

Figure 25 shows the vacancy rate between June 2017 and September 2020. The rate among registered nurses and midwives climbed steadily to a peak of 13.1% in June 2019, and has fallen since then. The vacancy rate in September 2020 stood at 7.4%

Among the nursing support workforce, the vacancy rate showed a similar trend, rising steadily between 2017 and 2019, peaking at 9.8% in December 2019 before quickly falling to reach 4% in June 2020. Between June and September 2020, the rate rose slightly to 5.2%.

**Figure 25: Vacancy rate among nursing, midwifery and nursing support workforce (2017-2020)**



Source: Department of Health Northern Ireland HSC Workforce Census

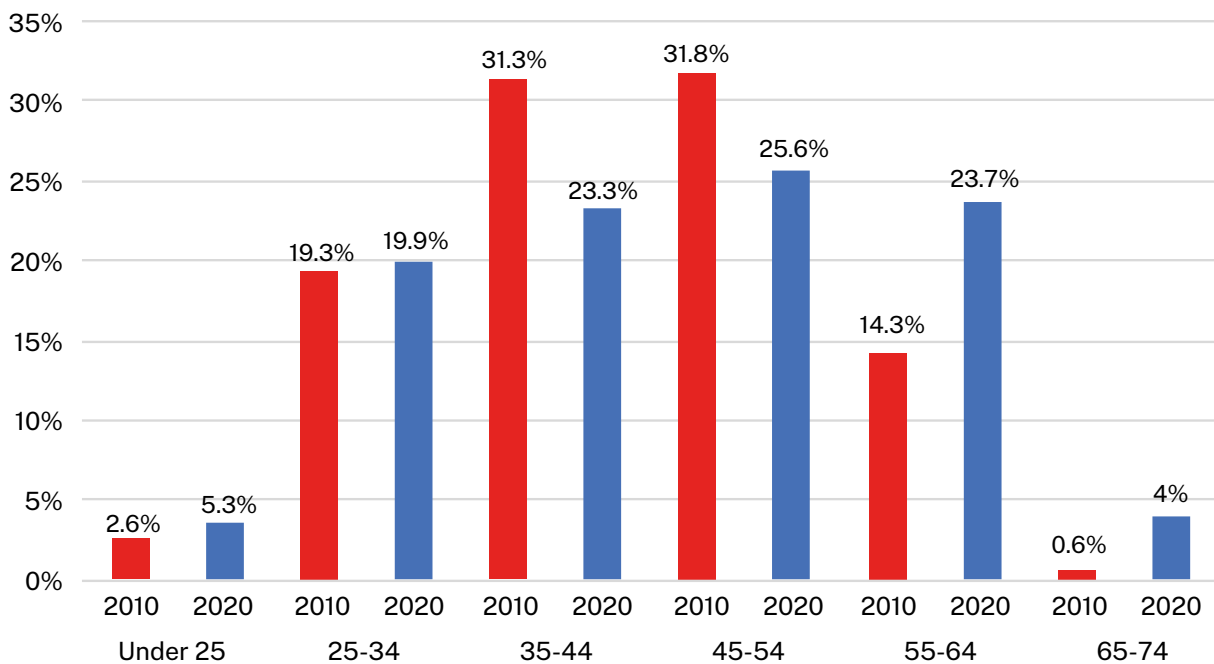
## 6. Nursing and age

The following figures provide estimates of the age profile of registered nursing staff using available data from the Labour Force Survey, NHS England, Scotland and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland. Data are not 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 shows that 14.9% of the nursing workforce across all sectors was aged 55 or over in 2010, compared to 27.7% in 2020.

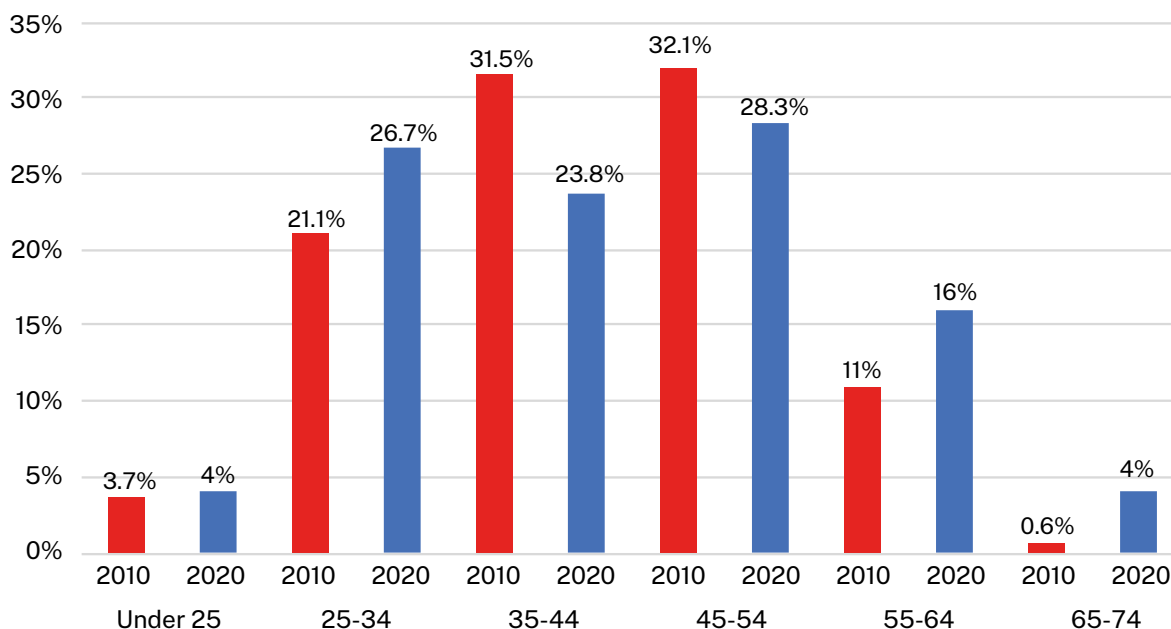
**Figure 26: Age profile of nurses working in the UK, 2010 and 2020**



Source: Labour Force Survey April to June 2010 and April to June 2020

Figure 27 shows the latest available data for the age profile among the NHS registered nursing workforce in England. Just over one in ten (11.6%) were aged 55 or over in 2010, compared to 17.3% in 2020.

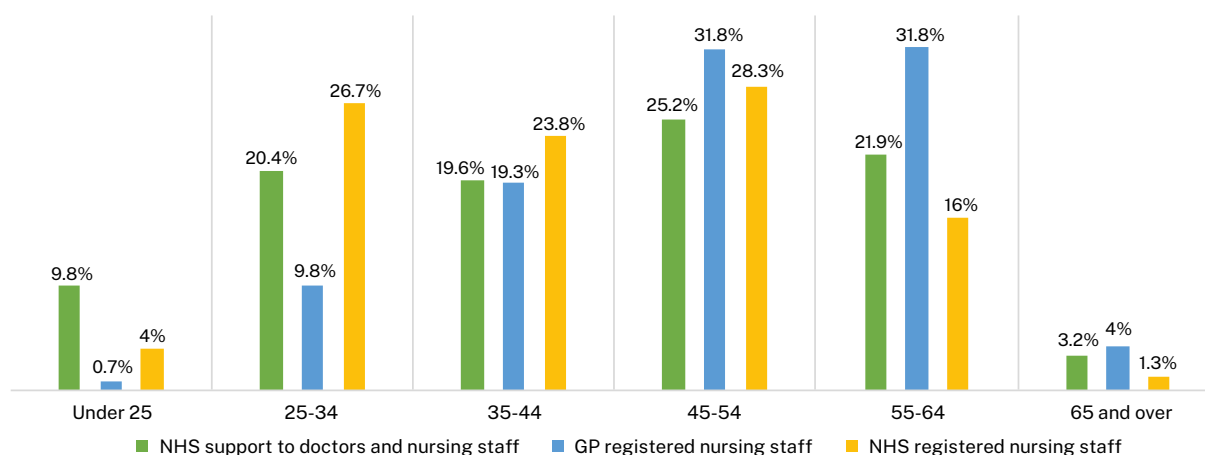
**Figure 27: NHS England: age profile, registered nursing staff, 2010 and 2020 (headcount)**



Source: NHS Digital

Figure 28 indicates that the general practice nurse workforce has a much higher proportion of older staff than nursing staff working in hospital and community settings. Over a third (36%) registered nurses working in general practice are aged over 55 compared to a quarter (25.1%) of nursing support staff and 17.2% of registered nursing staff working in NHS hospital and community health services in England.

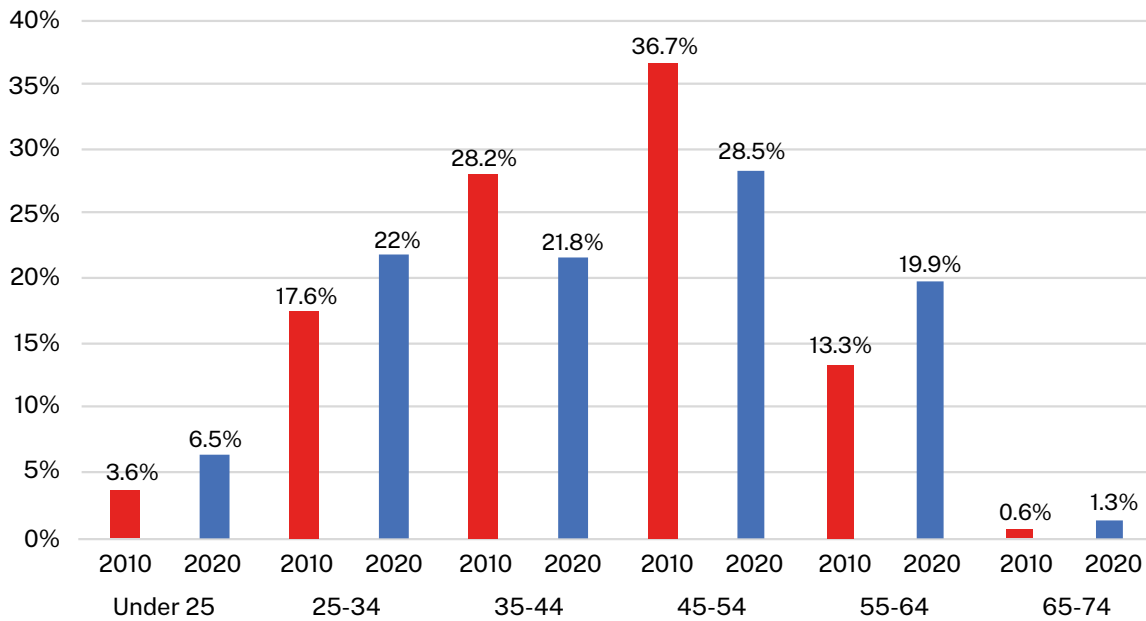
**Figure 28: NHS England: age profile, registered nursing staff, support staff and practice nurses, 2020 (headcount)**



Source: NHS Digital

Figure 29 shows the age profile for Scotland and presents a similar picture to England. In 2020, 21.2% of the nursing and midwifery workforce is aged 55 and over compared to just 13.9% in 2009.

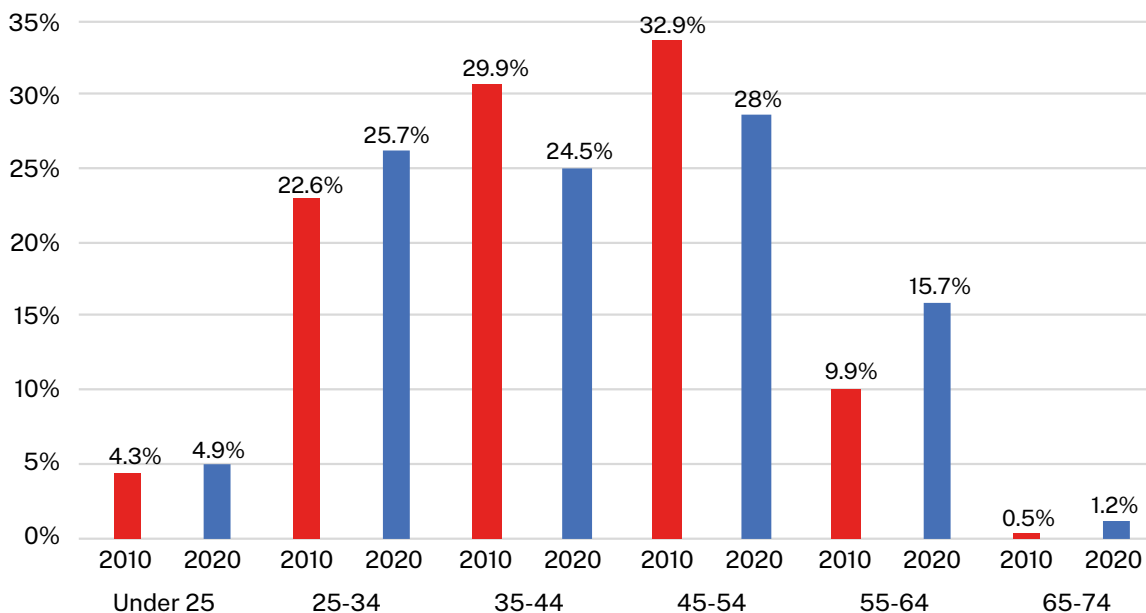
**Figure 29: NHS Scotland: age profile, all nursing and midwifery staff, 2010 and 2020 (headcount)**



Source: Information Services Division, Scotland

Figure 30 shows the age profile of the registered nursing workforce in Northern Ireland comparing 2010 and 2020. In 2010, one in ten (10.4%) of all nursing staff was aged 55 or over, compared to 16.9% in 2020.

**Figure 30: Health & Social Care Services, Northern Ireland: age profile, all nursing staff 2010 and 2020 (headcount)**



## 7. Nursing and earnings

Section 5 looks at average earnings growth for nursing staff compared to other employees in the UK, using Office for National Statistics data.

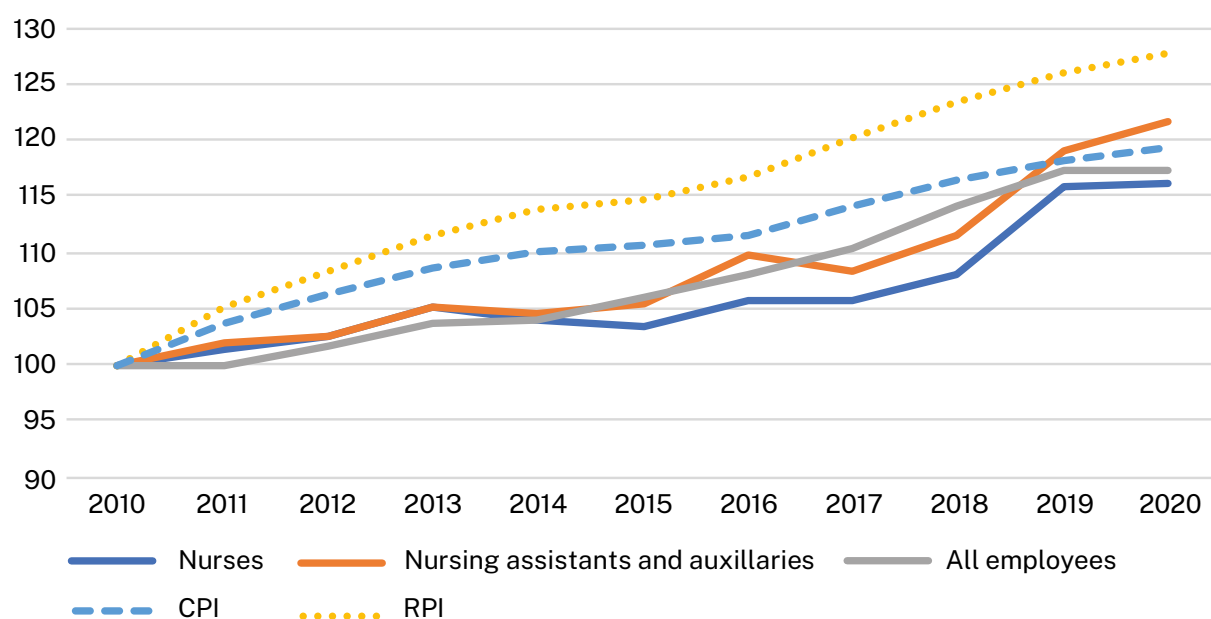
Figure 31 shows the growth in full-time gross weekly earnings for all UK nursing staff and all UK employees between 2010 and 2020. Since 2010, nominal weekly earnings rose by 16.2% for nurses and 21.6% for nursing auxiliaries and assistants, compared to 17.5% for all full-time employees.

Between 2010 and 2020, earnings have fallen behind inflation as measured by both RPI and CPI, with the only real growth seen among nursing assistants and auxiliaries in the last year, where earnings have grown by 2.1% between 2019 and 2020.

In real terms, using RPI as the measure of inflation, gross weekly earnings have fallen by 11.5% for nurses working full-time and by 7.4% among nursing assistants and auxiliaries between 2010 and 2020. For all full-time employees, earnings have fallen by 10.6%.

In 2020, median weekly full-time earnings for nurses are estimated to be £690 and £430 for nursing auxiliaries and assistants (across all sectors).

**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

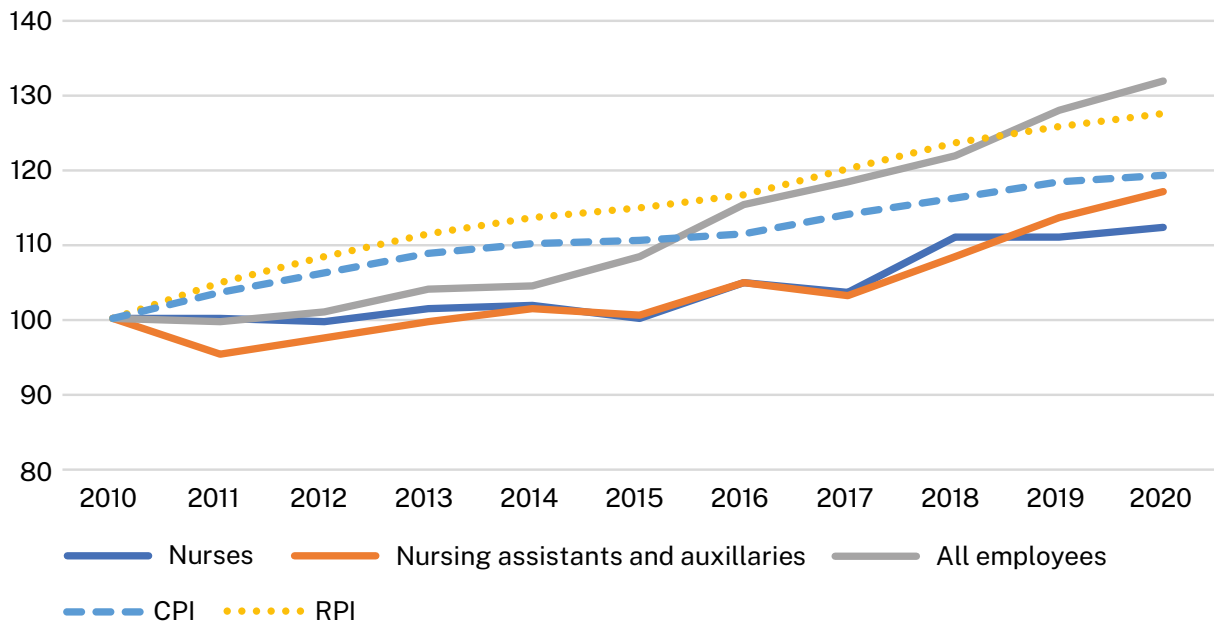


Figure 32 shows growth in median weekly earnings growth for part-time workers between 2010 and 2020. In nominal terms, median earnings grew by 12.5% for nurses and 17.4% for nursing assistants and auxiliaries. Meanwhile, earnings grew by 31.9% for all part-time employees, driven largely by increases in the national minimum wage.

In real terms (using RPI as the measure of inflation), nurses working on a part-time basis have experienced a cumulative drop of 14.4% while nursing assistants and auxiliaries have suffered a drop of 10.6%.

Median part-time earnings for nursing staff are estimated at £364 in 2020, and £223 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:

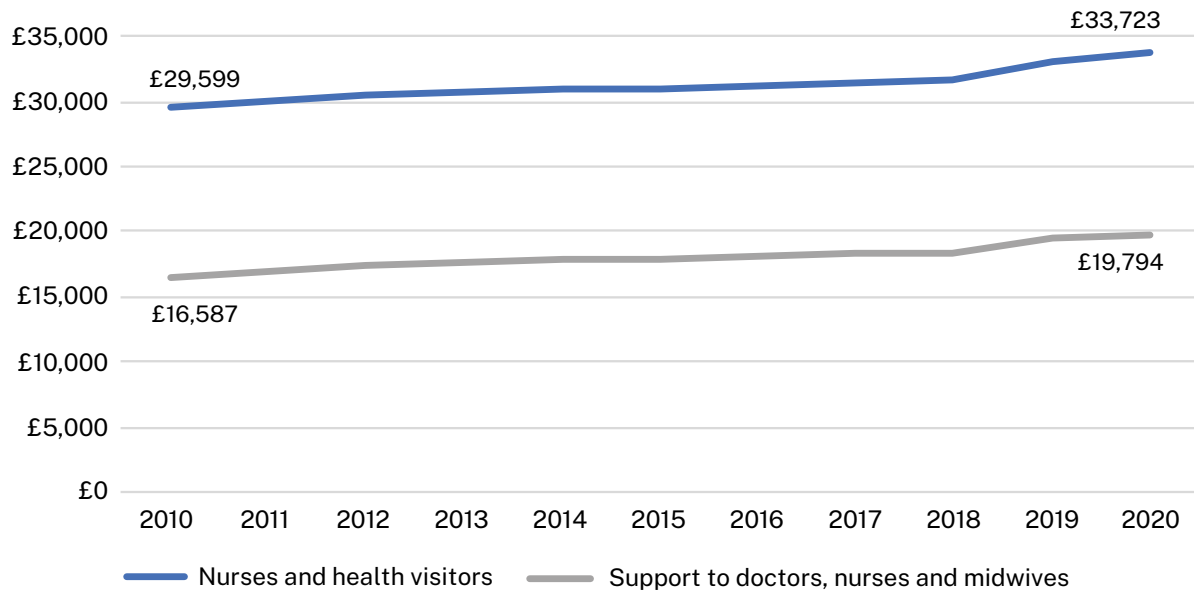
- **2012:** pay freeze for those earning above £21,000 per year
- **2013:** 1% consolidated uplift for all staff in UK
- **2014:** 1% non-consolidated uplift only for staff at the top of their pay band in England and Northern Ireland; a one-off payment of £187 in Wales; 1% consolidated uplift for all 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
- **2018-20:** 3 year agreements in England, Wales and Scotland; the same agreement as in place for England was reached in Northern Ireland in March 2020.

Figure 33 shows trends in median earnings for nursing staff in England between 2010 and 2020. Comparative data for the other UK countries are not available. This shows the change in median annual earnings for the following staff groups:

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

Median earnings include basic pay plus other earnings such as unsocial hours pay, overtime and regional allowances. The data includes all nursing workforce members who receive such additional payments to varying degrees.

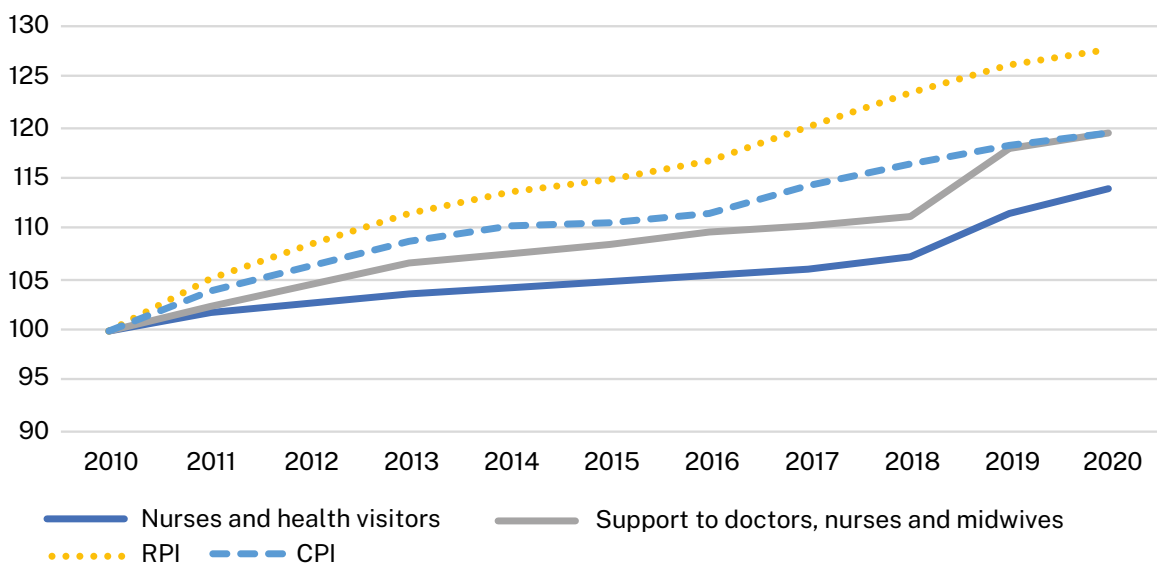
**Figure 33: Median annual earnings: NHS Hospital and Community Health Service; registered nursing and health visiting staff; and support to doctors and nursing (2010-2020)**



Source: NHS Digital

Median earnings have increased among registered nursing and health visiting staff between 13.9% and 19.3% among nursing support staff across this period. However this growth has been far outpaced by increases in the cost of living. In real terms, median earnings have fallen for nursing support workers by 10% and by 15.3% for registered nurses and health visitors between 2010 and 2020.

**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 (2010-2020) 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 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 2015 and 2020. The overall number of applicants to nursing courses increased by 6.7% between 2018 and 2019, and the positive trend continued between 2019 and 2020 with an increase of 16%.

Between 2017 and 2018 the number of acceptances increased by 6.5%. This was followed by a significant increase of 23.8% between 2019 and 2020.

This increase, to a great extent, reflects a wider growth in applications to all university courses between 2019 and 2020. However, this unprecedented growth in numbers is largely attributed the spotlight shone on the role of nursing staff during the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Figure 35: Nursing applicants and acceptances, with year-on-year percentage changes, 2015-2020**

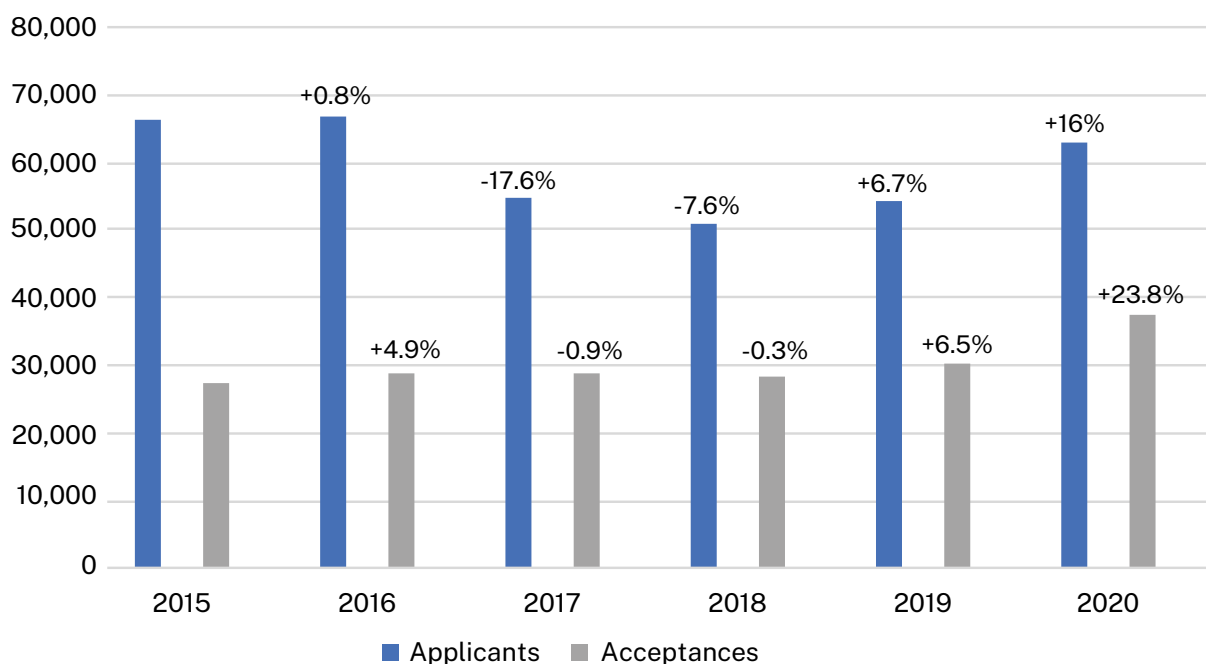


Table 15 looks at the number of placed applicants to UK university nursing courses. In England, which accounts for three-quarters of all placed applicants, there was an increase of 25.4% in the number of placed applicants. The table also shows a 57.4% rise in the number of placed applicants from countries outside the EU between 2019 and 2020.

**Table 15: Placed applicants to nursing courses**

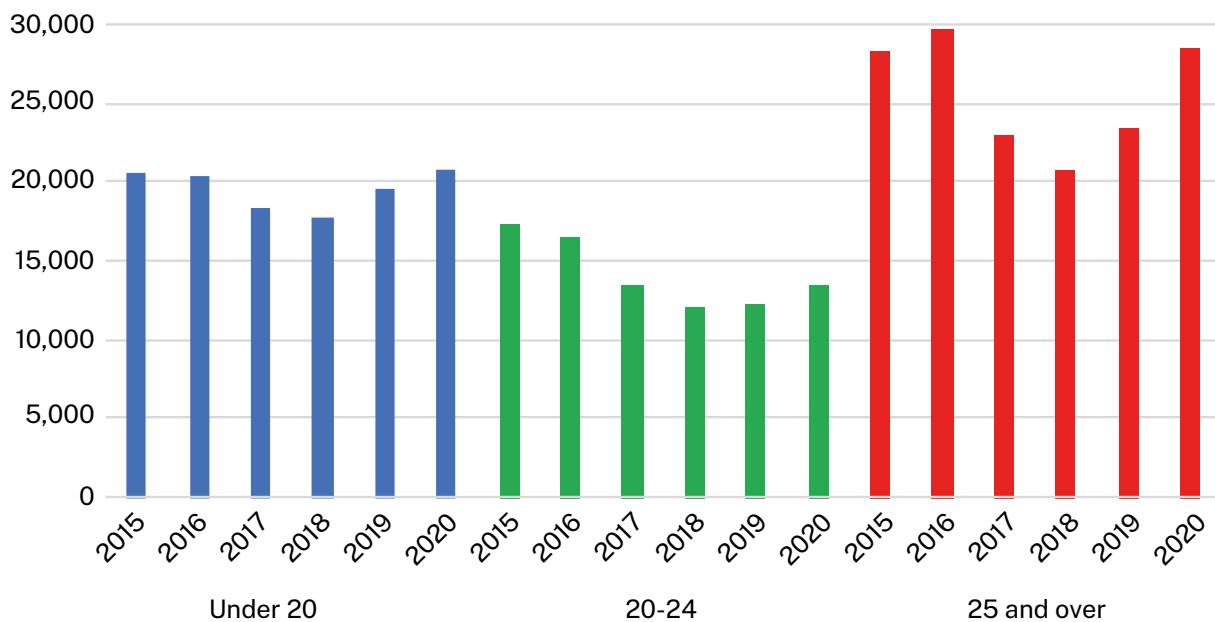
	2015	2018	2019	2020	% change 2015-2020	% change 2019-2020
England	21,450	21,745	23,060	28,920	34.8%	25.4%
Scotland	2,995	3,375	3,655	4,410	47.2%	20.7%
Wales	1,550	1,785	1,925	2,110	36.1%	9.6%
Northern Ireland	970	1,090	1,110	1,340	38.1%	20.7%
EU	490	410	410	480	-2.0%	17.1%
Outside EU	80	135	235	370	362.5%	57.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>27,535</b>	<b>28,540</b>	<b>30,390</b>	<b>37,630</b>	<b>36.7%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>

Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

## 8.2 Applicants and acceptances by age

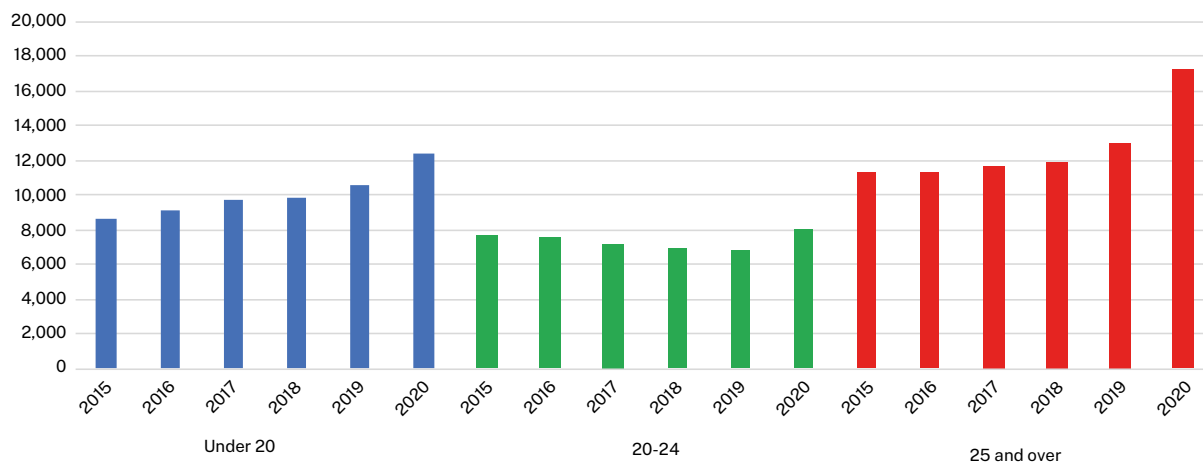
The following section looks at the number of applicants and placed applicants according to age profile.

**Figure 36: Applicants to nursing courses by age, 2015-2020**



Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

**Figure 37: Placed applicants to nursing courses by age, and year-on-year percentage change; 2015-2020**



Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)



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