



The NMC register

31 March 2019



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Foreword

I'm delighted to share our most recent registration data, which gives a unique view of the nursing and midwifery workforce in the UK.

As the professional regulator of nurses, midwives and, in England, nursing associates, our data shows exactly how many professionals are registered to work and how that is changing over time.

With the well documented workforce challenges and stark predictions for the future, including those in the recent Closing the Gap report, our data can further inform the discussion around these issues. I hope this insight helps others to understand what's happening in the health and care system, as they work towards improvements that will benefit people now and in the future.

The register

I'm very pleased to see that the overall size of the register has grown this year – up by around 8,000 on the previous year. This has been driven, in part, by a leap in the number of people from outside the European Economic Area joining our register and follows a number of changes we made to streamline our system and better support applicants through the process.

We've also seen a rise in the number of UK-trained professionals on our register, with an increase of more than 5,000 compared with the same time last year.

Encouragingly, the number of midwives has also increased by over 500 over the past 12 months, continuing the steady increase we've seen over the past five years.

This year has seen the first nursing associates joining our register. This new professional role is already showing its value to the health and care workforce in England. With nearly 500 registered during the first two months and many more to join, I have no doubt they will be valued members of the workforce in England in the months and years to come.

It's fantastic to see our register at an all-time high and nudging the 700,000 mark for the first time. But we know that as demand for care increases, the need to attract and retain highly skilled staff continues to be crucial.

Understanding why people are leaving the profession

Knowing the numbers is one thing, but knowing why things are happening is even more powerful. That's why we asked over 11,000 people who left our register to tell us why they left. What we heard from the 3,504 people who responded is compelling and will be useful for anyone dealing with workforce issues to understand.

Given the age profile of those who responded, it's unsurprising that retirement is the top reason people gave for leaving the register. However, it's concerning that over 1,000 (30 percent) of all respondents told us that the pressures of the job caused them to leave.

This shows just how far there is to go to ensure that the health and care system is creating an environment that enables talented and passionate people to thrive and feel proud of the work that they do.

This year's data report shows that there is lots to be cautiously optimistic about but also that there are warning signs that we all must take seriously.

In the coming months and years we will continue to develop and expand the data we make available, and it will be the cornerstone of the development of our new five year strategy. Understanding this data, sharing it with others and working in partnership on the solutions is essential as we strive to support better, safer care for people across the UK.

Andrea Sutcliffe
Chief Executive and Registrar



About our register

We keep a register of all nurses and midwives who meet the standards needed to be able to practise in the UK, and nursing associates in England.

Nurses, midwives and nursing associates show they maintain these standards by revalidating once every three years.

We currently publish data from our register every six months.

How to interpret our data

Our register tells us how many nurses, midwives and nursing associates are currently able to practise in the UK. Not everyone on our register will currently be working in these roles, or in the field they're registered in.

People from the UK, European Economic Area (EEA) and outside the EEA all join our register via different routes. When we say that someone is from the UK, EEA or outside the EEA, we mean that they joined our register via that particular route.

So far all the nursing associates on our register joined it via the UK route.

The number of joiners, leavers and total people registered won't add up exactly. The main reason for this is that the joiners' data only includes people joining the register for the first time. It doesn't include people who re-joined after a break from practising.

Our register is constantly fluctuating day by day and can vary considerably from the start of the month to the end of the month. Therefore, our data only offers a snapshot in time.

The figures showing the number of people on our register are taken from the last day of March in each year. The number of joiners and leavers are cumulative totals from the whole year (1 April – 31 March).

We're working to improve our systems so we can provide a more complete picture of joiners and leavers in the future.

Size of the register

The number of people on our register has increased by 7,959 (1.2 percent) since this time last year.

Figure 1: Total number of people on the register by registration type

| Registration type | March 2015 | March 2016 | March 2017 | March 2018 | March 2019 |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Midwife | 32,113 | 33,246 | 34,554 | 35,830 | 36,916 |
| Nurse | 644,441 | 649,668 | 647,605 | 646,637 | 653,544 |
| Nurse and midwife | 10,257 | 9,642 | 8,614 | 7,811 | 7,288 |
| Nursing associate | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 489 |
| Total | 686,811 | 692,556 | 690,773 | 690,278 | 698,237 |

Professionals with a specialist community public health nursing (SCPHN) registration are included in these numbers.

A new professional role

Our register opened to nursing associates on 28 January 2019. At the end of March 2019, there were 489 on our register.

This professional role is a new addition to the health and care workforce in England. The role bridges the gap between unregulated healthcare assistants and registered nurses.

Nurses, midwives and nursing associates from the UK

The number of people from the UK on our register increased by 5,169 (0.9 percent) between March 2018 and March 2019.

Figure 2: Nurses, midwives and nursing associates whose initial registration was in the UK

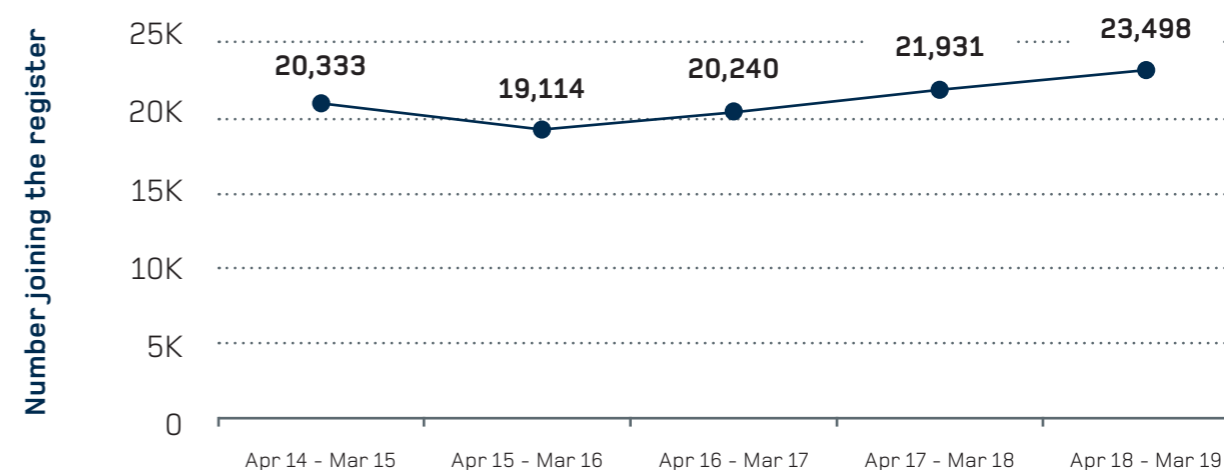
| Month and year | Nurses, midwives and nursing associates |
|----------------|---|
| March 2015 | 593,548 |
| March 2016 | 590,991 |
| March 2017 | 585,404 |
| March 2018 | 586,725 |
| March 2019 | 591,894 |

Joiners' data doesn't include those re-joining the register having previously left. Also, the overall number on the register is from one point in time, whereas the joiners' and leavers' data are the sum of activity over twelve months. Therefore, these figures won't add up exactly.

Joining the register

The number of people from the UK joining our register for the first time is steadily increasing. This year, 23,498 people joined. This is 1,567 more than last year.

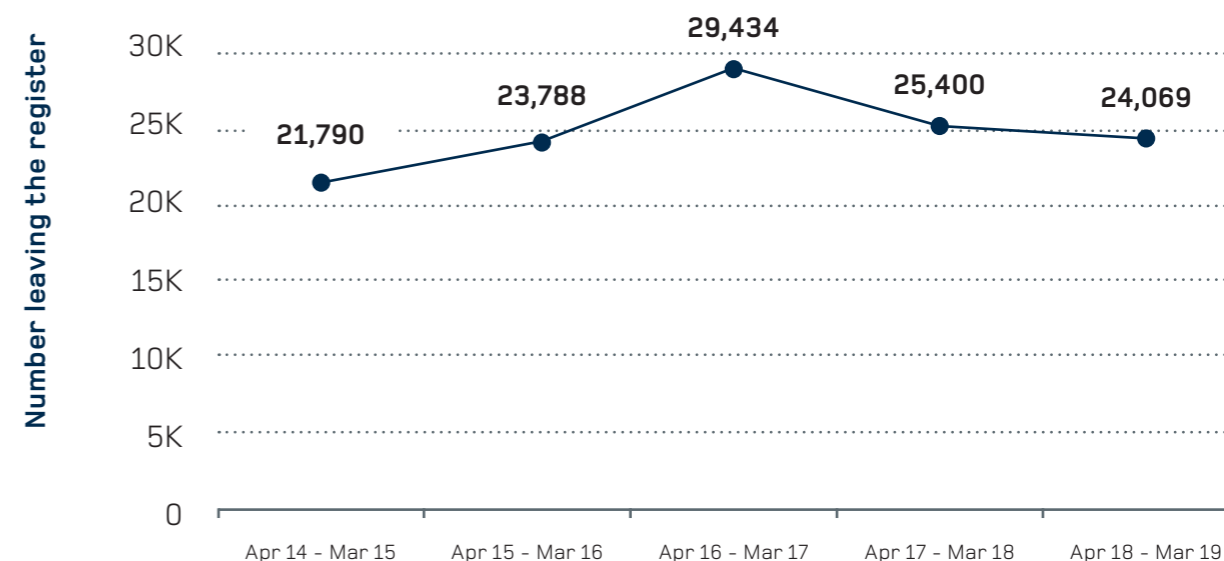
Figure 3: Nurses, midwives and nursing associates from the UK joining the register for the first time



Leaving the register

The number of people from the UK leaving the register peaked in 2016/17 and has since decreased. This year 24,069 people from the UK left the register, compared to 25,400 last year.

Figure 4: Nurses, midwives and nursing associates from the UK who left the register



Nurses and midwives from the EEA

The number of people from the EEA on our register decreased by 5.9 percent between March 2018 and March 2019.

The number of people from these countries joining our register for the first time dropped significantly in 2017/18 and only slightly increased this year.

Figure 5: Nurses and midwives whose initial registration was the EEA

| Month and year | Nurses and midwives |
|----------------|---------------------|
| March 2015 | 27,012 |
| March 2016 | 34,572 |
| March 2017 | 38,024 |
| March 2018 | 35,115 |
| March 2019 | 33,035 |

Figure 6: Nurses and midwives from the EEA joining the register for the first time

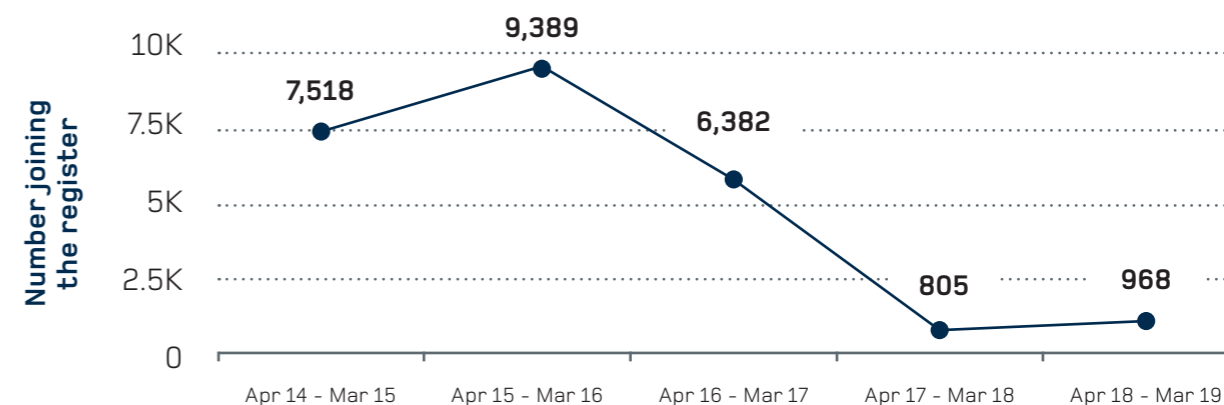
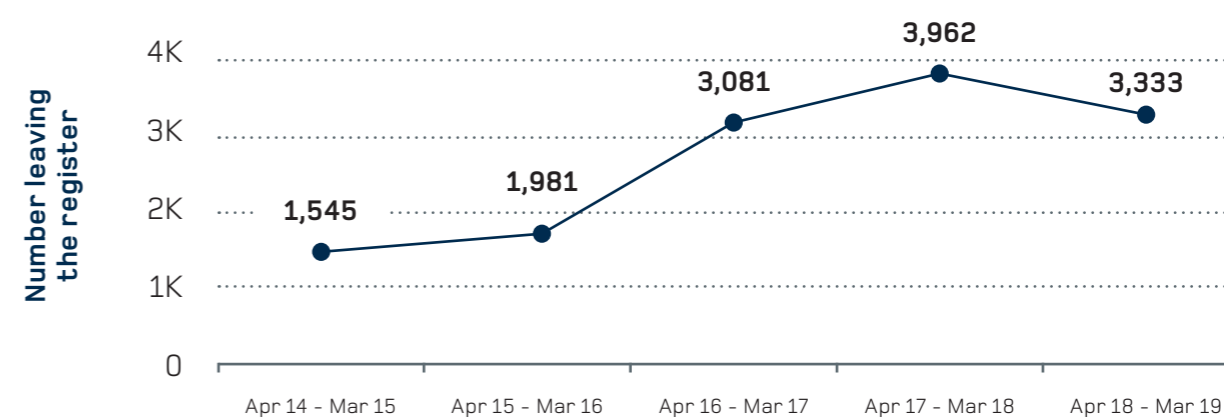


Figure 7: Nurses and midwives from the EEA who left the register



Joiners' data doesn't include those re-joining the register having previously left. Also, the overall number on the register is from one point in time, whereas the joiners' and leavers' data are the sum of activity over twelve months. Therefore, these figures won't add up exactly.

Nurses and midwives from outside the EEA

This year we've seen a significant increase in the number of people from outside the EEA joining our register for the first time (an increase of 126.4 percent). The total on our register increased from 68,438 last year to 73,308 this year.

Figure 8: Nurses and midwives whose initial registration was outside the EEA

| Month and year | Nurses and midwives |
|----------------|---------------------|
| March 2015 | 66,251 |
| March 2016 | 66,993 |
| March 2017 | 67,345 |
| March 2018 | 68,438 |
| March 2019 | 73,308 |

Figure 9: Nurses and midwives from outside the EEA joining the register for the first time

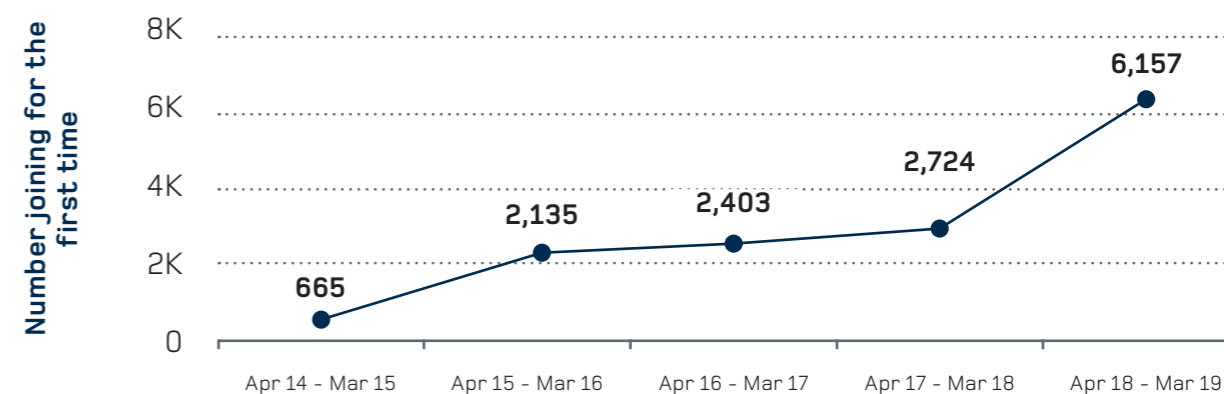
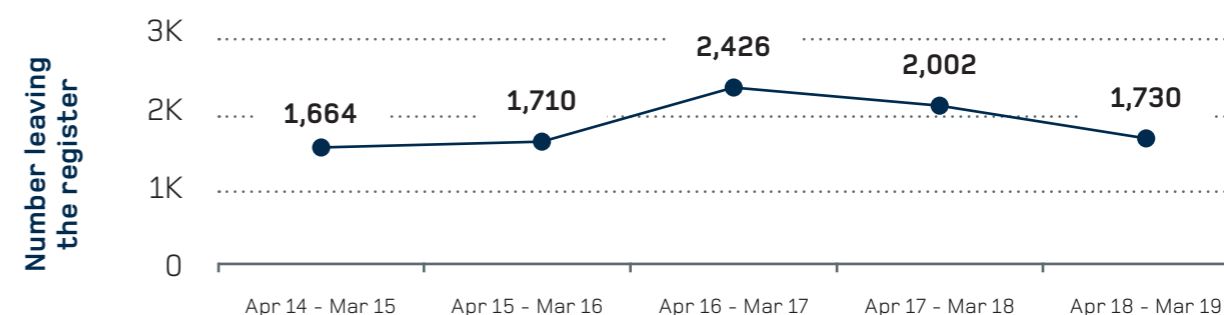


Figure 10: Nurses and midwives from outside the EEA who left the register



Joiners' data doesn't include those re-joining the register having previously left. Also, the overall number on the register is from one point in time, whereas the joiners' and leavers' data are the sum of activity over twelve months. Therefore, these figures won't add up exactly.

Profile of the register

Age

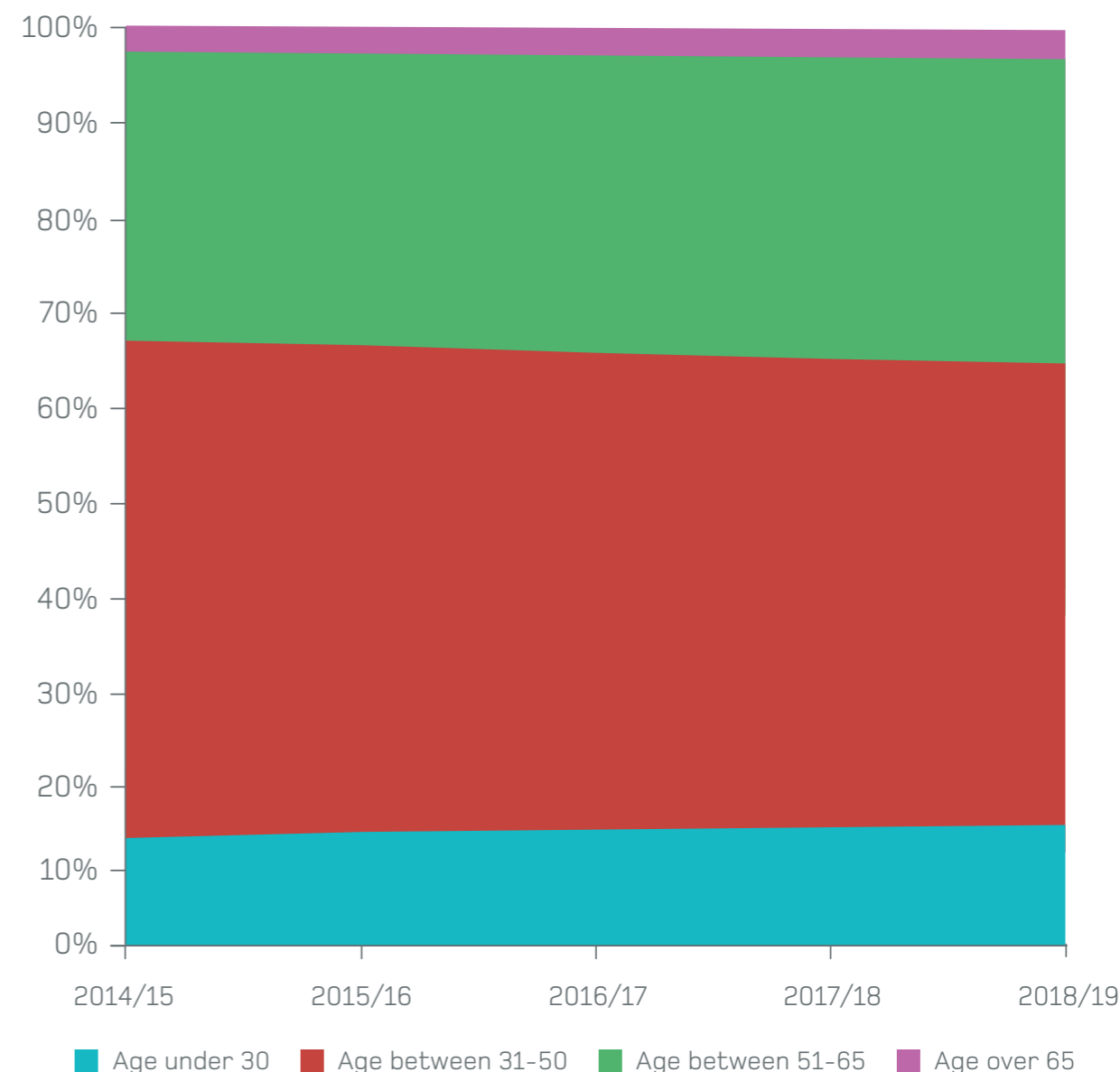
The largest age group on the register is 31–50 years (almost 49 percent of the register).

However the proportion of people on our register who are in this age group is decreasing. Meanwhile the proportion of people aged over 51 has risen from 33 percent to 35 percent over the last five years.

Figure 11.a: Age profile of the register

| Age group | March 2015 | March 2016 | March 2017 | March 2018 | March 2019 |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Age under 30 | 99,041 (14.4%) | 106,156 (15.3%) | 110,036 (15.9%) | 110,043 (15.9%) | 111,885 (16%) |
| Age Between 31-50 | 360,178 (52.4%) | 352,743 (50.9%) | 345,375 (50%) | 340,808 (49.4%) | 341,732 (48.9%) |
| Age Between 51-65 | 215,602 (31.4%) | 221,502 (32%) | 224,002 (32.4%) | 228,083 (33%) | 232,664 (33.3%) |
| Age over 65 | 11,990 (1.7%) | 12,155 (1.8%) | 11,360 (1.6%) | 11,344 (1.6%) | 11,956 (1.7%) |
| Total | 686,811 | 692,556 | 690,773 | 690,278 | 698,237 |

Figure 11.b: Age profile of the register – full register



The age profile of people joining our register for the first time

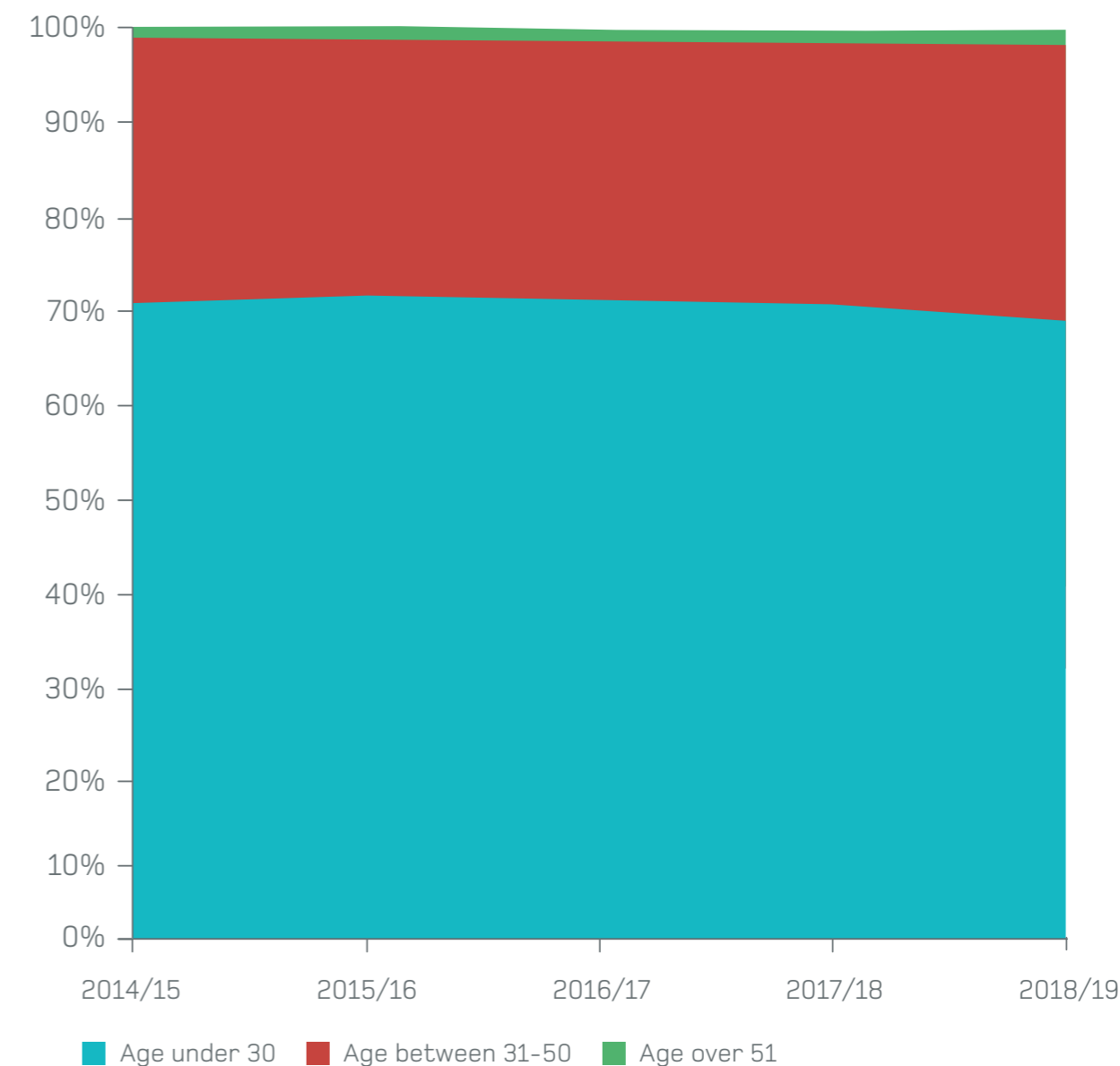
The age profile of people joining our register for the first time has changed slowly over the previous four years. The proportion of people aged under 30 years fell to 67 percent this year, while people aged over 30 made up 33 percent for the first time.

Between April 2018 and March 2019, ten people aged 61 or above joined our register for the first time.

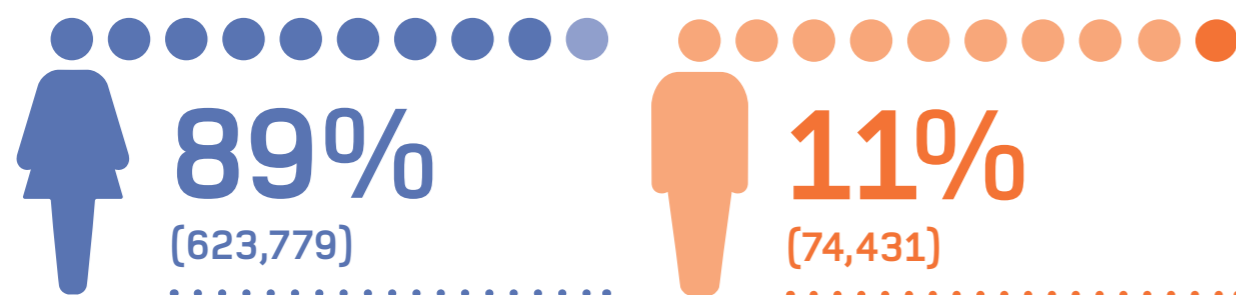
Figure 12.a: Age profile of people joining the register for the first time

| Age group | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Age under 30 | 19,954 (70%) | 21,942 (71.6%) | 20,510 (70.7%) | 17,715 (69.6%) | 20,478 (66.9%) |
| Age Between 31-50 | 8,215 (28.8%) | 8,342 (27.2%) | 8,157 (28.1%) | 7,416 (29.1%) | 9,675 (31.6%) |
| Age over 51 | 347 (1.2%) | 354 (1.2%) | 358 (1.2%) | 329 (1.3%) | 470 (1.5%) |
| Total | 28,516 | 30,638 | 29,025 | 25,460 | 30,623 |

Figure 12.b: Age profile of the register – first time joiners



Gender



of our register identify as female

of our register identify as male

This has remained steady over the last five years

Nurses

579,315 Female

74,204 Male

25 Prefer not to say

Midwives

36,808 Female

106 Male

2 Prefer not to say

Nurses and midwives

7,221 Female

67 Male

0 Prefer not to say

Nursing associates

435 Female

54 Male

0 Prefer not to say

Field of nursing practice

Between March 2018 and March 2019, the number of nurses registered in each field increased, except for learning disabilities nursing.

This data doesn't tell us what role nurses are currently working in. Nurses can hold more than one qualification and don't always work in the fields they are registered in.

Figure 13: Nurses registered in the four fields of practice

| Month and year | Adult | Children | Learning disabilities | Mental health |
|----------------|---------|----------|-----------------------|---------------|
| March 2015 | 529,200 | 47,270 | 18,546 | 90,953 |
| March 2016 | 532,469 | 48,116 | 18,163 | 90,068 |
| March 2017 | 528,818 | 48,742 | 17,503 | 88,741 |
| March 2018 | 524,891 | 49,793 | 17,174 | 88,421 |
| March 2019 | 528,146 | 51,005 | 17,125 | 88,944 |

Why are people leaving?

We surveyed nurses and midwives who left our register between 1 May 2018 and 31 October 2018 to ask them why they left. 3,504 people responded to the survey.

We asked respondents to select their top three reasons for leaving the register from a list of 18 options. There was also the option to select 'other' and enter your own reason.

Figure 14: Most frequently selected reasons for leaving given by all respondents

| Reason | Total citing this as one of their top three reasons for leaving | Percentage of respondents citing this as one of their top three reasons |
|--|---|---|
| I have retired | 1,760 | 50% |
| Too much pressure (stressful, poor mental health) | 1,050 | 30% |
| My personal circumstances changed | 927 | 26% |
| Concerned about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements | 658 | 19% |
| Staffing levels | 652 | 19% |



The most commonly given reason for leaving the register was retirement. We'd expect this as 75 percent of respondents were aged 51 years and above.

However, the age profile of the people who responded differed depending on whether they trained in the UK or not:

- Most people who had trained in the UK were aged 51 years and over (80 percent)
- Most people who had trained in the EU were aged between 21 and 40 years (72 percent)
- Most people who had trained outside of the EU were aged between 41 and 60 years (56 percent).

Top responses by country of initial registration

There were differences in the reasons given by people who had trained in the UK compared to those that had trained in the EU, and outside of the EU.

Figure 15: Most frequently selected reasons for leaving given by UK nurses and midwives (n=3,210)

| Reason | Total citing this as one of their top three reasons for leaving | Percentage citing this as one of their top three reasons |
|--|---|--|
| I have retired | 1,737 | 54% |
| Too much pressure (stressful, poor mental health) | 998 | 31% |
| My personal circumstances changed | 870 | 27% |
| I was disillusioned by the quality of the care provided to patients | 630 | 20% |
| Concerned about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements | 613 | 19% |

Figure 16: Most frequently selected reasons given by EEA nurses and midwives (n=180)

| Reason | Total citing this as one of their top three reasons for leaving | Percentage citing this as one of their top three reasons |
|---|---|--|
| I am leaving or have left the UK | 118 | 66% |
| Brexit has encouraged me to consider working outside the UK | 92 | 51% |
| Too much pressure (stressful, poor mental health) | 39 | 22% |
| My personal circumstances changed | 39 | 22% |
| Poor pay and benefits | 25 | 14% |

Figure 17: Most frequently selected reasons given by nurses and midwives from outside the EEA (n=114)

| Reason | Total citing this as one of their top three reasons for leaving | Percentage citing this as one of their top three reasons |
|--|---|--|
| I am leaving or have left the UK | 53 | 46% |
| Poor pay and benefits | 29 | 25% |
| Concerned about not being able to meet the revalidation requirements | 25 | 22% |
| Other | 25 | 22% |
| I have retired | 20 | 18% |

Comments on the top three reasons

Retirement

Comments made by those who selected retirement also mentioned feeling dissatisfied with work either because of workload, pressure, quality of management or support, or organisational culture. Some people also talked about work being too mentally or physically challenging.

“I always planned to retire at 60 years but the lack of consideration given to older staff confirmed it was time to leave.”

“Over the past few years, every year became more challenging, especially a significant increase of patients and [number of] beds. I worked nights & felt that every night seemed to get harder, there was no let-up anymore.”

“There are a number of reasons why I chose to take early retirement. Staffing levels, high caseloads and poor staffing levels contributed.”

Too much pressure

This year we added a new option people could select – ‘**too much pressure**’. This was the second most selected reason.

People were more likely to select this option if they had trained in the UK, were aged between 21–30 years, worked in the NHS or as a midwife or a mental health nurse.

45 percent of all comments we received in the survey responses related to stress or pressure.

“I worked in the NHS for a brief time after completing a ‘return to nursing’ course but I found the responsibility, workload and stress was too great. Coupled with poor pay that meant I was not able to pay household bills whilst supporting my family pushed me into resigning from my permanent contracted post within eight months of joining the NHS.”

“Exhausted, drained physically and emotionally, zero work life balance and barely able to be the nurse I thought I should be.”

“I would go home each night never feeling like I had done enough, often staying over because of lack of staffing and not enough care being delivered.”

My personal circumstances changed

'Changes in personal circumstances' was the third most commonly selected reason for leaving the register.

People told us about changes in health (such as a serious health condition or a disabling injury), childcare commitments, and, for a small number of people, moving to a different area.

"I developed chronic fatigue syndrome & fibromyalgia largely due to work induced stress."

"I became a mother and the cost of childcare equalled my salary, so in addition to the fact that my employers were unwilling to allow hours that would have been easier to manage, I was left with no option but to leave nursing."