Royal College
of Nurs n

The UK Nursing Labour Market Review 2019

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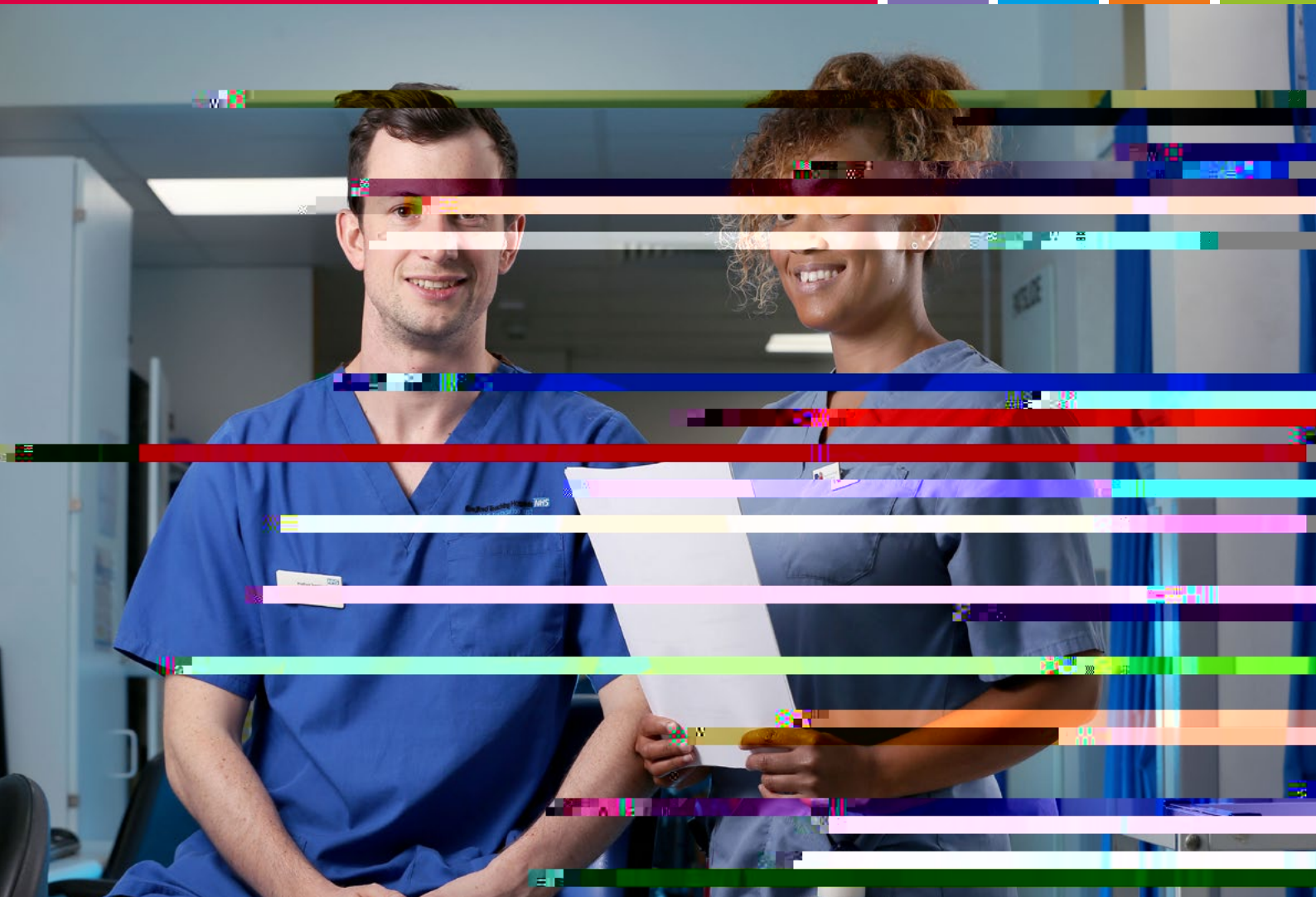
Contents

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*

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 ¾

3.1.3 P

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[4].

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.
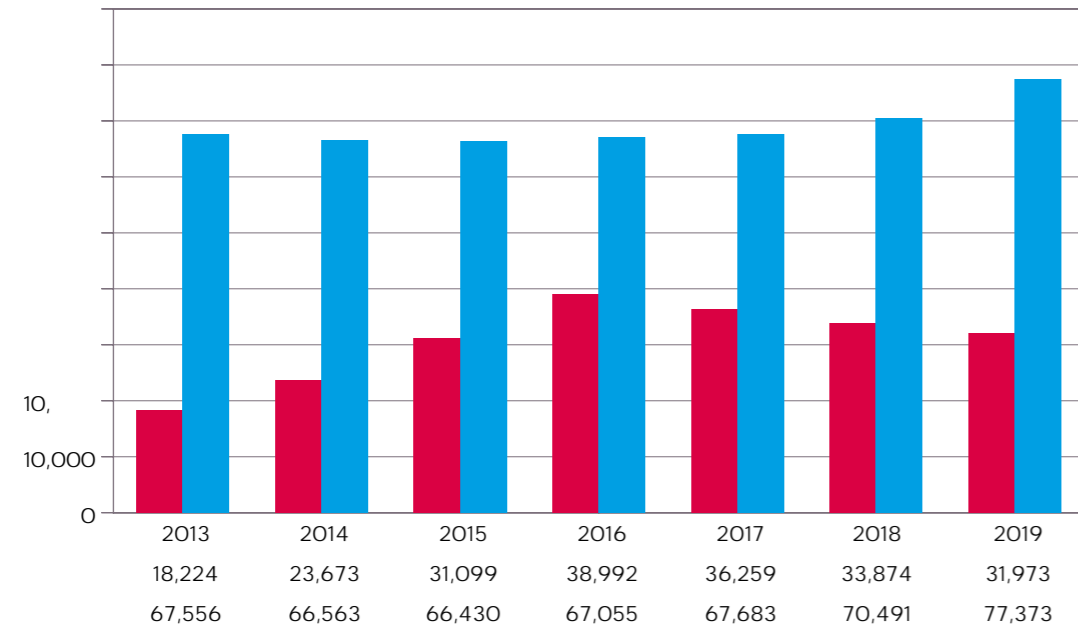
Figure 4: Proportion of nurses, nursing auxiliaries/assistants and all UK employees working part-time (2009/10 to 2018/19)
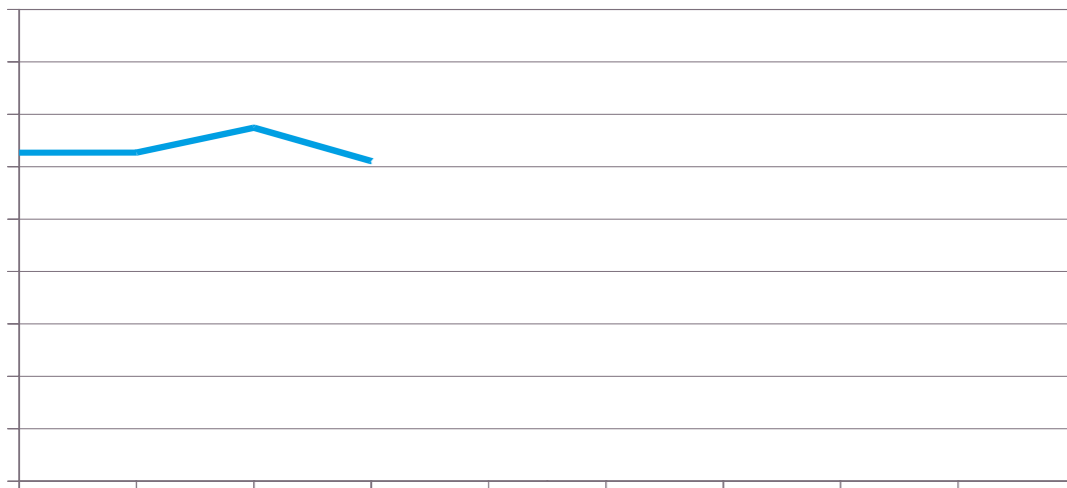
In Table 2 the breakdown of registrants is shown across the four main fields of practice. It should be

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)

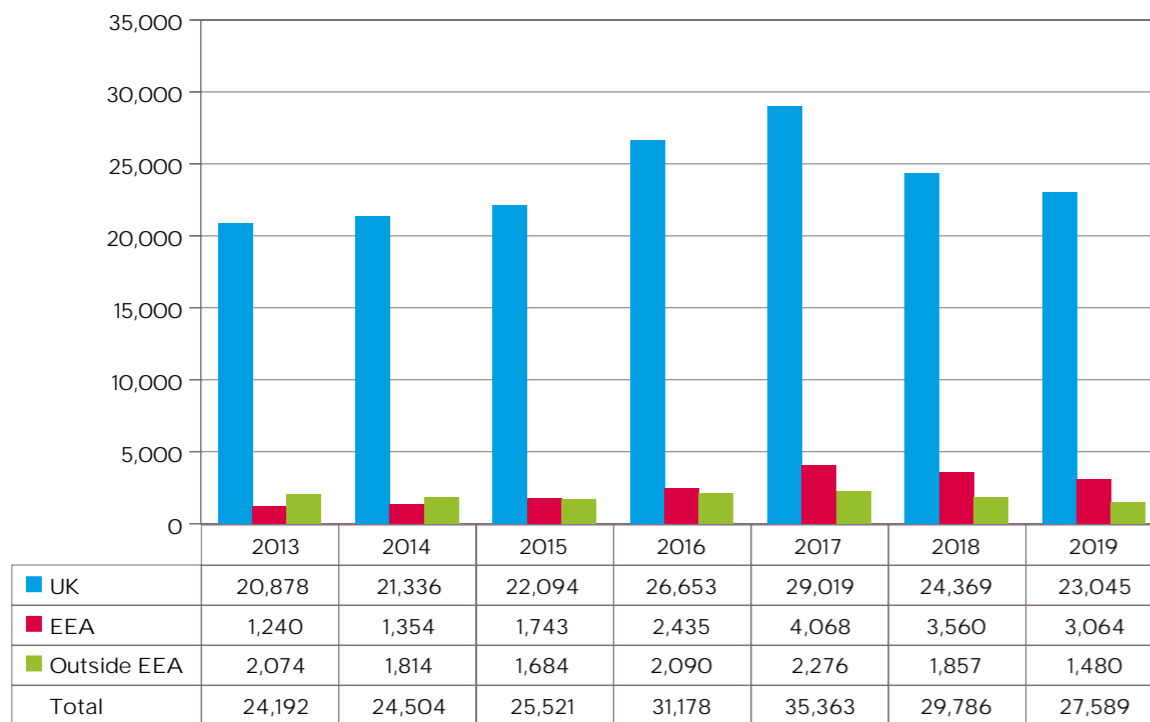|	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
	18,224	23,673	31,099	38,992	36,259	33,874	31,973
	67,556	66,563	66,430	67,055	67,683	70,491	77,373

.3 NMC

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)

|	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
■ UK	20,878	21,336	22,094	26,653	29,019	24,369	23,045
■ EEA	1,240	1,354	1,743	2,435	4,068	3,560	3,064
■ Outside EEA	2,074	1,814	1,684	2,090	2,276	1,857	1,480
Total	24,192	24,504	25,521	31,178	35,363	29,786	27,589

Source: Nursing and Midwifery Council

.3 NH

.3.1 E

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)

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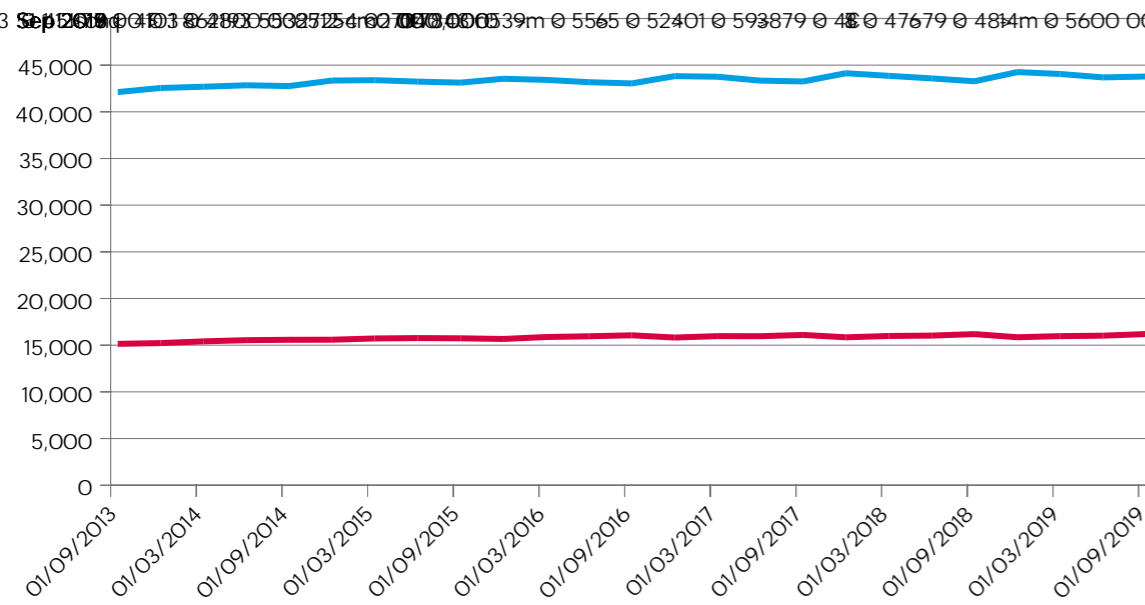
Figure 20 shows that the number of vacancies (expressed as a percentage of the nursing and midwifery workforce) have increased steadily since 2014. The number of vacancies in September 2014 stood at 1,662 (3.8% vacancy rate) to 3,060 (6.5% vacancy rate) in September 2019.

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)
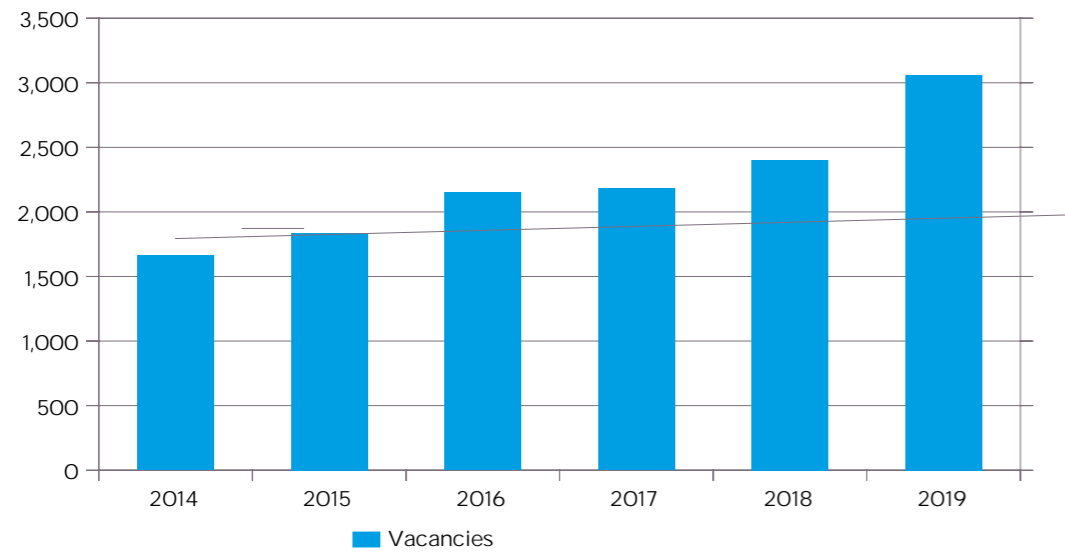
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6. Nursing and age

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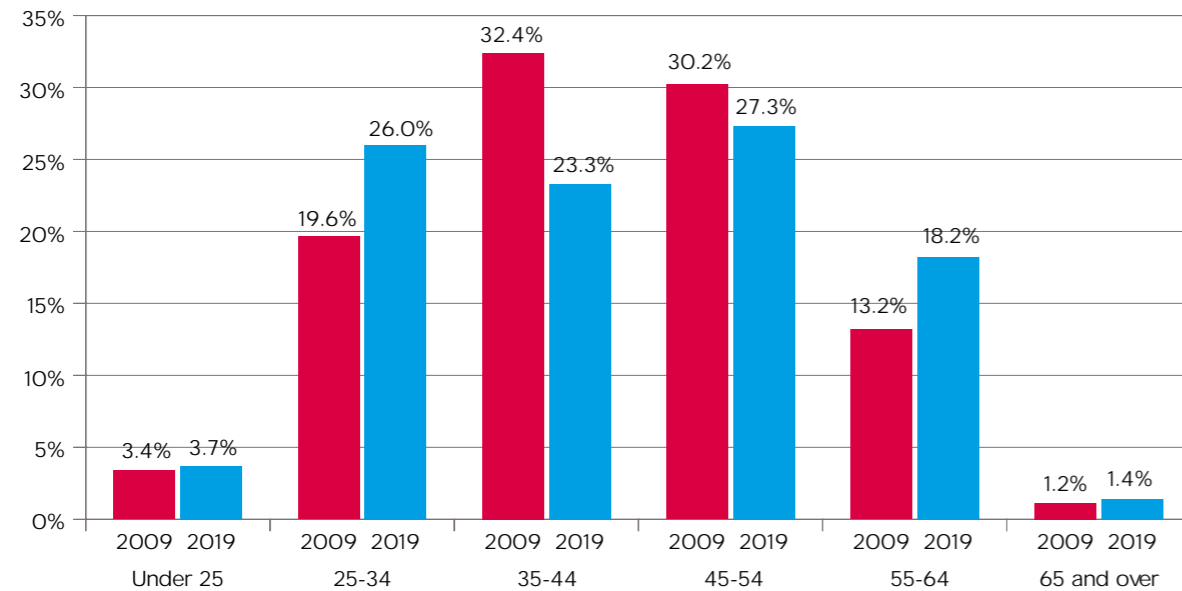
Source: Labour Force Survey April to June 2009 and April to June 2019

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)
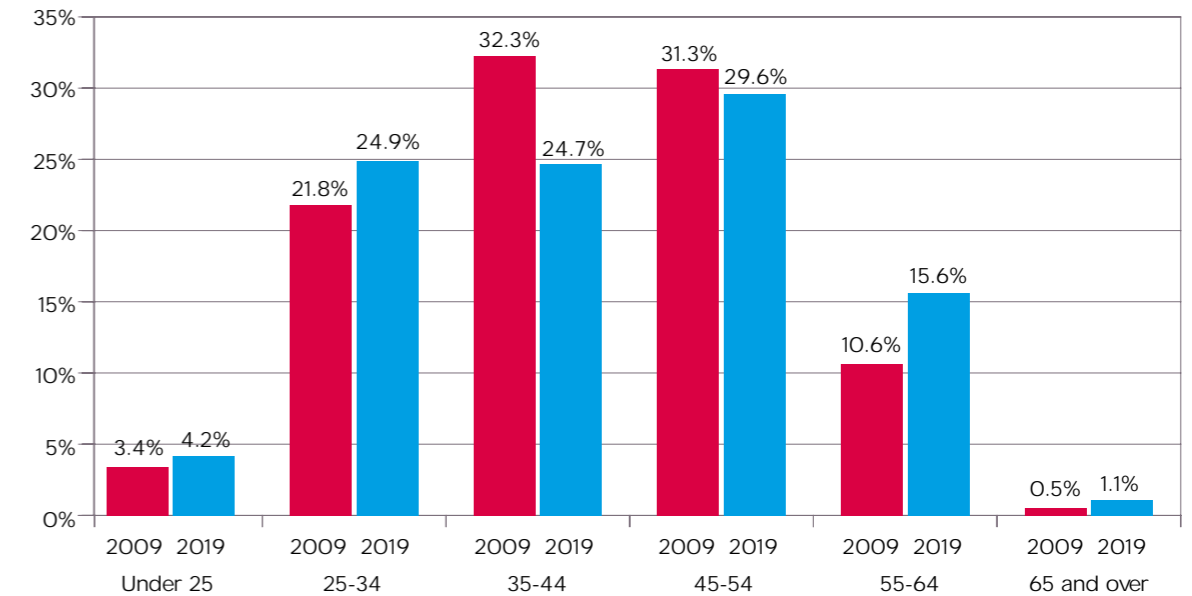
Source: NHS Digital

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.

.1 A...

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.
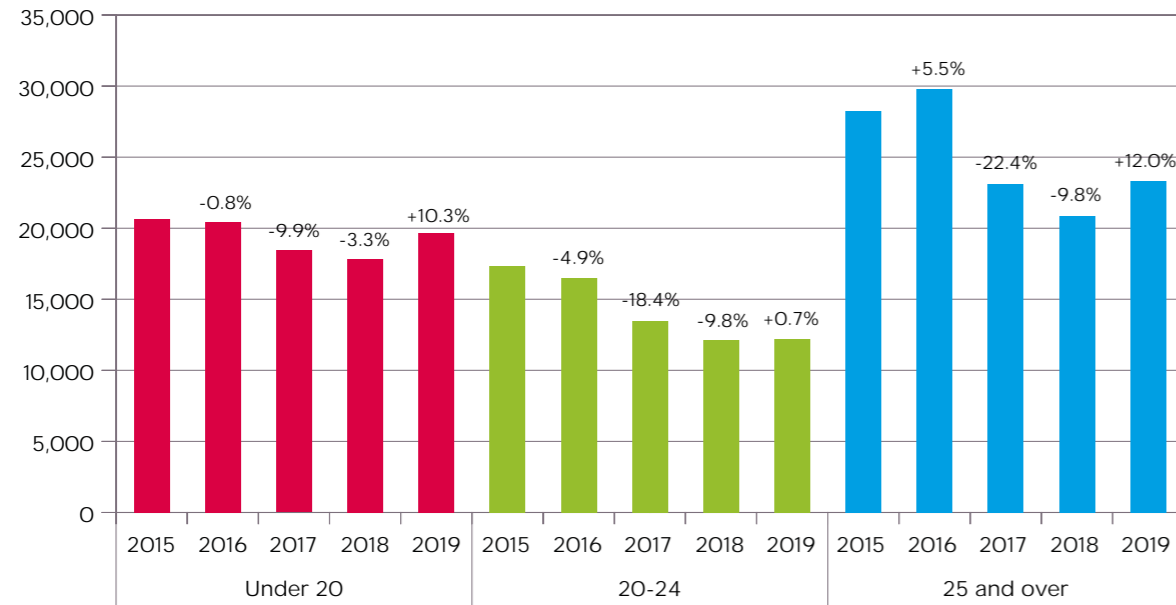
Between 2010 and 2019 there was below inflation growth in earnings, with the only significant growth seen between 2018 and 2019. Full-time earnings rose by 7.2% for nurses and 6.9% for nursing assistants and auxiliaries, compared to 2.8% for all employees. Given that the NHS is the largest employer of 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

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)

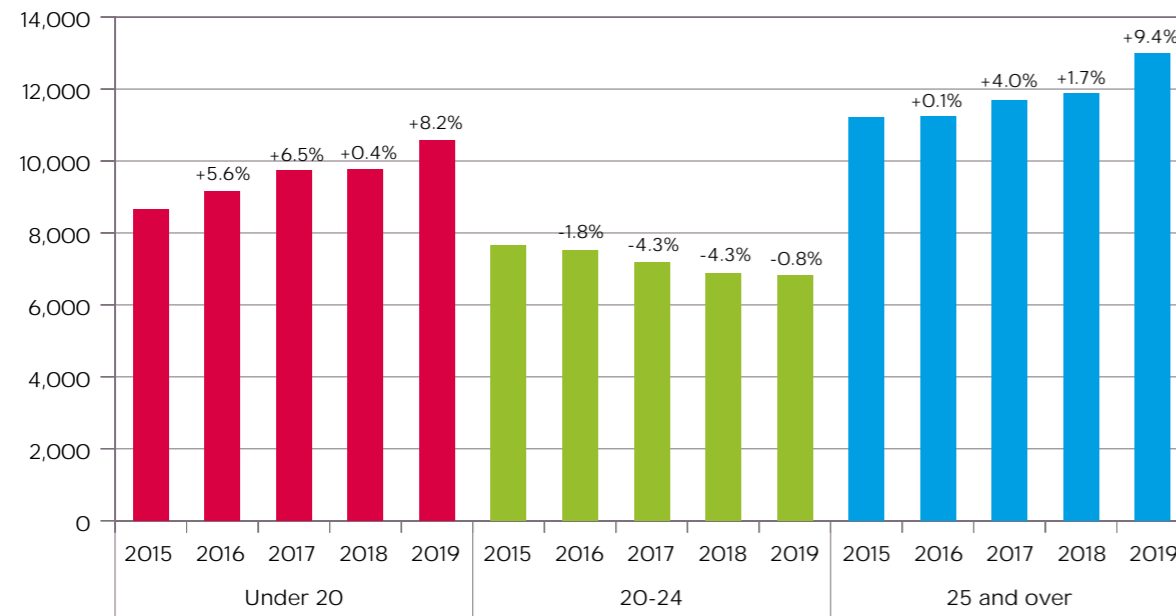*Source: Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)*

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*.

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